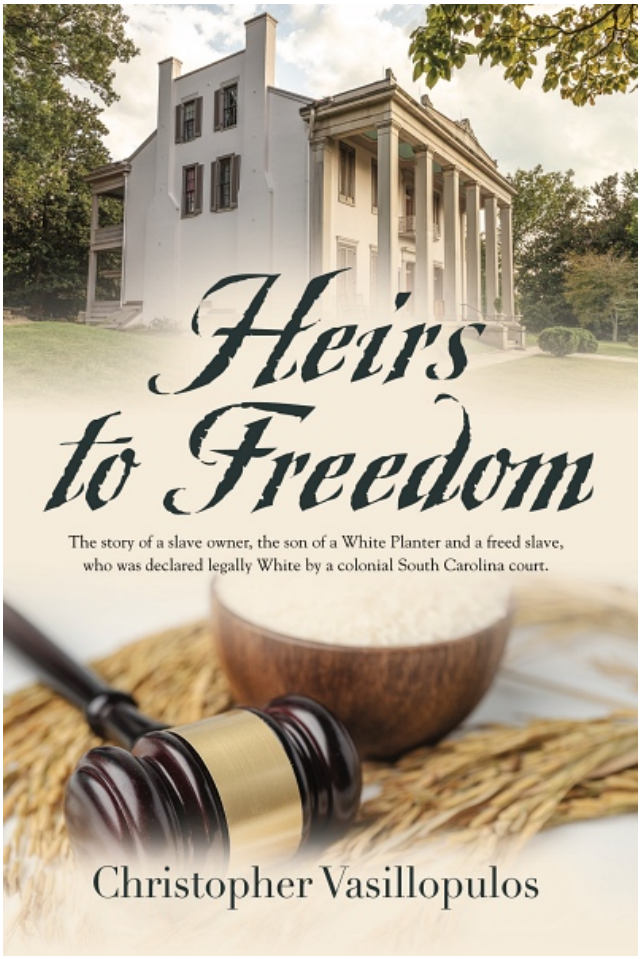

The love story of a slave woman and a planter, whose son was declared white by a colonial Carolina court.

Heirs To Freedom
By Christopher Vasillopulos

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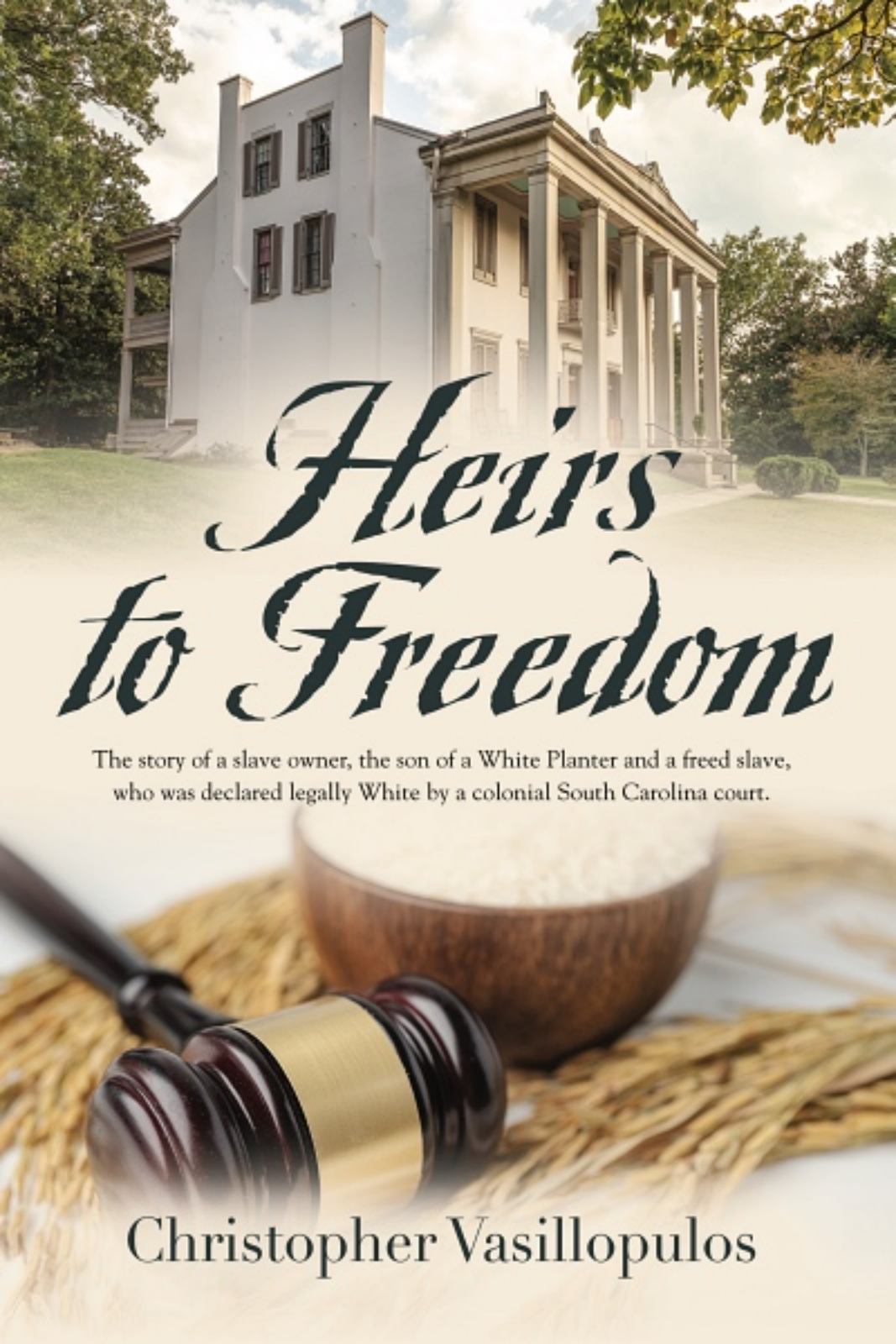

Heirs to Freedom

The story of a slave owner, the son of a White Planter and a freed slave, who was declared legally White by a colonial South Carolina court.

Christopher Vasillopulos

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CHAPTER ONE:
RELUCTANT HEIRS

I. From his first moment on the ship, Gideon was uneasy in the company of the seamen. Silently these ruffians, dregs of the waterfront cities of England, showed contempt for the gentleman. Ignorant of the sea and its customs, he considered this 'deficiency' neither permanent nor effeminate. Almost a graduate of Saint Paul's, he would show these tanned, sinewy men what he could do. Certain he would have an opportunity, he prepared himself, exercising in his cabin and observing his rivals, while on deck.

Jealous of his prerogatives, Gideon was disquieted by privilege. Some men were indeed better than others, as only a fool would deny, yet God's dispensations mocked man's efforts to enshrine superiority in a hereditary system. As one of the fortunate few, his misgivings had not matured into a philosophy. However, eager to prove his worthiness that his privileges were deserved, despite their fortunate origin, he would respond to any challenge, real or imagined. Were the world ruthlessly fair, if it were ruled by the coldest logic and not by a turn of a card, his position would be justified. So he hoped. His desire to impart reason to the unreasonable would infuse his life, as would his belief that Chance, more than merit, crippled man's attempt to walk in dignity. He would not outgrow his desire to act in concert with his beliefs. No risk would be too foolish to tempt him to avoid a challenge.

"See that boy, Captain? That one there?" The rice merchant, Samuel Richardson, spoke as he pointed toward the main mast. "He moves like a monkey, looks like one, too. I didn't think you used slaves as seamen."

"He's not a slave. He's English, not African," Captain Barnstable replied. "And ugly or no, he's a remarkable seaman." As they talked, the young man scrambled to the top of the mast and onto the highest

yards, straightening canvas as he moved. “Only his second voyage and already a foretop man, doing more than a man’s work.”

Sensing the Captain’s annoyance, the portly rice dealer said, “Take young Gibson here, I’ll wager he can do anything your urchin can and look better doing it, too.” The Captain turned to go, as Richardson pressed on, “I mean what I say, Captain. I’ll wager anything you like that Gibson here can best your man.”

“I wouldn’t say that, sir,” ventured Gideon, who was not fond of heights, observing the young seaman, who flew among the rigging like a sea gull.

Knowing men and boys who would be men, the Captain sensed a trace of fear in Gideon’s words and perceived in it a way to silence the obnoxious merchant. “Would you like to race him to the crow’s nest and down?”

“What say you, Gibson? Are you game, boy?” The merchant smiled, as he spoke, but his eyes bore into Gideon’s hesitation. “I’ll make it worth your while.”

“Thank you, sir. That won’t be necessary.”

“Well said, lad.” Richardson beamed, as he held Gideon by the shoulders.

“Have you ever climbed a mast, Gibson?” Barnstable asked.

“No, sir.”

“Are you willing to try? To race Tom to the top and down?” Searching the young man’s face, the Captain found fear but also resolve. “I want you to know that you don’t have to. None of us will think the less of you for using good sense.” The sea-hardened man’s face softened to a degree Gideon thought impossible. “It’s a lot higher up there than it looks.” Gideon appraised the mast that already looked high enough. “And it sways in a greater arc than the ship, as you can see.”

"Are you trying to frighten the boy, Captain, or save yourself some money?" Richardson continued, "Young Gibson here knows his own mind. He's nearly a man and quite an athlete at that. You should feel his shoulders."

Not needing to assess Gideon's strength, the Captain said quietly, "Why don't you take a few days to think about it? The mast will be there. So will Tom."

"I'll do it, sir. I don't think I can win, still I would like to try." Having decided and believing the Captain would not let him engage in a suicidal effort, Gideon's voice achieved its normal, confident tone. "I'll do it tomorrow, if it's all right with you and Tom."

"And Tom," the Captain thought. "A real gentleman after all, he might make a seaman." The Captain turned to his duties, only to be restrained by the merchant again.

"The wager, Captain, the wager." Captain Barnstable realized there was more than a concern for money in the merchant's words, suggesting the contest was between them.

"Fifty pounds, would fifty pounds be satisfactory for so foolish a wager," he asked, hoping Richardson would balk. Why should Gibson endanger himself on the whim of a ridiculous merchant? Tom would win no doubt, but why should he exhibit himself to no purpose? Besides, how could such an ill-conceived wager prove anything?

"Done," Richardson said. His bluff called, the Captain held his silence, believing that Gibson's common sense would limit his recklessness. At worst, there would be an embarrassing rescue. "Done," Richardson confirmed. "To engage this arrogant seaman, to establish the real gentleman, made fifty pounds a bargain. And perhaps," the merchant thought, "Gibson might win."

Not foreseeing this sort of challenge, Gideon's chest heaved, as he watched the two men shake hands. While he might be able to improve

his chances, it would take time. “Captain, would it be acceptable to change my mind?”

“Of course, Gibson, and a good thing too.” Relieved, yet disappointed, the Captain masked his feelings.

“No, sir. I want to race,” Gideon said quickly. “I would like to do it in seven days, if that’s all right.”

“Certainly, young man, one week from today, first thing in the morning. If you need more time, let me know.” The Captain saw something new in Gibson’s face, more than an attempt to overcome fear, more than pride. He saw judgment. Realizing that Gibson did not think any more of his chances than he did, yet seven days of preparation might allow for a creditable performance, if nothing more.

Gideon’s new regime included mental toughening, as well as, strengthening the muscles he needed to climb the mast, to say nothing of his hands. Each night Gideon practiced, climbing the mast, hoping the darkness would keep his secret. If the crew observed these nocturnal efforts, they did not reveal them. Each day he measured his nightly progress against Tom’s effortless activities, convinced he could not win and equally certain of his improvement.

At the appointed hour on the appointed day, Gideon looked at Tom closely for the first time. His squat body, his face more round than square and a puffiness that almost enveloped his small pale blue eyes, Tom seemed sullen, an attitude intensified by the prospective contest with his handsome adversary. He would have preferred to pick his contest and his wager. Once assured by the Captain that his participation was voluntary, he boldly asked, “What will I win?”

“Well, Richardson,” the Captain asked, “what will Tom win? I can’t very well order him to perform merely for your amusement.”

Before the merchant could reply, Gideon said, “If Tom wins I will give him my knife.”

As Gideon displayed the bone handled knife to his rival, the Captain asked, “Is that satisfactory to you, Tom? It’s a good knife, I think.”

“Yes, sir,” Tom responded, confirming Barnstable’s confidence in him.

“If we must, let us proceed. Last chance to reconsider, Gibson.”

“I’m quite ready, Captain.”

The day was bright and calm with a soft breeze off the port quarter. “Perfect weather,” Gideon thought, until it occurred to him that for the first time he would see how high and how far over the sea his climb would take him. Without the comforting blackness, he tried to concentrate on the task’s technical aspects. Believing he was stronger than Tom, an advantage he hoped would compensate for Tom’s greater experience and agility, Gideon’s heart pounded, as he waited for the starting bell.

Side bets abounded, exhausting Richardson’s capital and dampening his enthusiasm to humble the Captain. As the odds against Gideon steepened, coins began flowing to his colors, more for the attraction of a long shot than a belief in his chances. Yet, there was something about the boy, something that kept the odds from becoming lop-sided, something that attracted support beyond the lure of gain. For the crew, no less than the Captain, began to admire the handsome lad. Accustomed to boys of their own class performing hazardous tasks, it seemed gratuitous to risk injuring or humiliating the well-endowed youth. More, however, was at stake than the contest, more than their money, or the Captain’s or Richardson’s. Their way of life and their skills had been impugned. And by whom? A potbellied, land bound snob, who knew nothing of life beyond getting and spending. If humiliating a young gentleman were necessary to demonstrate their worth as sailing men, so be it. Men without privilege must be men of merit to be men at all.

The bell rang. The boys sprang to their work. Gideon, owing to his height, maintained an advantage, until midway up the mast when, against his will, his eyes were drawn to the deck. His knees quaked. His foot slipped. Before dropping six inches, it was steadied by Tom's strong palm. Without faltering again, Gideon reached the crow's nest. Now working to his advantage, his fear concentrated his efforts. The strain of his muscles, the pain in his joints, the burning of his bleeding hands blurred his mind, blotting out the sun. It was night again. Oblivious to the sights and sounds on the deck, he tumbled down the mast, never securing a foot or hand hold. Restrained by the dangers involved, Tom could not overtake his reckless rival. To the delight of the crew Gideon hit the deck first, twisting his ankle. A second later, Tom gracefully landed, smiling.

"Well done, boy," Richardson shouted above the din.

"Congratulations, son. How do you feel?" the Captain asked, aware of Gideon's injury.

"I'm fine, sir. Just fine. Did I win?" Gideon winced, as he tried to put weight on his foot.

"You certainly did. Cost me fifty pounds and it was worth it."

"Take the money and divide it among the crew, Captain," Richardson said, basking in his victory. "We're all British, you know. Well done, lads. Well done, all around."

When the fellowship of the next few moments had run its convivial course, the pain of his ankle settling in, Gideon gestured to the Captain. "Yes, what is it, Gideon?" Asking for silence, the Captain repeated, "What is it?"

"I didn't win, sir, not really." Before Captain Barnstable could articulate the denial covering his face, Gideon continued, "I don't think I won, sir, not fairly." For a moment only the wind filling the sails and the sea rushing along the hull could be heard.

"Of course you did, boy. You most certainly won," the merchant said, unconvincingly.

In a voice constricted by pain, Gideon replied, "No, sir, not really. About half way up my foot slipped and Tom caught me, saved me from falling. He set me right. That's why he lost."

"Is that true, Tom?" Tom hesitated, not wishing any more than the rest of the crew to diminish Gideon's victory. "Is that true, Tom?" the Captain repeated, certain it was.

"Yes, sir." Tom paused, then said in a clear voice, "We always help each other in the rigging, sir. We must."

"So you do, Tom, so you must." Seldom had the Captain been more proud of his crew. Rarely had he taken greater pride in his profession. "Well, Gideon, what do you propose we do?"

"I don't know, sir."

"What say you, men?" the Captain said, raising his voice and arms to the crew.

"The Gibson lad won, Captain. Fair and square," the first mate and spokesman for the crew said. "It's handsome of him to say he didn't, but he won all the same. Tom did no more than was expected of him."

Well paid by the respect of his peers, Tom nodded his concurrence, as he accepted the understated compliment of the first mate. "No more than expected," Tom repeated.

"No more than expected, no more than expected of seamen," the crew thought as one. "Do you understand that, merchant? No, of course not, but no matter. We do, we men of the sea."

"Tom," said Gideon, "I know I lost and you won. Here's the knife. It belongs to you."

"But, sir," Tom protested first to Gideon and then to the Captain.

"Take it, Tom," the Captain instructed. "The knife was well earned, no matter who won the race."

"Take it please, Tom, or I'll throw it overboard."

Tom cradled the bone handled knife in his stubby, calloused hands and said, “No need to waste a good knife.” The crew cheered, as Gideon limped to his cabin.

II. The dogwoods hurried to an early greening, as summer comes quickly to Charleston. Waiting on the dock in the surprising heat of mid-morning, his woolens hanging heavily on his shoulders and thighs, Gideon considered leaving his trunk and seeking a cool drink and some shade. Walking toward a mechanics’ tavern across the road, he heard his name. “Master Gibson, Master Gibson, is that you?” a middle aged man in rumpled, white cottons called.

“At your service, sir. And are you Mr. Joshua Mooring?”

“In the tired flesh.” Joshua Mooring had been Gibson’s solicitor in the Carolinas, since before Gideon was born. A tall man with the slightly rounded shoulders of those who spend long hours at a desk, he seemed sincerely pleased to welcome the son of his late friend to the New Land. Noting the youth’s discomfort, he said, “I trust you have not been waiting long. I intended to be here earlier, but...”

“Not so long as it seems, I imagine. Does one get used to the climate?”

“In time, although it afflicts the vigorous more than the sedentary.” Noting the impatience that had marked his father, “A Gibson to the marrow,” the older man thought, saying, “Your father was able to tolerate it, if not enjoy its most extreme manifestations.”

“You knew my father well?” Gideon asked coolly, a frown flashing on his face.

“We were old friends. He spoke of you often.”

“Not much he could have said. He knew little about me and I less of him.”

Wishing to defend his friend without offending his heir, the solicitor replied in the language of his profession. “Your father deeply regretted the circumstance of his separation from his only son and his

mother. He spoke to me frequently of his regret for not being the father you deserved. You see, he knew of your progress at St. Paul's and..."

"Was there a need for intermediaries?"

"Intermediaries? Oh, yes, I see." As if he deserved to be chastised for the shortcomings of his friend, Joshua bowed his head slightly, a gesture that embarrassed Gideon.

"Well, no matter. Is there a place where I can get a cool drink?" he replied, recovering his normal tone. Had he realized the depth of his resentment toward his father, he would have masked his feelings and would not have spoken so sharply to this inoffensive man. Unprepared for protestations of his father's solicitude, on this alien shore unwillingly, having to deal with gratuitous responsibilities left by his father's inopportune death, he wished to avoid unwanted emotions.

Unwittingly, the solicitor represented unpredictable and intractable events, the power of blank necessity. Nothing confounded Gideon more than the irrationality of life. Wrenched from the security and high promise of his last year at school to become a stranger in a land he believed antagonistic to his every inclination, Gideon would not shroud his resentment in courtesy. Willing to do his duty, civil and social, he would, however, be damned before he would pretend to prefer this barbarous, stifling province to his cultivated and familiar England. Nor would he countenance good words about his father, who had remained in Carolina, after his wife found it intolerable and returned with her son to her home in the Lake Country. "Deeply regretted the circumstance, indeed! Not deeply enough to write a letter or to make a voyage to see his son or the woman he married and abandoned. Not enough to consult his heir on the matter of his inheritance. Knew of my progress! Not enough to ensure his schooling. Not enough to refrain from burdening him with unwanted possessions and responsibilities."

"Perhaps he sensed your feelings?" Joshua ventured, breaking into Gideon's thoughts. "Understanding them, as perhaps only a father can, may have made it impossible for him to dispense with intermediaries, as you characterize my efforts in his behalf. Of this I am certain, he wished to be a father to the man he had not been to the boy. After so long a time and so great a distance, he simply did not know how. I am aware you did not wish to make the voyage, particularly as it interfered with your schooling. Your father did not wish to die any more than he wished to curtail your education." While the solicitor had spoken softly, there could be no mistaking his desire to correct the record, whether the son of his friend liked it or not.

"I'm called Gideon," the young man said smiling, admiring Joshua's loyalty.

Another Gibson trait, Joshua noted. Working a private distinction, Gibsons could acknowledge error, often gracefully, yet never recant. "Ah, here the hands are, finally," Joshua said, nodding to the two black men, who had been patiently waiting for Joshua's orders.

"I've only one chest. It's over there."

Sweating profusely, the men loaded his sea chest onto a wagon.

"It seems quite heavy."

"It is. I've lots of books."

Wanting to have him observe the countryside in peace, the trip along the river road began in silence, broken only by the horses' hooves and the wheels of the carriage and wagon. Gideon tried to appear indifferent to the strange landscape, a jungle, sultry and lush. Only the familiar odor of sweating horses comforted him. Before long, curiosity overcoming his feigned indifference, Gideon asked his companion a series of questions regarding the Gibson plantation.

"About five hundred acres, a handsome two story, frame house, some outbuildings, quarters..." Joshua replied.

"Quarters?"

"Slave quarters," Joshua said evenly, noting Gideon's concern. "The plantation supports about twenty slaves, twelve adults, eight children or nine. Naturally, they live at the Hollows, in quarters."

"Why wasn't I told of them in your letter?"

"You should have been. Wasn't a list of assets enclosed? The slaves would have been itemized under 'chattel property'."

"Chattel? I thought that meant livestock," Gideon replied, blushing at his naïveté.

"There are livestock too," Joshua responded, ignoring Gideon's discomfort. "They're good slaves. Your father seldom had problems. He was a good master."

Unable to comprehend the idea of one man owning another, much less doing so virtuously, Gideon could not understand how Joshua, who seemed a gentle and honest man, could use a phrase like "good master," as if he were commenting on the weather. Not wishing to pursue the point, nor to hear his father praised further, Gideon continued his inquiry. "How much is the land worth?"

"That depends."

"On what?"

"On whether you reckon its value by the income it produces or its value at a sale and that depends, of course, on the kind of sale, forced or voluntary."

"A sale, a voluntary sale." Again, the characteristic Gibson trait, irritation when instructed, particularly when the subject did not attract the pupil.

Despite his unhappy role in the dialogue, Joshua was pleased that so many of the father's traits were in the son, hoping their similarities would allow the youth to value his inheritance, if not his father. "About three thousand pounds, including all chattels," he said, with muslin-thin irony. "The Hollows earns about four hundred and fifty pounds a year, depending on the market, the rice market." The solicitor paused,

hearing no further questions, he asked, “Do you wish me to look for a buyer?”

“Yes, I think so. By all means.”

With disappointment finding its way into his otherwise flat speech, Joshua said, “Your father put his life into the Hollows.”

“My father seems to have done a great many things about which you and I seem destined to disagree. I didn’t say I would sell. I asked you only to make inquiries. I certainly will not let it go for a distressed price. I would like to know its market value, however, and a discreet inquiry seems practical. And, if I decide to sell the property, I take it I may do so. I have that prerogative, don’t I?” Regretting his staccato tone, Gideon would not have his rights questioned, not by anyone. Nor would he be maneuvered or manipulated. He would rather make a mistake than be pushed into a correct decision.

“Yes, Gideon. You have the right, of course. And I will help you to do what you think is proper.” Joshua wished he could tell Gideon there was more to the Hollows than crops and livestock. The plantation had been as alive to Gideon’s father, as his horses. It needed his protection, more than the woman he married. It needed him more than the son he loved. The land, the Hollows, needed him, overcoming his own need for a wife and son and theirs for him. Not expecting anyone else to appreciate his inexplicable feelings, not defending them or speaking of them, they were expressed in him and he in them, his life and the living of it in one indestructible whole. Only his premature death made him leave the Hollows. Hoping the land would work its spell on the son, as it had the father, Joshua kept his counsel.

As the carriage and wagon came to a noisy halt in the yard in front of the house, the new master, in spite of his untrained eye, noticed the slaves’ effort to honor his arrival. On the verandah of the newly white washed house stood a tall, black woman, her complexion deepened by the starched whiteness of her clothes. She was still, almost feline, her

appearance alert and placid, trying to conceal her anxiety. Her smile shone through the blackness of her face. Joshua performed the introductions, as he observed the young man and woman. “How do you do, sir,” she said, in precisely enunciated English.

“I’m well, Miss, Miss...”

“Sarah,” Joshua reminded. “Sarah.”

“And how are you, Miss Sarah? I’m fine, although a little warm.”

“We’ve prepared some cool tea for you, sir. If you will excuse me?”

As she glided into the house, Gideon turned to Joshua, who stifled a smile, and said, “You snared me quite nicely, Mr. Mooring. Do you have other surprises for me, or must I find them out for myself?”

“It’s well when confronting life in the provinces to keep an open mind. The unexpected often occurs,” he answered blandly, only his eyes betraying his good humor.

“Like hearing the King’s English from a slave girl in the middle of the woods. Is there anything else I should know, before I embarrass myself further?”

“About the plantation, the Hollows?”

“About the girl, Sarah.”

“I suppose I’d better tell you. She can read and write, quite well, I believe.” Joshua hesitated, considering his words, then adding, “Your father taught her. She was his prize pupil.”

“And writes sonnets no doubt, having had Will Shakespeare for a tutor,” Gideon responded, for the first time accepting a reference to his father without bridling.

“Can’t speak to that. Why not ask her yourself? She’s coming now. I have to go.”

“Won’t you stay for tea or lunch?”

Noting how easily Gideon assumed a proprietary air, Joshua declined, reminding the young man that he would help him effect any decision he made.

After the refreshing mint tea, Gideon followed Sarah on a tour of the house. It was simply and intelligently laid out, the entry way separating the dining room from other living areas, while serving as the base for a right angled stair case. A hallway divided the bedrooms on the second level, the master bedroom and two dressing rooms facing the front and south, three smaller bedrooms facing the rear and north and an attic suitable for servants' quarters. In anticipation of his inappropriate sweat soaked woolens, on the oversized bed lay cotton trousers and a cotton shirt. In the doorway of the dressing room stood a pair of well-worn, highly buffed riding boots. After Sarah excused herself, he changed into them, finding the clothes loose in the shoulders and thighs, much more comfortable than his woolens. The soft boots fit perfectly, an appropriate symbol of his new house. "Probably his father's," Gideon thought.

III. Quickly the days of summer passed, filled with exploration and learning. Eager to please, anticipating his wants, tolerating his youth and inexperience, the slaves presented few difficulties, facilitating an easy adjustment to their master's new life. Relieved by the similarities of the son to the father, who had been a good master, the slaves hoped his heir would make the Hollows his permanent residence. The unknown lay like an uncharted sea before these mariners, who seldom ventured from their land. Slavery bred few Columbuses.

Unobtrusively, like a spider's web, Gideon's actions became routine. Once past its soreness, his athletic body took to outdoor work, tanning nut brown, growing thicker in the chest and back, shoulders and arms. His hands calloused; his stamina increased. He began to enjoy the heat, at least, in the absence of extreme humidity. By the

beginning of autumn, his father's clothes fit better. Meanwhile, Joshua completed his search for a buyer: four thousand pounds was offered for the Hollows, not volunteering the information to Gideon, who did not inquire.

Within the house, life proceeded as smoothly, as it did in the fields. Sarah moved through her chores as gracefully, as she entered the drawing room each morning to bring Gideon hot coffee. He believed she enjoyed running the household, not realizing she hovered between boredom and restlessness. Her interests lay in the Gibson library and, it must be said, in the young master, although she would not have admitted it to herself. So like the father and yet so different, at once sensitive and rough, finished and raw, delighting in simple things, while revealing almost daily, inadvertently, an increasing complexity of mind and character. She studied him with the same thoroughness she applied to books. He, this strange son of a strange man, was becoming as central to her self-discovery as the library. He was, however, a good deal more difficult to understand and impossible to place in an acceptable relationship with a slave girl with a passion for learning.

Soon after dark on these long September evenings, Gideon would sit on the verandah enjoying the sounds of evening with his tea. He would swing slowly, the chains creaking rhythmically, the crickets chirping, and the frogs croaking noisily, as the nocturnal animals began their rounds of life and death. Enjoying these moments of darkness, waiting for the heat to dissipate, and rehearsing the tasks of the morrow, he was content and lonely.

One evening in the new September moon, the stars brightening the void, a cool breeze wafting the fragrance of cedar through the waning light, Gideon took his tea from Sarah's hand and asked her to stay a while. She sat on the steps, her straight, strong back resting against the railing post, her broad shoulders accented by a long neck. "Nefertiti,"

he thought, smiling inwardly. “And I, a provincial Ramses, drinking tea, six thousand miles from the Nile.” He chuckled softly. She sat quietly, absorbing the night, lengthening the moment. Gideon wished to say something that would tell her how alive he felt at this moment and how important she was to him, how she had enabled him to temper his resentment toward his father and his attachment to England. He said, instead, “Sarah, were you born here, here at the Hollows?”

“No.” As much as he intrigued her, she never considered she might interest him. How could a girl of unknown, not to say defiled, origins interest a gentleman, however provincial, sensitive, and lonely? Her life began, when his father noticed her. It began, when the world outside the Hollows, the world that transcended her fetters, poverty, and her daily reality, became accessible to her. How could she explain this to the white man whom she served, no matter how much she wanted to?

“Where did you come from? I mean, were you born in Carolina?”

“I’m not sure. It never seemed important.”

Aware of her discomfort, attributing it to shyness, he persisted, “How did you get here, to the Hollows?” He wondered why it was so difficult for him to ask simple questions, why there seemed more to her hesitant responses than natural reserve.

“By myself,” she answered placidly, determined to get through his curiosity, idle in her view, as graciously as possible.

“Where were your parents?” he asked, hoping so simple a word as ‘parents’ would not prove a false step.

“Got killed or sent away or ran away or something. I’m not certain. I awoke one morning, and they were gone. I waited a long time, then wandered off.”

As Gideon put down his cup, she began to rise. He motioned her to remain seated, as he poured another cup of tea. “How old were you?”

"Six, almost seven."

"Wandered away at six, almost seven? How did you get here? I mean, how did you come to stay at the Hollows?"

"I stayed around the creek bed for a day or two, frightened and hungry. On the second day, I think, one of your father's crews came by to cut some river oak. The men used axes, the women stripped branches. They worked easily, unafraid of their master, who worked beside them, laughing and joking with the men."

"And..."

"In the early afternoon, a little after the noon meal, the master left. I asked a woman to take me in. And here I am."

"My lord, you were a cheeky child."

"I was more hungry than brave. The sight of the food was all I could stand. What else could I do?"

"But not until you observed, that's what I mean."

"No, not until..."

IV. Hearing the laughter, the little girl rose up from the stream bed. Crawling up the bank, she saw two men, in sweat soaked clothes, fumbling with their trousers, doubled over laughing. Beyond them were men cutting down trees. After a meal, a white man left on a horse, shouting final instructions, as he galloped across a clearing. The blacks worked as before, the men with the trees, the women with the branches, occasionally helping an old woman control some children. The sun high in the sky, the hands finished their tasks, the stronger helping the weaker in mock irritation. Washing away the tears of recent events, the little girl arranged her mud-stained shift and walked, as confidently as she could, toward the woman. She was noticed before she moved more than a few steps by another woman, who was wiping a man down with a damp cloth by the stream.

"Who dat?"

"Where?"

"Over yonder. Who dat young'un?"

"Dunno. C'mere chil'. I say c'mere!"

Jane moved toward the little girl, who, while trying to appear nonchalant, stumbled on a rock. As Jane reached down to help her up, the little girl's courage gave out, and she began to cry. "Now, now, you bes al'right. Jes a skin' knee. Nothin' to cry bout."

"Who she?" inquired Sam, Jane's husband, as he buttoned his shirt.

"Who you belon' to, chil'?" she asked, drying her tears with her kerchief.

"No one."

Jane smiled and said, "Wes all belon' to someone, somewhere, chil'. Where's your mammy?"

"Dunno."

"Where your Massa?"

"Dunno."

"C'mon, Jane. Massa Gibson know what t'do. Les go home."

"Jes take it easy, Sam. She's scared, dat's all. Hungry too, fo' sure, hungry. Are you hungry, chil' "She nodded. "Good, les get somethin' t'eat. Can you walk?" Recovering her spirits rapidly, the little girl began to walk beside the woman, trying to match her easy gait. "How dey calls you, chil'?"

"Saree, my name, Saree."

"From now on, Saree, you bes on Gibson land. Anyone ask, you say, I belon' on Gibson land, and you bes al'right." Saree looked bewildered. "Listen to me, chil'. Gibson, dat's all you have to member, Gibson. Can you say dat?"

"Gibson."

"Dat's right, Gibson." They walked quietly for a while, then Jane continued her inquiries. "How long you bes alone?"

"Mornin'"

"Dis mornin'? Good, dat's not too long."

"Yesterday mornin', I think."

"And befo' then?" Jane frowned, thinking, "What kind of world left a little child alone in the woods?"

"I was wid my mammy and pappy."

"What happen to dem?"

"Jes gone."

"Can yo' beat dat, Sam? What's de world comin' too?"

"Heard, ders a coffle in des parts, movin' south."

"So?"

"So she may 'scaped the coffle or her folks hid her or somethin'. Anythin' possible. Dat's what kind o' world we got."

"No one would jes leave a little girl," she said, unconvincingly, to no one in particular.

"Believes what yo' likes. Dey did what dey thought right. Dat's what I believes."

After a perfunctory and fruitless search for her parents or master, Gideon Gibson, assumed ownership of Saree, placing her in the care of Sam and Jane.

"Say your name, child. Say, Sarah. Sarah," the burly white man enunciated in his still English accent.

"Saree," answered the frightened, but stubborn girl.

"No, not Saree, Sarah, ah, ah, ah. Can't you say ah?"

"Ah, ah, ah," the girl said, smiling ever so slightly.

"I think she's playing with me, Jane. She understands perfectly well. She just won't say Sarah."

"Maybes she like Saree," Jane offered, bowing her head.

"That simply will not do. She deserves a proper name. Surely, you can see that?"

Jane nodded, but she couldn't see that, or rather she couldn't understand why one name was proper and another wasn't. "What's wrong wid Saree?" she later complained to Sam.

"Massa don' like it, dat's wrong nuf."

Tiring of her game, Saree became Sarah, to the delight of her master, her transformation just beginning. She would learn in the next months and years what all slave girls needed to know, if they were to survive solicitous white men. As Sarah turned before their eyes from a skinny waif into a statuesque young woman, her foster parents feared she might learn too much, too soon. "I don' like it, Jane. Don' like it one bit. She still too young to be used."

"I don' tol' her a thousand times, don' talk white, don' bes smart, don' bes seen," she responded defensively, as if Sarah were responsible. "But she bes too smart to listen, her own fault, her own fault," she added, dejectedly, not believing a teenager could or should bear all the responsibility for what might happen to her. "But what could she do? What could she have done? What more than warn her of the fickle ways of white folks, especially men folk," she thought, saying, "Dey think it fine now, all dis talkin' white. Think it nice now, nice little nigger gal, smart little nigger gal. But yo' jes wait. De same ones now think it fine will be 'gainst it later. What bes fine in a nigger chil' is dangerous in a grown up. Danger to everyone."

"It bes wrong. She too young to live in the Massa's house, too young."

"She sho' don' look young."

"Dat bes de trouble."

The sexuality of a comely black girl could not be long delayed. Sam had certainly done his share of rolling in the damp grass with girls Sarah's age. Although concerned for her well-being, he was no prude, nor did he expect her to be. He did, however, see a particular danger in a liaison, inevitably transient, with the master, a danger to her and to all slaves, the peril heightened by her ability to take on white ways. How would she know who she was and where she could go for help, regardless of her standing in the alien and arbitrary white world?

"Massa say he jes want to teach her to read and write."

"She can already do dat," he replied.

"She say she really needs to learn like white folks, be good nuf for white folks, not jes for slaves. What's wrong wid dat?" Jane asked, trying to allay her husband's anxiety. "Don' see why she wants to work so hard at dat stuff, but she like it, so what's de harm?"

"Jes like baboons, Massa a baboon. An' dey calls us animals," he responded, as much to himself as to his wife.

"Baboons?"

"Don' you know nothin' woman? Baboons raise young'un to be der mates, dats all. Massa Gibson don picked out a mate, now dat his wife be gone. Jes like an animal, he don pick out a mate from young'uns."

"He had plenty mates before, white and black, widout takin' dem in de house to learn to read, widout learnin' dem a thing dey don' know before. Maybes he jes like de girl, dat's all."

"He surely do like her. Dat de truth an' de trouble."

With a good ear and a quick, rapidly developing mind, Sarah took to her new instruction, as an eagle takes to flight. Her expanding household duties, under the nitpicking supervision of an anxious and disapproving house maid, did not prevent her from spending long hours studying preparing for weekly tutorials with the master, who proved a sympathetic, if demanding, teacher. If he harbored less than admirable motives regarding his unusual pupil, he did not act on them. The danger, however, was not forgotten by Sam and Jane, who seldom forfeited an opportunity to warn Sarah of the ways of white men. Although they could not prevent the master from using her body, even against her will, they tried to fortify her mind in anticipation of the inevitable assault. Their efforts were subverted by a growing disagreement between them.

From the very beginning of her intensive tutelage, Sam had been concerned about the disruptive effects of a perilous liaison. Jane's concerns differed, wondering how Sarah could be happy. On the verge of beauty, highly intelligent, she was spoiled, house spoiled, white spoiled. Would she be able to give up her privileges when the time came? Other slave girls could and did endure the fields after sharing the master's bed, but how could she, who seemed to be sharing the deeper intimacy of his mind? How would she cope with her master's rejection? What would become of her children, if she had any? She believed Sarah's learning, more than her privileges, would make it impossible for her to be happy with who she was and who she might have to become. Having access to the white world, not simply its bedroom, she would be miserable, or so Jane feared. In the gravest danger, in peril of being nothing, unable to live in the world of her choice and unable to accept the world of her circumstance, Sarah was approaching an abyss.

Until now Jane's anxieties were unfounded. Until now, she had defended herself quite well, effortlessly. She knew what she had always known: that learning the language of whites and their ways, sharing their privileges, was a temporary pass to otherwise intolerable present. The pride she took in her accomplishments, the praise from her roughhewn master, the satisfaction she took by flaunting her education in that self-effacing, effective way of hers, all this did not change her status. Aware of its treacherous elements, knowing the white world and herself better than Sam or Jane, she realized a whim could place her knee deep in a rice swamp, her choices determined by a slave's calculus, poignantly aware of the scope and depth of the world denied to her. Protected by this understanding from the most profound assaults of the white world, she would not deny her African ancestry. The white culture she acquired with so much skill and pleasure assured her blackness. Secure in this, she felt no need to

proclaim it, either to her master and his kind or to Sam and Jane and theirs. Now, for the first time since that hungry morning long ago, she was afraid. She began to wonder, as she had then, how she would answer the question, "who bes you, chil'"? "Saree," she had answered, her tears drying on her ashen cheeks. "Sarah," she had answered later, her game with the burly white man having run its course—that strange man who seemed to like her and who had fathered her new master.

V. "Sarah, Sarah," Gideon called, breaking her reverie, concerned he had offended her with his too personal questions.

"Yes, Master. I'm sorry. My mind wandered for a moment," she said, with a warm, self-possessed smile.

"It's the night air. It's wonderful. Can you smell it? Can you hear it?"

"It's often like this in the fall."

"Sarah, would you mind making another pot of tea? I think I'll stay up a little later than usual." He watched her walk into the house, broad shouldered, her waist defining a deep arc in her torso, sweeping out to her hips and buttocks. "Sarah," he called in a firm voice, hoping to arrest her movement to the kitchen, as she was about to open the door.

"Yes?"

"Never mind the tea. I've changed my mind. Why don't you join me in the swing?" After a shadow of hesitation, she complied, their bodies separated more by formality than space. They did not touch, her fragrance, knowing nothing of such propriety, mingled with the cedar in the night air. Perhaps light conversation would clear his head. He asked, as soberly as he could, his voice sounding oddly constricted, "Are you happy here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can I get you to call me 'Gideon'?"

"I don't think I should."

"Why not?" he responded, his voice rising.

"People would talk," she said evenly, looking into the night.

"What people?"

"Folks, black folks, especially white folks. It wouldn't be proper."

"I wouldn't want you to do anything that makes you uncomfortable," he said, turning toward the star washed sky. I do wish you would call me 'Gideon,' at least when we are alone."

"Like now?"

"Yes, like now," he said, turning his face to the shimmering woman. "One other thing, I would like you to have supper with me. I don't enjoy eating alone. If you need help with the kitchen or anything else, we'll bring someone in." Neither waiting for, nor expecting a reply, he put his arm around her shoulders, as the nocturnal animals heralded the night. "There is one more thing," he began, much less matter of factly, only to be interrupted by the woman staring into his face.

Although an inexperienced lover, Gideon had been with more than one woman. None of his cork and bottle encounters, however, prepared him for Sarah. With her, he felt neither a tradesman nor a novitiate. There was sweetness in their evaporating awkwardness. Long hoping there could be more to physical passion than he had experienced, lest pagan texts be false, he had not anticipated the exquisite delicacy of their mutual exploration of body and sensibilities. His friendship with her enabled him to imagine, as much as his fantasies dared, passion beyond his experience. For the first time, someone or something, undeniably external to his being, satisfied him from the inside out. Of course, she was Sarah and he was Gideon, two separate organisms, something new, however, emerged from the master bedroom that bright morning, a double-bodied, double-minded unity. To explore this stunning realization, this reformulation of the realms of body and mind, could require a lifetime. What seemed certain was that the overwhelming sense of fulfillment coursing

through his body and mind marked the end of a journey. The more arduous voyage of fulfilling his manhood lay ahead with all its unenvisioned challenges and satisfactions. He believed that Sarah lent him the confidence he needed for this Odyssey. He hoped this newly created entity, a dyad of Gideon and Sarah, could accomplish far more than any Greek hero, including one with the combined virtues of Achilles and Odysseus. That they, more accurately, their dyad, would share lives, as yet unimagined and unimaginable. For now, he was content to contemplate this remarkable and beautiful woman.

Surprised by the vigor of her response, she enjoyed the warmth and strength of his body and the gentleness with which he shared it with her. The indeterminate future holding greater perils than rewards, she would try to take life as it came, whole, moment by moment, enjoying what she could, deflecting what she could not. Accepting Gideon's interest in her as a flattering episode, an experiment with the folkways of his new surroundings, she would share his bed, however temporarily, hoping he would exercise his prerogatives humanely. While Sam and Jane imagined disaster, Sarah trusted her judgment and her ability to survive rejection. So she would keep the night's events in perspective, but for all her realism and all her tribute to the idols of self-control, she began to feel she had underestimated their transformative power, as she had underestimated her sexual response. Uncertainty enveloping her, he had burrowed beneath the shell of her status, her defense against fantasy, breaching her wall of reserve, leaving her to wonder, if the moat separating the physical from the mental was as wide and deep, as she had believed. She feared this irritant would gather the substance around itself, until it could no longer be ignored, put in perspective, or reasoned away. For the present, she moved through the house performing her chores, wondering what future her new status portended, less certain she could survive banishment from him and his world.

VI. More than the normal curiosity and hospitality native to the region lay behind Gideon's invitation to the Jennings's plantation. His neighbors wanted the newcomer to learn his role quickly. Contemptuous of his cohorts, Gideon's father had maintained only the barest commercial relations. Gideon's ignorance of Carolina demanded his neighbors' attention, as they feared the son would follow the father. As a substantial landowner, Gideon occupied a position of prestige, wealth and power. His failure to support the regime would weaken them all. Beneath their good humored gossip concerning horses, women, crop prices, and weather was their need for him to comply with the slave regime's norms.

"Carolina does not lack amenities, Mr. Gibson. It's not England, but it has things England doesn't and cannot have." Like most men of moderate disposition, Montgomery Ludington spoke banalities, as if he were disclosing secrets of the gods. With the zealous whimsy of flies on a dung heap, they reproduced, finding themselves charming.

"I already appreciate its beauty," Gideon ventured in the proper spirit. "The climate will take more time, I'm afraid."

"In a year or two, you won't take notice." As impatient with polite conversation as Gideon, Sewell Jamieson spoke with a harshness more appropriate to the docks than the drawing room.

"My energy is often dissipated by late morning," Gideon continued, ignoring Jamieson's tone, "with a great deal of work to be done."

"Work? Work? In the fields?" Hearing no contradiction, Jamieson added derisively, "Planters don't work in the heat, certainly not in the fields. That's what niggers are for!" He searched the room for confirmation, receiving silent disapproval.

Gideon instantly disliked Jamieson, whose repulsiveness nullified the inoffensiveness of the other guests. Ignorant, if not stupid, Jameson seemed to enjoy slavery's cruelties, oblivious to its moral dilemmas.

Gideon had seen sufficient brutality in the region to dislike those who thrived without thought for its victims. “Coming from equatorial Africa, they are perhaps better suited to the heat,” he said, looking squarely into the red face of Jamieson.

“Suited or not, they adjust or suffer for it,” responded Jamieson, who was not about to be deflected by this puppy, this offspring of a nigger loving, son of a bitch. “They were brought here, because they could be made to work. The Indians, who were already here, couldn’t or wouldn’t. It’s easy to understand.”

“Easy or simple minded,” thought Gideon, without responding, believing Jamieson wished to provoke him.

Another planter came to his aid, hoping to lessen the growing tension. “The African’s special amenability to the work of the Rice Coast may lie in his docile disposition and his aptitude for agriculture.”

“That sounds like Aristotle to me, Mr. Jennings,” said Gideon relieved.

“You are much closer to the books than I, Mr. Gibson, so you have me at a disadvantage. May I say, I appreciate the association?”

As Jamieson grunted in disgust, Gideon continued, “The association is yours, Mr. Jennings, if I understand your views. Aristotle believed that some men were slaves by nature, a view compatible with your phrase, ‘docile disposition.’”

“No man would endure slavery,” interjected Jamieson. “No *man*. If slaves are so by nature, they cannot be men. The only way to make a man a slave is by force.”

“Not all men are the same,” qualified Ludington. “I think I can submit to certain necessities and remain human too.”

“That’s what I said,” Jamieson replied.

“Perhaps? I understood you differently.” Ludington said, feeling obliged to chastise Jamieson for his ill manners, if not for his views. “You say, or seem to, that once a man becomes a slave, once he

submits to force, he ceases to be a man. My opinion is that a slave is a man in a particular set of circumstances. Some of them adjust better than others, that's all. The Indians couldn't adjust. The Africans are more civilized."

"A man would rather die than submit to the will of another," answered Jamieson, his tone questioning the virility of his colleagues, all of whom he considered effete.

They in turn believed him to be as savage as the Indians, but they could do little beyond reminding him of the proprieties of their society. His position as a landowner, no less than Gideon's, made Jamieson essential to planter society, whether he took the bit easily or not. Stability, the prime conservative value, exacted its tribute by compelling men otherwise dissimilar, or even mutually distasteful, to be sociable. The commonwealth demanded it.

"If this be the best of Carolina, I will miss England more than ever," Gideon mused, as he rode home. "With Sarah, he could satisfy needs he never knew existed. With Joshua, he was developing a friendship. But how could he endure the superficiality of his cohorts? How would he satisfy his intellectual craving? Reading was a partial answer. But with whom could he talk? Perhaps he should sell the Hollows, return to England, resume his education and lead the life of a gentleman? But what of Sarah?" In the meantime, until he could answer this question, he would be a planter.

Gideon relied on Joshua Mooring for practical advice on plantation management. He also discussed many matters dealing with crops, equipment and the like with planters, learning much, just as he was absorbing a great deal from the slaves, as they performed their varied tasks. But when the planters' talk turned to the relative merits of the Whydahs, Nagoes, Pawpaws, Koromantyn, Angolas, Ebos, or Mandingoes, Gideon made his excuses, his insides in turmoil. While the cooperative nature of farming and Gideon's practice of working

among the slaves blunted the sharpest edges of owning human beings, the business imperatives honed the blade with equal effectiveness. He realized he needed effective slaves, for the same reasons he needed productive cattle or horses. Nonetheless, he tried to insulate himself from the barbaric trade in human life. Sheepishly, he would ask Joshua to could find a Mandingo or an Angola at a reasonable price, men who were suited to the Hollows. Gideon knew he was not innocent of the evil practice, simply because he refused to attend the slave market. He believed nevertheless, an important distinction did exist. It was one thing to bid for a slave and another to evaluate the man working beside him, a man who was already his responsibility. Any criticism of him would not carry the same devastating consequences as a negative assessment of a man on the block, who in all likelihood would be sold to a plantation with a much stricter regime.

Whatever the value of this distinction, whatever solace it provided, the Ebos mocked it. Rebellious, proud, and suicidal, they belied the concept of benevolent slavery. Despite their reputations, they were occasionally purchased by planters, price making the sale. Worked to exhaustion, under constant close supervision, often under physical restraint, their value would be relentlessly extracted, as rapidly as possible. One seldom owned an Ebo for long. Gideon wished he could buy them all, set them free, or failing that, take them to the Hollows and treat them as they deserved. The first option only slightly less impossible than the second, as there was no way to treat an Ebo, as he deserved, not as a slave. This, too, had been tried by liberal masters to no avail, but Ebos seemed more injured by kindness than by severity, their servitude more intolerable for its benevolence than for its cruelty. “The white Devil is human after all,” an Ebo seemed to say, “and still he would enslave me.” Suicide was an Ebo’s all too frequent response to this crushing realization.

Fortunately for the economy of the Rice Coast, the Ebos were exceptional. Most tribes were as well suited to the exigencies of rice cultivation, as their masters were not. It was not only the arduous labor of rice sowing, reaping, and cultivating that brought white men to their knees, but working in the heat and humidity of the malarial swamps, where rice thrived. For white men, Carolina was Hell in the summer and a hospital in the fall. Those who could, and they were a surprising number by the 1740s, spent summers in Newport, Rhode Island. Other planters spent as much time as they could in swamp drained Charleston, for it was healthier than its environs. Those too poor, too greedy, or too suspicious to work their land from a distance paid a high toll. Rapid transformation of farms into plantations was due in great part to the inability of white men to work their farms for very long or to compete successfully with those who could were better financed or more efficient. Embittered, defeated farmers would sell out to established planters, retreating to the backcountry to earn a living from red clay, while resenting their Rice Coast betters.

James Oglethorpe's experiment in Georgia had dispelled all doubts regarding the economic significance of slavery. His attempt to establish a colony free of slaves and free of rum failed abysmally. Receiving its charter in 1732, Georgia planned to prosper from the efforts of white yeoman labor, principally from the cultivation of grapes and mulberries for silk. Neither crop succeeded. By 1737, only five hundred of the original five thousand settlers remained, the vast majority resettling in the alien camp, Carolina, whose premise of large scale, cash crop production under a slave regime became indisputable. Slavery now became an article of faith, a way of life, much more than a method of cultivation. Not for many decades did anyone effectively question its necessity. This framework set, Gideon learned to make the most of his chattel; competition with his industrious neighbors demanded it. A careful estimation of a field hand's daily production

was mandatory, but so was his health and strength. Only a foolish planter worked a slave to death, as often through ignorance as malice. Equally important, it was necessary to induce the slaves' acceptance of their servitude. The more they internalized the values of the slave culture, or at a minimum, recognized the futility of resistance, the more efficiently a plantation could be operated. Enlightened self-interest characterized the management of successful plantations, supplying the rationale of the task system.

Under the task system, as the prevailing practices came to be called, each field hand was allocated a plot of land. A man was expected to work between one-quarter and one-half an acre per day, a woman three-quarters of that and a child, depending on age, about half. The rate of work, rest periods and the like, was generally up to the worker, as long as quotas were met. The system fostered cooperation among the slaves, allowing them to assess a fair day's labor, removing much of the basis for malingering and reducing the need to drive or closely supervise them. The task system's reasonableness did not lessen the arduous realities of rice cultivation, yet it left room for human variation. Individual masters working with individual slaves could and did make slavery less arduous. The Hollows was a better place to work than neighboring plantations. Respecting their efforts, Gideon admired the Africans for their ability to survive their servitude with a dignity that often eluded their masters.

VII. Dignity was not the only attribute the Africans brought to the New Land. "I can't stand it, Sarah. Can't anything be done? I'm going insane."

Reluctantly, Sarah approached Jane, hoping to discover a traditional remedy. "If I don't do something to get rid of the Master's chiggers, he might scratch himself to death."

She laughed, saying, "I knows it's not funny. Dem chiggers sho nuf do like white folks. Ifn dey bother us like dat, we don' never get

de work don." Chiggers respected one skin color no more than another, but Jane could not resist the point that spoiled white men exaggerated their discomfort.

"We've tried everything, including soaking his foot in scalding water. It was awful." Jane could see from Sarah's drawn face that she was at her wit's end. "For a day or so, it got better, but then the swelling returned worse than ever."

"Only one thing to do. Call de Conjur Man"

"For the Master?"

"Only de Conjur Man get rid o' chiggers," Jane answered, aware that the doctor from Charleston had been called but to no good effect.

Frowning, Sarah asked, "Where is this man?"

"Some place south o' here. Sam know."

Without informing Gideon, Sarah asked Joshua to escort Sam to find the Conjur Man. "Didn't the doctor help?" he asked.

"A little. He said he would return, but he didn't seem confident." Distraught, she added, "He's suffering so, he needs help now."

"Don't worry, Sarah. We'll find this Conjur Man. He lives only a few miles from here. We can be back by this afternoon, if we leave now."

"Don't bring him back." Sarah's voice had an uncharacteristic assertive edge, startling him. "The Master will never see him. He doesn't even know I'm asking you. He'd be furious."

"Oh, I don't believe that, Sarah," he replied, more concerned for the moment about her than Gideon. "Why would a case of chiggers upset her so? There was more to her anxiety than solicitude for a kind master," he thought, saying, "If you wish to help Mr. Gibson, you should get some rest. You don't look well."

"Will you do as I ask? Here's some money."

"Yes'm." Sarcasm so ill-suited the kindly, patient man that it brought her back to her manners.

She said, "I am sorry, Mister Joshua. I'm beside myself. I apologize for being rude. I'm so worried."

"Your concern does you credit. Gideon is fortunate indeed to have so devoted a servant," he responded, smiling. As her demeanor spoke more eloquently than her words, his hairline hesitation before he said "servant" made her aware of his new understanding of relations in the Hollows. "And I am as concerned as you are for his well-being."

"I know that, Master Joshua. I am truly sorry for my rudeness."

"There was none, Sarah. Nor can there be between us concerning our regard for Gideon. Some matters are too important for proprieties, isn't that so?" She looked at Joshua, as if to concur, saying nothing. Returning the money to her cold hand, he added, "I'll do better by sending an invoice." This statement between equals did more to allay her than anything else he could have said.

"If the Conjur Man can get rid of chiggers, the Master will give him and you half the crop," she said, managing a smile.

The Conjur Man waited patiently for the emissary from Charleston, having been apprised of Joshua's visit by his owner, Broderick Massengill. After elaborate pleasantries that amused his master hugely, the Conjur Man said, "Chiggers bes hard to scare. Need to tricks em." Accustomed to the professional's need to demonstrate the great skill involved in performing the desired service, Joshua nodded, respectfully. About to leave, Massengill restrained him with a gesture. It seemed the medicine would be useless without the prescribed incantations. These time consuming rites were, Joshua was informed, of great value, making the Conjur Man worth his hire. After lengthy prayers, Joshua made a contribution, to whom it was vague, but the Conjur Man's young assistant readily pocketed the money. The resinous potion cauterized the infection suffocating the maggot-like chiggers. As modern men, Gideon and Joshua attributed the cure to the

stinging sap and not to incantations. Gideon laughed uncontrollably, as Joshua recounted the details of his mission.

As relieved as Gideon to see him on his feet and the household back to normal, Sarah failed to see the humor in the episode. New to the world of Reason, she could not consider magic quaint, charming, or amusing, white or black. Like ignorance, it compromised her new understanding. Not believing in magical potions, any more than Gideon or Joshua, she did not tolerate superstitious practices, especially when they merely packaged the common sense remedies practiced by unscientific healers, European or African. Her learning too fresh, she was not ready to be tested by events beyond her comprehension. As time passed, she had less and less casual contact with those who persisted in tribalisms. Immersing herself in study, a chasm opened in the life of this young slave girl, one that would be filled by a powerful and ritualistic Anglicanism.

Sarah's private resolves had no effect on the slaves' enjoyment of the Conjur Man's latest victory, a triumph that provoked the telling of folk tales around the open fire. Admiring the cunning of the rabbit or the tortoise, they enjoyed the victories of good over evil, appreciating the skill with which their animal heroes played weak hands. After all, it was the bear who was desperate, who for all his strength failed to degrade the rabbit.

This night, however, belonged to the Conjur Man, and Sam's story about him received high acclaim. "Once der bes dis ol' Conjur Man. He mines his own business, jes makin' folks feels better and stuff. But his ov'seer takes a spite 'gainst him fo' not workin' the fields and whips him bad. De Conjur Man he don say nothin', but he do plenty."

"Dem conjurs wrong to spite. Dat ov'seer a fool," a voice from the dark said.

"Conjurs don say nothin' no one. Dey takes care dem selfs," another voice added.

"Dis one sho nuf did," Sam said, regaining the floor. "At midnight, dis Conjur Man say de magic and leaves hisself in de cabin and visit de ov'seer. Says some mo' magic an' turns de ov'seer into a goat. Den he lets de goat in de Massa's garden. Dis Massa he prideful bout his garden. Ain't nothin' lef' come mornin'. De Massa follow de tracks to de ov'seer cabin. De ov'seer know nothin', he say, and he bes sick anyhow. De Massa don' believe him and beat him wid a stick. Jes like he bes a goat. De Conjur Man he hidin' in de bushes, holdin' his belly wid laughin'."

"Conjur Man good fo' mo' den chiggers. White folks don' mess wid em."

"Dey thinks dey know ev'thin'. Dey don' know nothin'. Nothin' bout Conjur Man stuff."

Later that night, Jane said to herself, as much as to Sam, "Too bad Conjur Man don' know how to make us free."

CHAPTER FOUR:
BLOODY SUNDAY

I. The center of secular learning, a city-state devoted to cultural, as well as, commercial activity, Charleston may have reached its fullest expression during these pre-Revolutionary years. Morality would take care of itself, perhaps. If it didn't, the Puritans would do enough breast beating for all of them. While Puritan sages made plain was that effort and virtue were nearly synonymous, for Carolinians, on the other hand, effort, virtue, and happiness went together. As the Commissary had explained to Gideon during their first conversation, planters and merchants—and they set the tone for the region and they were often the same person—were hard working gentlemen, not aristocrats. Moreover, they found joy in their labor, as well as, profit. Not working to redress Adamic sin, Carolinians toiled, because they enjoyed themselves, physically and mentally. When exercising these natural and healthy functions, they fulfilled their destiny, ordained or not.

Often their impatience seemed to sire superficiality. To Northern apostles of gloom, Carolinians seemed, at best, dilettantes and, at worst, cavaliers. How could they be taken seriously? How could a slave regime honor Natural Rights or the Christian equality of the baptized? How could any significant value be upheld in an atmosphere of carnal and material indulgence? With a paternal smugness that flourishes to this day, the North's answer was swift: Southerners were ignorant, undisciplined, over indulged children or, worse, decadent and cynical adults.

There were those, however, like Commissary Alexander, who belied the moral inferiority of the South. Fully aware of slavery's defects, they struggled to improve the lives of its victims. As Christians and enlightened men, how could they do otherwise? Neither

shallow, nor cynical, many Southerners honored their values, while confronting the intractable problems slavery entailed. In a shabby effort to elevate itself, our effete and indolent age, adhering to nothing the Puritans valued, save contempt for Southerners, denies the forthrightness of these men, as they confronted the tragic dilemmas of their times, while we ignore ours.

Like Commissary Alexander, Sarah would do her part, conspiring with time and circumstance, to educate Todd, as she educated herself. Aware of the pitfalls of learning, appreciating that the muses might become furies, she knew in the flesh what men like the Commissary appreciated by learning. Overcoming her forebodings, she could not advocate closing the gates of knowledge. Delighting in Todd's progress, whether his education would have malignant or benign consequences was a question for another time.

On the occasion of their fifth anniversary, Gideon and Sarah had a dinner for their closest friends, Father Tewksbury and Joshua Mooring. Well into the evening, his eyes luminous from the wine and glow of the fire light, Gideon opened a slim volume of sonnets and read from "Sarah's favorite author, this side of the *Gospels*:

> Tell me, fair friend, you can never be old,
> For as you were when first your eye I eyed,
> Such seems your beauty still. Five winters' cold
> Have from the forests shook five summers' pride,
> Five beauteous springs to yellow autumn turn'd
> In process of the seasons have I seen,
> Five Aprils' perfumes in five hot Junes burn'd,
> Since first I saw you fresh, which yet are green?
> Ah! yet doth beauty, like a dead hand,
> Steal from his figure, and no place perceived;
> So your sweet hue, which methinks doth stand,

Hath motion, and mine eye be deceived:
For fear of which hear this, thou age unbred
Ere were you born was beauty's summer dead."

"Hear! Hear!"

"Thank you, Gideon, that was sweet. I have a verse of mine to offer, with your indulgence. Perhaps the Bard's shade will not find it amiss?"

"How many puns in that line, Sarah?" Gideon replied, counting two, suspecting more.

Answering only with a smile, she recited her sonnet from memory:

Cedar Raptured Evenings
From cedar-raptured evenings, neath rain-washed
Eaves, played we games of sun-drenched youth. Beneath
My hands your proud thighs trembled glistening
Delight. Without a word you spoke of life,
Of manhood growing strong. Without a sound,
You sang the freedom song, the hawk's swift flight,
Of love to banish night. Without a prayer,
You brought me God, who shines in me His light.
For this, much more than pleasure's trove, I wove
The golden threads which wrap my soul in new
Wrought bliss. For these, as well as loins conjoined,
My heart fair bursts with joy. Now Death can come
When ere he will and find me calm and still.
For though we die, apart we cannot be.

Sipping their port, for several moments, the three men sat in silent wonder. Father Tewksbury gloried in her, as God's creation, a woman, who mocked the pretensions of Europeans, by imbuing this beautiful

daughter of Africa with His Son's spirit. Joshua Mooring was astonished by the ease with which she, so recently a slave, could make English do her bidding. Gideon, whose appreciation of Sarah went so much further than her achievements and infinitely more imtimate, gloried in his good fortune. "Imagine living with the only woman he ever cared about! Imagine her loving him! Imagine what the future would bestow!" he thought, his face shining, saying, "Truly beautiful, my love. The Bard would have been well pleased by having so marvelous a pupil. He would have enjoyed your graphic portrayals, too, although I'm not sure Lytton countenanced them."

"I've read the *Song of Solomon*, Gideon. So, even if my reading were limited to the *Scriptures*, which it is not, I would not be so innocent. Very beautiful, indeed, Sarah. What I particularly admire is your blending of the physical and the spiritual, precisely like much of the *Old Testament*. Quite remarkable." The friends bantered the evening to an early close, omitting their usual late night political discussion.

As Gideon and Sarah climbed the stairs, he asked, "Is there no way I can top you. I read the world's greatest poet, quite well, I might say, and no one will remember one word. Alas, poor Yorick! At least, in your sonnet, you confirmed my ideas about him."

"Do you really think so?" Sarah paused, as she reached the landing, allowing him to brush against her back. "You know, if you think about it, you might find a way to top me." The graceful woman resumed her sinuous walk into the bedroom, without turning around.

"You become Elizabethan every day," Gideon answered, in mock horror, as he released his trousers on the transom of the bedroom.

"Impatient as ever, I see," she said, smiling into her wash basin.

"Let me show you how much." Gideon stepped out of his clothes and took her by the waist, before she could face him.

"Aren't you going to allow me to finish my toilet?"

"Too late for that," he said, his voice husky, as he raised her skirts above her buttocks, inserting himself into the already wet woman.

"I suppose you think this will earn you an appointment as the Master of Horse, my good sir," she responded, prior to losing interest in words.

And thus the Gibsons would have been content to live out their days, loving each other, working together, enjoying each other, raising a family. Events threatened to intervene.

II. "Where yo' goin'?"

"Out."

"It bes Sunday."

"So what!"

Accustomed to his gruffness, the woman went back to sleep. Jemmy, who had not slept at all, left the hut, joining a group of slaves at the edge of the wood that bordered their quarters on the South. "Everyone here?"

"Ceptin' Amos."

"Wes got to go. Can he keep his mouth shut?"

"He bes alright, jes worried bout his chillen."

"No matter." It did matter and their leader, Jemmy, knew it. "We'll be lon' gone," he said confidently. "Les go to de store."

He strode at the head of his rag tag contingent, never feeling so vital. Every muscle in his field hardened body conspired to overcome the ground's dumb resistance to his movements. Racing with the day's possibilities, his mind overcame fear and foreboding. He might fail, of course, but how could a slave's life be a success? Sitting in a wide spot in the road, the general store seemed to shrink before the band. Accustomed to shuffling slaves, the store knew there would be no ordinary purchase, not at this hour, not on this day, not from these black men, who advanced with a purpose. Closed, as expected, but two white men were sleeping off the night on the porch. The first decision,

the first adjustment. How many more would there be? How many adjustments could his tenuous hold on his troop withstand?

"Kill dem!" His voice did not betray his conjectures. "I say, kill dem! Yo' think wes playin'? Kill dat trash!" No one moved, as one of the white men began to stir. Jemmy walked calmly up the the porch and cleaved the stuporous man with his axe. A powerful spurt of blood spattering his coarse clothes, a snapping of collar bones and breaking ribs woke the other man. Before he could clear his eyes, a violent stroke stopped him. His eyes burning, his axe dripping blood and flesh on the wooden floor, Jemmy turned to face his stunned followers.

"De next time, I tells yo' to do somethin', yo' damn well better do it." He barely recognized his voice, as deep authoritative, disembodied sounds poured from his mouth. Neither did his troop.

"Yes suh," they mumbled, without any sense of sarcasm. "Yes, suh."

"Don' suh me," the voice said. "Ise still Jemmy." But, of course, he wasn't. He was a free man and a murderer by the same act. He liked it. And he savored the fear he saw on his friends' faces, fear of him, not of their owners. "Get de guns," he ordered, matter of factly. Two men sprang to the porch, avoiding the corpses sprawled on it, emerging with three muskets and some ammunition.

"We needs a flag," someone said, as he darted into the store, emerging with some multicolored cloth.

The dandified young man continued to read his report: "After the removal of arms from Brown's store, the rebel band moved south, as they had planned, colors flying, drums beating. By evening, they hoped to reach safety deep in the disputed territory. In another day or two, they hoped to be under Spanish protection and free."

"Is there any evidence that the Spanish were involved with the rebels?"

"At what point?" the Lieutenant Governor's aide asked.

"Before the rebellion started."

"No, but the slaves were privy to rumors that the Spanish would welcome them."

"Was contact made during the march?" another man asked.

"No, and we are certain of that."

"Why were the slaves so bold, so indiscreet?"

"Midmorning and all was well, almost to Beaufort," Jemmy thought. Need more guns and men too. His plan was to recruit on the march. This, however, was proving much more difficult than anticipated. He was able to increase his numbers, but not without threats.

In his favor, some of the rebels sensed success. Veterans of a couple of hours boasted to newcomers, "Wes an army."

There was a sound of a single horse, then silence.

"Hush," Jemmy yelled. "Must have imagined it," he thought, saying, "Les go, but no noise. Soon nuf, wes can be as loud as wes like."

"Our information suggests that the slaves believed they had made good their escape, so caution was unnecessary," the aide continued.

"How could they? They had traveled only a few miles," someone interrupted.

"Not far for a white man, perhaps," he replied, slightly bored with recounting the obvious to the members of the Carolina Assembly. "But quite a distance for a slave, who had seldom left his Master's plantation. They had climbed a mountain and the valley lay before them. After the apparent false alarm over the horse, they believed they were safe."

"Governor Bull's horse, can you beat that?"

"The sheerest good fortune, the Governor assures me," the aide added, chuckling, as the Governor listened impassively in the seat of honor.

For the first few miles, Jemmy avoided farm houses, speaking only to the slaves he found in the fields. “But suppose there was a rider. Suppose they were pursued. They would need more weapons,” he thought. “Wes goin’ to take de next house,” he said to his followers. They did, and the next and the next, pillaging and burning everything in their path.

One white farmer resisted. He, his wife and two children were killed. Not without its rewards, the massacre made recruiting easier, the local slaves fearing they would be blamed for the murders and the carnage. Jemmy’s boldness was contagious, awakening feelings of revenge and pride, putting an end to shuffling, skulking, and averting eyes. There were material benefits, besides. Arms, jewelry, money, and liquor were distributed among them. At its height, the band numbered eighty.

The aide continued his report: “Governor Bull, as you know, acted with great dispatch. Gathering men, he soon had a militia of about three dozen. They pursued the rebels, soon overtaking them, as the rebels paused to consume their spirituous spoils. Intoxicated, they lost all sense of urgency. If it had not been for the eagerness of the Sunday-go-to-church militia, the rebels would have been completely surprised. As it was, the first shots sobered many of the slaves. A skirmish resulted. Forty slaves were slain on the spot, the militia losing twenty-one men. The balance of the rebels were hanged, save for a few, who had obviously been coerced into the rebellion. That ends my report. Thank you.”

“Thank you, Mr. Belvoire. Now, gentlemen, we must consider what we can do to preclude a repetition of these unfortunate events,” Governor Bull said, as he slowly rose.

There is no need to follow the perambulations of the lengthy and lively debate which ensued, to say nothing of the countless others it spawned, as Carolina revised its Slave Code. Essentially, the debate

oscillated between advocates of severe reprisal and advocates of less corporal punishment.

"Jemmy had always been treated well. Baptized, taught to read, and what did Christian charity produce?" argued the spokesman for severity.

Other delegates, themselves slave owners, believed uprisings were the result of intolerable abuse, simple rebelliousness, or insanity. To them, Jemmy was insane. Therefore, harsh punishments, if otherwise justifiable, would be ineffective. Slaves were children, dangerous to be sure, but controllable by wise and strict parents.

The revisions to the Slave Code, made in 1740, reflected the less severe approach to slave control, substantially modifying the Barbadian Code. Crippling physical abuse was prohibited. Work hours were limited to fifteen per day. The effort to control by supervision, rather than coercion, was enhanced. There was less freedom of movement and less discretion than the earlier code had prescribed. Slaves could wear only coarse clothing or livery. None would be taught to read or write. No more than seven could travel unaccompanied by a white. No houses or land could be rented to slaves. They could not be kept on plantations with nonresident whites. In part, the lash was replaced by a prison without walls, resulting in close monitoring of the inmates. The harsher approach would have assaulted the slave's body, capitalizing on his fear of pain. The New Code attacked his self-esteem. While the inhuman treatment of the severe approach assumed its victims were dangerous adults, the adopted Code assumed they were perpetual, unruly children. Significantly, it made childhood safe, secure and, above all, preferable to adulthood that was dangerous and unpredictable. Many, if not all, slaves would have resented physical abuse; resisting relatively good treatment and minimal expectations would find less favor.

Only in the slave quarters had there been any foreboding of the Stono Rebellion, as Jemmy's exploits came to be called. None of Gideon's slaves had heard of the conspiracy, however, in the days before that bloody Sunday, a vague immanence lay on the land. News of the rebellion inundated the rice fields, the most cautious slaves dominating the hour.

"Damn fool niggers. All dat killin', fo' what? Now we be watched day an' night."

"Dey don alright, once de fightin' start," another young man offered.

"Dey kill a mess o' white folks."

"Drunk as Hell. Niggers so dumb, can't even see dey bes dead."

"How dat be dumb?" the youth said, under his breath, blind neither to the heroism of the rebels, nor to the old man's grudging respect for them.

"Dey all hang," the old man said, sharply to the youth. "Yo' want to hang, boy, hang like a nigger, eyes bulged out, tryin' to scream, an' can't. Ifn dats what yo' wants, yo' can get it anytime, anytime a'tall. Fool!"

The meeting ended somberly, leaving Todd and other young slaves unconvinced. Death was bad, hanging was horrible. Were they worse than slavery? During the discussion, Sam had tried to minimize the differences among the slaves. Although he admired the fighting qualities of the rebels, he was appalled by the cost of the rebellion, yet could not condemn it. He believed the threat of revolt, along with sporadic uprisings, was necessary to their fragile self-esteem, enabling passive resistance to continue. Without Jemmy, without rage, without bravado, without foolhardy acts, without the violent, doomed gesture, the reluctant heroes of his beloved folk tales would no longer be able to sustain the slaves' less flamboyant efforts to make life tolerable.

Aware of Todd's growing eloquence, he hoped the youth would articulate these ideas. But Todd remained silent, displaying unexpected restraint. Was he the man they so desperately needed, a wise Jemmy, a leader of the old and the young, the drunk and the sober, a leader, who, by the force of his character and mind and by his ability to articulate their feelings and beliefs, would make violent gestures unnecessary? If so, his gifts were worth nurturing. As there would always be opportunities for action, it would be folly to act prematurely. In Todd's restraint, Sam sensed wisdom beyond the young man's years. Biding his time, developing his talents, honing his judgment, he would spend his youth to greater effect than Jemmy. Todd would not dissipate his life in violent spasms. His rage would be more focused, his actions less futile, more efficient, his impulses tempered by reason. His silence signified that his time was coming and that destiny beckoned.

Soon the New Code was promulgated to the slaves. Most planters read it aloud, word for word, to their chattel. Few slaves understood that the Code's judicious mixture of indulgence and restraint consigned them to perpetual childhood. Most were relieved, unable or unwilling to see that cooperating with the New Code made them less than animals in their Masters' minds. The planters respected the Indians, who could not be broken to the plow, as they respected the wild cats and bears they hunted, whose free, wild, bestial natures demanded that they kill or be killed. Passive resistance was weak, despicable, something to be indulged by the planters, for it confirmed the slaves' natural inferiority.

Not all planters favored the New Code. The hardliner's motto, "Let them live in fear," was expressed brutally on Jamieson's plantation and on others like it. All infractions were tantamount to insurrection. When one of his slaves killed another, he would order the corpse tied to the killer, to be dragged about as the slave performed his chores.

Within a few days, the slave would die. No one can estimate how many miscreants were deterred by this and similar barbarities. Gideon complained to the Commissary, the Magistrate and other authorities in Charleston to no avail. Nothing could be proved, nothing would be done. The price Jamieson paid for his license to kill was relentless vigilance over the activities of his slaves. His plantation became a prison, and he, its warden. Overall, the New Code worked. An incipient revolt similar to the Stono Rebellion was betrayed. Fifty slaves were hanged as example. No further uprisings troubled the planters' sleep for many years.

III. What role was the Church to play in this era of hideous punishments and oppression? Commissary Alexander believed that the Church must act, if only as an example of Christian benevolence and humanity. His efforts were beset by many obstacles. Despite the radiating changes resulting from the Toleration Act of 1688, the Church could not satisfy either its reactionary or its nonconforming members. Doctrinal conflicts in the New Land were complicated by its unsettled character, which made adherence to any doctrine difficult. On the Rice Coast, the Church depended upon the beneficiaries of the slave regime. Under the auspices of the Bishop of London, the Commissary condemned its more brutal manifestations, urging the planters to treat their chattel humanely. Many planters acquiesced to the cautious teachings of the Church, although they often did so with a mind to more temporal benefits.

Some planters, however, believed any concession to the slaves was foolish and dangerous. "Treating slaves humanely, absurd!" they would snort. "I'd sooner have my horse to supper. If they were human, it would be foolhardy to allow them to believe it. Treat them like beasts, chastise them, domesticate them, and they'll soon see themselves properly." Unable to resist the Church directly, the advocates of severity cast about for a religion that would numb the

slaves to their condition, make them willing workers, without allowing them to consider the secular implications of having an immortal soul. Jamieson believed he found the personification of these attributes in Reverend George Whitefield: a spell binding preacher, who could make his congregation feel good, while keeping them alive to the realities of this world and reserving their hopes for the next.

Aware that his unorthodox methods aroused opposition within the Church, Whitefield sought alternative sources of support for his ministry in the New Land. He met with Jamieson to explore mutually beneficial arrangements. During his extensive travels, the tireless Priest had met many men like Jamieson, so he wasted no time discussing his theological differences with the Commissary. "What is it you propose, Mr. Jamieson?" he asked, after the briefest of salutations.

"I have heard that you are a talented man," Jamieson said; receiving no reply, he continued, "We need talented men on the Rice Coast, men with sound religious views and the courage to express them."

"My independence is well known." Whitefield smiled, enunciating each word carefully, adding, "As to the soundness of my views, I suppose that depends on what is meant by sound."

Not given to semantic distinctions, Jamieson interjected, "Not filling the slaves with ridiculous and dangerous ideas is sound enough for me. As for the rest, I don't give a tinker's dam."

"I would have thought that the New Code protected the slaves from unsound views. Can't you enforce it?"

"I can do any damn thing I want!" Jamieson exclaimed.

"Then you have no need of my services."

"Now, wait a minute. That's not what I mean. I'm sorry, if I was hasty." Unaware that Whitefield had intentionally provoked him, he continued, "I have tried to prevent my slaves from hearing outsiders.

They don't go to Tewksbury's nigger loving chapel. But I can't prevent them from making up their own mumbo jumbo, tribal superstition, and ridiculous nonsense. Something Christian would be much better, don't you agree?"

"No doubt," Whitefield answered, mildly.

"But not what that fool Tewksbury gives them."

"Does he preach?" Seeing that Jamieson did not comprehend the importance of his question, he rephrased his question. "Does he preach the Word of God?"

"How should I know? He treats niggers, as if they were white. He married Gibson to his nigger whore. That's preaching enough for me."

"And certainly unsound theologically," Whitefield said, his irony lost on Jamieson.

"Can you do something about that?"

"About Tewksbury?" Recognizing Jamieson's confusion, he asked, "I will not interfere with another man's ministry. In fact, that is what my difficulties with the Commissary amount to and..."

Interrupting, the last topic Jamieson wished to broach was Whitefield's relations with Commissary Alexander, he said, "Not Tewksbury, the slaves. Can you do something about them?" Before Whitefield could sketch his views regarding missionary work among the heathen, Jamieson added, "Unless we keep them terrified of us in this world and the next, our lives are in danger and what happened on the Stono River can happen again."

"I believe I understand you now, Mr. Jamieson. I'm to dispense sleeping potions to your slaves, so you can sleep in peace, after keeping them terrified all day, to say nothing of working themselves to death to make you wealthy. Not a very flattering task for a talented man of God, is it?"

Afraid the conversation was beyond recall, Jamieson squinted and said, “Quite a lucrative one, if done well.” To no avail, as Whitefield left, without excusing himself.

For all his difficulties with the Church, Whitefield was a sincere Christian. No hireling, had he agreed with Jamieson regarding the bestiality of the slaves, he would not have sold his services to the planter or any other human being. He worked for the Lord. If the Commissary could understand that, he surmised, there would be fewer points of difference between them. The Reverend Whitefield was the messenger of God’s Word, not an employee of the Church, called to preach, not preside over moribund rituals, called to reach the Many, called to provide the food of God to all who hungered, called to serve those who would not be satisfied by dogma and wafers. If he could work without the constraints implied by traditional Anglicanism, or if he could find an institution that would support his efforts, there was no limit to the good he could do. He had hoped Jamieson might be the means to prevent a pygmy like Alexander from obstructing the glorious path God had called him to walk. He left Jamieson’s plantation disappointed, not defeated, thinking, “Only God could defeat a man like him. And what reason could He have to do that?”

Aware of Whitefield’s nonconformity, Commissary Alexander needed to do something about his most famous priest. He dispatched this letter to Gideon: “My dear Gideon: Would you do me the honor of dining with me Tuesday next? I need to discuss a sensitive issue concerning the Church and George Whitefield. Your obed’t servant, Edward Alexander, Commissary”

Gideon immediately drafted a reply, which Sam delivered. Upon his return, Gideon asked him how the Commissary appeared.

“Fine, Massa Gibson, jes fine, a little tired, but alright.”

“Did he answer my note or give you a message?”`

"No, suh." Gideon bent over his desk, believing the interview over. "No, suh," Sam repeated, without any conviction.

"Is there anything more? What is it?"

"Well, suh, der bes somethin' funny bout de comm'sary."

"Out with it, will you, please?" Gideon snapped, ever impatient with indirection passing for deference.

"He acks me bout preachin'."

"Preaching? He knows Father Tewksbury better than we do. Odd."

"Field preachin', I reckon, Massa," Sam replied, beginning to enjoy himself. He knew something the master needed to find out. "He acks me ifn der bes any field preachin' in de Hollers."

"Is there any?"

"No, suh."

"Is that all, Sam? I really am busy," he said, twisting in his chair. Despising paper work, he tried to get through it, as rapidly as possible.

"Yes, suh, dats all, ceptin'..."

"Sam, will you please give me the whole story, once and for all?"

"Yes, suh. He acks me ifn I likes de preachin' in de chapel."

"You mean Father Tewksbury?"

"Yes, suh, and de service."

"What did you tell him?"

"I don tol him, it bes jes fine, jes fine."

"That's good, good, now..."

"Ise goin', Massa."

Unable to resume his work, Gideon, not without misgivings, visited the Commissary. Mostly a monologue, their conversation amounted to Gideon's polite responses to his friend's exposition, regarding nonconforming priests in Carolina. "So you agree with me, Gideon?"

"I agree that you need to do something, given your version of the facts and your values. Undoubtedly, you have the authority to act as you see fit."

"That's not what I asked. Do you agree with my position?"

"Yes, but I'm afraid not in a way you'll approve of. Preaching unquestionably endangers the Church, it's more perilous than scientific experimentation. You know what happened to Galileo," Gideon replied.

"I am neither a papist, nor a medievalist."

"If you were, I wouldn't be here, still, I'm not sure you fully understand that all free inquiry, all free speech, and all coherent preaching, undermines dogma."

"So do the nonconforming sects, but in a different way, less elegant, more emotional..."

"Granted, but their members choose the sect, making the difference between dogma and preaching insignificant."

"I don't believe their choice so-called can be genuine. Haven't you heard those preachers? They pander to the lowest instincts of fear and superstition. They make outrageous and cynical promises to their converts, while justifying their servitude," the Commissary said. "What passes for dogma is a haphazard set of irrational fantasies, the most important of which is embodied in a charismatic charlatan, who feeds his ego and fills his purse, as he beguiles the ignorant and unwary."

"I suspect some of them might be sincere."

"I'm sorry, Gideon. Of course, some are. You must think me a terrible old man, cringing in the corner, grasping at his last threads of power, holding back the dawn." Gideon sipped his sherry. "Some of the nonconformists are genuine Christians, men of courage and conviction, worthy of respect. The Wesleys for example."

"And they are the most dangerous to the Church?"

"No. I know, by your question, I have mislead you. No sincere Christian imperils the Church. No good man endangers the divine basis of all true religions."

"Now I am puzzled."

"The Church, not its buildings or clerics, but its expression in its rites and rituals shows in concrete terms that God is present. This Church is imperiled by men of great talent, men who misuse their gifts to confuse the people for their own misguided purposes."

"So your doctrinal differences with Whitefield are of no consequence?"

"I would not go that far. Dogma, like ritual, is important, for the reason already indicated. It is essential to the ministry of the Church, as I have defined it."

"So your objection to Whitefield and the others comes down to this: they reduce the effectiveness of the Church's ministry, by confusing the people." The cleric did not object, nor did he confirm Gideon's reduction of his concerns to a problem of clarity. Gideon continued, pressing his point, "I believe, Commissary, that at some stage, all inquiry confuses. Confusion is not the enemy, at least not so great an enemy as dogmatic clarity."

"Which is why I don't agree with your formulation of my position. I'm aware that my defense of the Church and my concerns about preaching and confusing the people have often justified the worst tyrannies. I realize, as well, that free inquiry is the basis of all human freedom. Without it, we would all be enslaved, whether we recognized our bondage or not. Ignorance is slavery. You know I agree with that."

"So did Galileo's Pope before he assumed the Throne of Saint Peter."

"If I were content with my views, I would not have burdened you with them. I'm worried about my people. I want them to be free; I want them to be happy, too."

"That may be impossible, Commissary, though you are a good man for wishing it so."

"I need to do more than wish. I intend to act."

"Against Whitefield?" Gideon rose to leave, as the dinner hour was approaching. "That sounds like a conversation unto itself."

"Won't you stay to dinner? I believe Matthew is expecting you."

Gideon nodded, as he noted a trait common to men of action: a conviction that their concerns are shared so fully by their friends that it would be impossible to impose on them.

The conversation proceeded apace throughout the dinner. "I hope you don't think that I am jealous of Whitefield."

Enjoying his friend's awkward assertion of his rectitude, Gideon said, "He's a talented man. Who would not envy him?"

"Let him found his own church and leave mine to me," the Commissary replied, unable to match Gideon's playful intent.

"I thought you wouldn't object to another Wesley?"

"I wouldn't, although I didn't say I would enjoy him. Wesley is a fine man, more humorless than I, I'm afraid." Both men smiled, as the Commissary continued. "Whitefield is not a Wesley. He and others like him, many of them less principled or more misguided, use the Church and its offices for their own purposes, violating its very essence."

"He's always saying he's the mouth of the Lord."

"Yes, the Lord's special messenger. Well, he's supposed to be an ordained priest, not the translator of God's private language. He dismisses nearly two thousand years of history on the basis of a private, unverifiable, insight. And you talk about inquiry!" Unburdened, the Commissary signaled to Matthew to pour the claret.

"If all you wish to do is to purge the Church of a disloyal priest, what's stopping you?"

"I have no desire to make him a martyr and thereby increase his malevolent influence."

"Then let him be."

"I cannot allow him to misuse the priesthood and to misrepresent himself as an Anglican. He doesn't believe in the doctrines of the Church."

"Which Church?"

"The Church that is my home and life, Gideon, the institutional Church."

"And you want Whitefield to obey its rules?" Gideon savored the claret, which he thought a trifle thin, but no weaker than the Commissary's efforts to square dogma and tradition with a charismatic priest, to say nothing of free inquiry.

"I make no apology for the rules, Gideon. And I know, you believe that I have contradicted myself. In truth, I cannot separate an oath of obedience to the rules of the Church, as they are embodied in our form of worship, from the spiritual service to God. That's why I'm an Anglican."

"Surely, you do not believe the rules, the rites and rituals are God's?"

"Not directly, but an oath taken in the presence of God to do this or that or to refrain from this or that amounts to a divine injunction, at least as divine as we can imagine. *The Book of Common Prayer,* if one professes or, if you will, confesses, to believe in it, amounts to an oath."

"I don't envy your decision, Commissary. I wish I could help."

"You have helped a great deal. I feel much better about the whole affair. By the way, Matthew has prepared the guest room for you. It's much too late to ride to the Hollows."

"Is a heretic allowed to share the manse of a saint?"

"Saints don't live in manses. And as you know, I do not aspire to sainthood. I care much too much for the rules, for institutions, and for many other conventions you mock, perhaps correctly. Heretics are in far greater danger of being sanctified than prelates." Gideon smiled at his friend, who added solemnly, "Thank you, Gideon, I realize my friendship carries untoward burdens. Perhaps a glass of Madeira before we retire?"

"No burden is too great to carry, if the reward is your Madeira," said Gideon.

"My brother's Madeira, you know. He's a sea captain. You would like him. He makes your heresy seem dull by comparison."

"Let's have some then. I think I'll go to the market tomorrow, while I'm in town."

"Don't go, Gideon. I've heard some very unpleasant rumors. If they are true, you will not like what will happen."

"A man does what he must," Gideon replied, for the first time assuming the earnest demeanor of his friend. He, too, had heard there would be a special slave auction.

"Some things are best left to God."

"No doubt, Commissary. Will you leave Whitefield to His dispensation?"

"Perhaps I should. In any event, I scheduled a meeting with him."

The friends drained their glasses, watched the fire down to its embers and went to bed.

IV. A few days later Reverend Whitefield preceded Matthew through the doors of the study. As they exchanged formalities, the clerics were as cautious as stray dogs. Whitefield saw nothing remarkable in the Commissary, whose strong grey eyes seemed insufficient to make up for a deficiency of stature and a stiffness of bearing. "A careerist," the preacher thought. Like most men, who have the power to move audiences, Whitefield disparaged subtle virtues. A

bold, dramatic man, he saw only the absence of the traits that had been so much a part of his success. A large frame, a confident manner, a sonorous voice, the gift of felicitous speech, Whitefield was prepared to grant his host a courtier's cunning, but little intellectual or moral vigor and no flair.

Less overshadowed by ego, the Commissary's evaluation was more charitable and more accurate. He appreciated Whitefield's easy charm and dignity, a presence that assumed rather than demanded respect, a lion among jackals. He seemed much larger than he was, his wide shoulders, erect carriage, and flowing hair creating a sense of dominance and distance, as if his presence among mortals was to be cherished the more for being deserved the less. Whitefield was Olympian. "Hardly surprising that he so fills this room; he has no difficulty filling a sanctuary. A daunting adversary, if it came to that, and a man whose gifts the Church could ill afford to lose, especially in this large, open and individualistic New Land," the Commissary thought. Not wanting to break with him, despite the danger Whitefield embodied, he believed that the Church was greater than any one man, no matter how blessed by God. This truth could not be neglected in favor of expedient accommodation. This appraisal of Whitefield's many talents and the Commissary's equally forthright recognition of the Church's need of them did not lessen his wariness of the histrionic and demagogic, of those who would mislead the oppressed and miserable. He recognized that Whitefield's gifts could be fatal. Protector of his flock, Commissary Alexander would give his life to kill any predator, who would ravage them. He realized that his effort to protect the Church and its community would be seen by some as a personal attack on a better man. "Is this not why so faithful and perceptive a friend as Gideon was skeptical regarding his motives? So be it," he thought. Reiterating his resolve not to let his righteous course be diverted by unavoidable risks, praying for a pure heart and God's

blessing, he began his talk in earnest, hoping that indirection would make his message more palatable. He wished to remind Whitefield of the perils of demagogy, if not his deviance from the liturgy.

"I should like to tell you a story."

"Pray go ahead, my dear man. A diverting story is welcome respite for a man of God."

"This one may be more disturbing than diverting. It's a true account of a horrible tragedy," the Commissary said, frowning, annoyed by Whitefield's attempt to lessen the importance of his words, even before they were uttered.

"The truth must always be welcome, pleasant or not, by the front or back door."

"Long before you graced these shores, only a year or so after I assumed my present office, an itinerant Moravian preacher created a large backcountry following. Possessing the gift of felicitous speech, his words unrolled in resonant Biblical cadences. Resounding with the mysteries and visions of *Revelations*, they could not stand theological examination, nor were they intended to. They served the moment well and none questioned their basis. Although the Church has never lacked quibblers, we, the Anglican clergy, did not criticize the Moravian, at least not openly. In fact, we welcomed him, as all men committed to the glory of God should receive a man blessed with His gifts, minimizing his unorthodox method and lack of discipline." The Commissary paused, studying Whitefield's face. Seeing nothing but professional charm and the mildest curiosity, he continued. "We admired his ability to arouse the most indolent parishioners to the joy of Christian living. We soon regretted our enthusiasm, as we began to fear that his talent for persuasion would exact a fearful, perhaps demonic, price. Lacking his imagination and gift for the unorthodox, we, I, took refuge in staid, familiar, if worn, robes of ritual and common utterance.

For the first time in my religious life, the *Book* of Common *Prayer* became more than a series of helps to an ignorant, semi-literate, lazy clergy. Its very familiarity, its conventionality, if you will, not its wisdom or beauty, was its greatest justification. We used it to retrieve us from our mystical transport, to limit our delight in the theatrical, to avoid the momentarily efficacious, to save us from the trap of facile solutions to perennial problems of faith and living. No one needed the constancy and the conformity of the *Prayer Book* more than I, a new Commissary, full of my calling and my mission in the New Land. We resolved to forget our infatuation with the expedient and get down to our real work. As we would soon learn, we had more to regret than our embarrassment, despite the preacher's departure."

Again he paused. Whitefield sat contentedly, more bemused than provoked by the story. The Commissary continued: "Not all our parishioners returned to the fold. One family, the Duartes, were involved in a horrible tragedy. The Moravian had convinced them, or so they testified, that they alone knew God's truth, which came to them in visions and dreams. In one of these visions, the husband of the eldest Duartes daughter, one Peter Rombert, believed he was a prophet and claimed he was instructed by God to 'put away the woman whom thou hast for thy wife, and when I have destroyed this wicked generation, I will raise up her first husband from the dead, and they shall be man and wife as before; and go thou and take thy wife her youngest sister, who is a virgin; so that the family shall be restored entire and the holy seed preserved pure and undefiled.'"

Pausing, receiving no response, the Commissary continued. "The eldest Duartes, a credulous father, to say the least, consented to the arrangement, subjecting himself, his daughter, and his son-in-law to legal and ecclesiastical sanctions. The magistrate, Captain Peter Simmons, attempted to arrest Rombert and his 'wife.' Under an alleged divine injunction, the family resisted. In the ensuing pitched

battle, Simmons and one of the other Duartes women were killed. Many were wounded, before the family was subdued.

At the trial, Rombert, his 'wife,' her father and two eldest sons were convicted. Condemned to death, the father and the Romberts were executed, refusing to the last to repent. The sons were more amenable to my entreaties, which were aided immeasurably by the nonoccurrence of the prophesied resurrection of the executed. Mercifully, they were released. One of the boys later committed murder and was tried and executed. The other vanished."

"It must have been a terrible ordeal for you, Commissary, to have witnessed a tragedy before you had gained enough experience to interrupt its course. You mustn't blame yourself. Perhaps no one could have reached the family."

The Commissary could not believe Whitefield's effrontery. "Here he is at my behest, and he has the brass to console me for my inadequacies that have nothing to do with my summons of him, and he knows it," he thought, saying, "The inexperience of a youthful priest is perhaps a lesson to be drawn from the tale, but not the one, to be candid, I had in mind," he said. "Weak, but on the right tack," he thought.

"My dear Commissary, I trust you are not offended. I ventured to speak only to the point of how your inability to reach the least member of your flock does you honor. As one who suffers much the same anguish, I know how important it is to accept limitations..." He paused, then finished his thought, "the limitations of our parishioners to respond to the most heartfelt Christian compassion."

"I thank you for your concern," the Commissary replied, ignoring the rebuke in Whitefield's words. "In truth, I'm glad you brought up the topic of limitations, for it is central to the story. We all must accept our limitations, isn't that so? In many ways, the Moravian preacher is the author of our sad story. He must have known that he could not

always be with his followers to guide them, to protect them from an excess of zeal. Yet, he allowed them to believe the most blasphemous nonsense, homicidal, as it transpired."

"I'm not sure that I can condemn him. He cannot be held responsible for the insanity of his followers."

"Not in law, certainly, it seems to me, however, that, as a Christian, he had greater obligations than the letter of the law."

"His obligations were to the Truth of God's Word, which insofar as you have told it, he fulfilled."

"A man of God incurs obligations to those who follow him, many of whom may seem prosaic to a gifted speaker," the Commissary paused, then added, "like the Moravian." Whitefield merely smiled, as the Commissary continued, "A man of God, particularly a priest, must do more than preach the Word. He must be a pastor, a good shepherd, to his people. I believe that had the Moravian paid sufficient attention to his pastoral duties, the tragedy could have been averted."

Whitefield had anticipated the Commissary's words, knowing that those, who did not embody the Word, resented those who did. These mediocrities find refuge and self-justification in the Church, reciting rituals and incantations and tending to the mundane needs of parishioners. They could not understand that the Word and its Messenger met all pastoral needs. The Word was the good shepherd. A Christian needed no other. Eager to leave the Commissary and his trivial ideas, Whitefield said, "This is all very interesting, Commissary, however, I have much to do. If that is all you wished to tell me, I thank you and bid you good day." Whitefield stood, appearing less imposing than before.

"Sit down, please. We are not quite finished with our business." Surprised by the Commissary's tone, both men seemed momentarily perplexed. "You may be correct about the Moravian, and you may be correct about a great many other matters, about which we differ. That

is by the by. What is of central importance, to me at least, is that all members of the Anglican clergy adhere to the doctrines to which we have sworn obedience, whether we find them restrictive, or not. For these oaths embody that we are witnesses to God's Word. Is that clear?"

"If you believe..."

"If I believed that you violated any oath or Church ordinance, I would charge you, you may be certain of that. All I am trying to do now is, to use your words, to interrupt a tragedy."

"Forgive me, Commissary, I do not see how a semi-literate, itinerant Moravian and my ministry have anything in common. I fail to see the basis of your concern. If all you are asking for is my support of your authority over administrative affairs of the Church, you have it. That has always gone without saying."

"Allow me to say it, anyway, for the record, because we may disagree about what your acknowledgement implies for your behavior." The Commissary stood, as he spoke. Whitefield affected a lack of concern. "If I may review events: When you first arrived in the colony, over a year ago, we met in this room to honor the formalities."

"I remember well."

"Yes, so do I. I remember how delighted I was to have a man of your obvious presence and strength of mind in our region. I knew you would meet with great success, as you have."

"In his wisdom, God has seen fit to grant me..."

"Yes, His graciousness is beyond measure and dispute. If I may continue, my concern at that very first meeting was whether parish life could fulfill you, even for the short time, before your advancement in the hierarchy. I wonder now, whether the Church can contain you." A fire crackled behind the Commissary, failing to warm the room. Whitefield stood, tilting his head more than necessary to stare directly at him. Each was impassive, their minds coursing with estimates of

each other's thoughts, formulating countless statements and counter statements. The long silence further chilled the atmosphere.

Finally, Whitefield spoke, "That is a matter under the province of Canterbury, not Carolina. I am ordained."

"Did I intimate otherwise? My apologies."

"I understand."

"As conscious as I want you to be of your obligations to the Church, I wish to assure you I am equally cognizant of mine. My concerns, and, of course, I speak only as a subordinate of the Bishop of London, are quite specific and limited. I am charged with the responsibility of supervising the priests of Carolina. As befits a fellowship of Christians, supervision has been lightly manifested. Perhaps, too lightly. To curtail behavior my laxity may have encouraged is the purpose of this meeting. Allow me to be blunt. Our prescribed liturgy is to be performed in the prescribed manner, word for word. This may seem absurdly constricting to a man of your genius and temperament, it is, however, no more than the articles of our faith demand, no more than you are sworn to uphold, before Canterbury and before God. This has not always been done. As of now, it will be done in all services under your control." The Commissary had spoken deliberately and calmly, although a great deal more severely than he anticipated or intended. "If you believe I have exceeded my authority by so informing you, you may complain to the Bishop. Have I made myself understood?"

"Yes, Commissary. Am I now excused?" Whitefield spoke with a deference unintended and unacknowledged.

He nodded instinctively, realizing only with Whitefield's escape that his assent was highly ambiguous. "Yes, to what? The clarity of my preferences? His willingness to comply with them? His right to complain to London? I had better write him a letter demanding an unambiguous reply in writing," he concluded, wearily.

A great many letters were exchanged, none of which achieved the Commissary's objective. Needing to maneuver, Whitefield required as much ambiguity as he could wring from the Commissary's reluctance to have a final rupture. His voice had become too powerful to be muffled by the *Book of Common Prayer,* to say nothing of a clerical puppy like Alexander. Not of divine origin, unlike the *Bible,* obedience to the *Prayer Book* had to be limited by individual Conscience. From his perspective, that was the import of William and Mary. They were summoned by Parliament to rule under Parliamentary restrictions, not to return to prior abuses, clerical or secular. Unable to demand absolute obedience, their authority was no more divine than Parliament's. Both were constrained by the Word and Conscience. Only the divine was absolute, as manifested in the Word, as interpreted by a man of God, and confirmed by Conscience, the properties of individuals, not the Church. Certainly not the Church, as conceived by careerists like the Commissary, a collection of rules, interpreted timidly by a congeries of mediocrities. To substitute dogma and ritual for the Word, to interpose rules between man and God's Message, was an obscene elevation of the needs of a man-made institution to divine commandments. Not the Word itself, liturgy must support the Word. If it diluted the Word, or otherwise compromised it, then the liturgy would serve evil, if it did not become evil itself. So Reverend Whitefield believed and so he preached, allowing his congregation to draw the conclusion that the Word was one with its charismatic messenger.

And the Word said, in Whitefield's understanding, that everyone was responsible for himself, ultimately alone, before his God. Whence the protective clothing of ritual, dogma and tradition? The Reformation signified the power of the individual, through the proper use of his most divine gift, his Conscience, and signaled the success of the strong and the righteous and the demise of the weak and vacuous.

No longer able to huddle in groups, man would be naked, as he had always been in the sight of God. Only those willing and able to accept the rigors of affirmative belief, of public confession, of private resolve, of repeated dedication of one's life to Christ, were acceptable to the priesthood of all believers and to the communion of saints. No theological or doctrinal compromise was acceptable, no matter how shrouded in traditional propriety or ritual.

Thus, for Whitefield the stakes were high. Hence, the world was divided between those elected to confront God, stripped of worldly sin, and those, who cringed before Satan, lavishly robed in degradation. Thus, Whitefield would stand proudly naked, armed with the staff of Conscience, the buckler of Certitude, and the Word of God.

In keeping with Anglican custom, the ecclesiastical struggle was protracted, unable to reach its inevitable conclusion, without becoming enmeshed in dreary, interminable, legalisms. Jurisdictional and procedural cuttlefish could have succeeded in obscuring the profound incompatibility of Reverend Whitefield and the Church of England, to say nothing of Commissary Alexander, had not Whitefield perceived the *Prayer Book* as the incarnation of mindless compliance with tradition. In his view, it tolerated, more, encouraged, incoherent, trivial homilies, intoned by mediocrities, leaving little taste for the great didactic sermons necessary to school the Saved. The powerful liberating effects of the Reformation would miscarry, unless the newly minted concepts of the Word and Conscience could be impressed with the literal truth of the *Bible,* best understood by charismatic men, like him. They would be the drill masters of this model army of believers, having no need for the protective and cumbersome armor of medieval priests. No ritual, no dogma, no litany, no liturgy was needed to clothe these saints. Not content to keep the Devil outside the castle, they sought to slay him. For that task, they needed the freedom to move

among the people, as Messengers, if not Incarnations, of the Word, not purveyors of incense and incantation.

The practical difficulty of this heroic approach to Christianity was that it depended on congregations, as Whitefield well recognized, and as his reluctance to renounce his ordination demonstrated. After another year Whitefield lost his congregational support and returned to England, the scene of his first triumphs, becoming more extreme in his convictions, more authoritarian in his manner, and more reckless in his actions, taking on in the process many of the trappings of the prophet, Peter Rombert. This time there would be no denouement, no bath of blood, only a pitiful journey into irrelevance. Everything has its season. Including prophecy. Including divine messengers.

V. There would, however, appear in Carolina other men of the cloth, whom Gideon would find a great deal less amusing than Whitefield. For now, he was content to discuss the Priest's appeal with Sarah.

"I think Whitefield had a good idea. His kind of sermon has long been needed. When I disagreed with its content, I still thought it interesting and informative. He was too enthusiastic, that's all."

"He was blasphemous, believing he was the Word."

"That's not what I mean. Enthusiasm and theatre, that's how he reached the congregation, but he went too far. The Commissary was worried that Whitefield's preaching would have negative effects."

"That was Commissary Alexander's fear, but it didn't happen. His people grew tired of him. There were no untoward effects. That's why he left for England."

"The effect he couldn't control was congregationalism. What the congregation bestows, in this case a certain protection from the hierarchy, it can take away."

"The displeasure of a congregation should be a concern for a priest, but by itself it should not be decisive. A priest is ordained by the Church, as God's representative, the dispenser of the sacraments."

"That view has justified mediocrities for centuries. Whitefield was no mediocrity," Gideon replied.

"He was willing to entertain to suit his gargantuan purposes. He was a salesman of himself, hardly a teacher."

"I agree that he was not a teacher, at least, not in the narrow sense, as one who conveys truths and analyzes concepts. Nonetheless, his method allows for instruction in a way the homily does not. Can you imagine Lytton Tewksbury preaching?"

"Father Tewksbury is a good man and a good priest," she answered.

"What's the point of missionaries teaching literacy? Homilies? No, that's much too great an effort for too small a benefit."

"In order to defend themselves against the next Whitefield."

"There's no way to guarantee that. The next gifted preacher might be skillful enough to defeat their primitive defenses," he responded.

"That's why liturgy is necessary."

"To avoid the pitfalls of inquiry one retreats to dogma and tradition?" She did not reply. "Don't you see that mindless faith has its own perils? I would rather have people sufficiently well-armed to meet Whitefield on turf of his choosing, the Living Word, approached through Reason and Conscience, not withdraw behind medieval ramparts."

"Whitefield's sermons were not what they pretended to be. They were not honest explications of the meaning of the *Scriptures*. They were egotism, dressed in grandiose speech and high drama. He claimed he was the Word Incarnate."

"The antidote to drama is a dull liturgy?"

"Properly understood, liturgy is not dull. Every element has a tradition and a story behind it," she replied.

"And if, for whatever reason, the congregation remains ignorant of these traditions, its deeper needs are properly disregarded?"

"The Church does not disregard anyone's needs, not intentionally."

"How then, do you account for the power of Whitefield, to say nothing of his less literate imitators, or the Moravian or, for that matter, the conjurors?" he asked.

"Men are often wayward, without questioning the bonds of marriage; so it is with otherwise faithful Christians."

Their conversation ended unsatisfactorily. The Church had not reached many slaves. They continued to believe in their superstitions and to practice tribalisms. Although native superstitions repulsed Sarah, they at least had a natural appeal missing in the evangelism of Whitefield and his less gifted emulators. These purveyors of the most ephemeral fantasies, these merchants of the Lord advanced the art of selling, as they stripped pagans of their nativity. She would devote some of her time toward a greater understanding of the liturgy in the hope it would reveal internal sources of vitality and relevance for these abject prisoners in an alien land.

CHAPTER FIVE:
CONCEIVED IN LIBERTY

I. In June, 1775, the Battle of Bunker Hill was joined. Eager for a decisive victory, twenty four hundred Redcoats advanced on fifteen hundred men and boys from Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut. Having dug in during the night of June16th, while under bombardment from a warship, the Americans watched the Redcoats march up Breed's Hill, laboring under field packs, bayonets gleaming, in the morning sun, but without promised artillery support. Receiving concentrated musket fire, they retreated, regrouped and tried again, only to be bloodily repulsed by the effective volleys of Colonel Prescott's men. A third assault was mounted, this time without field packs. Picking their way over the dead and dying, the British advanced to within twenty yards of the American emplacements. Twenty yards! Within sight of the "whites of their eyes!" Prescott's men fired a volley so harrowing, the Redcoats panicked, suffering two hundred dead and eight hundred wounded. The British could have salvaged victory, if, as General Clinton had urged, the American line of retreat were severed. It was not, and the Americans, their ammunition exhausted, abandoned their positions, without duress. Instead of strangling the rebellious baby in the cradle, the Americans defeated, not only the badly led Redcoats, but the myth of their invincibility.

Alexander Gibson and thousands of other conservatives were appalled by Bunker Hill and its bloody portents. Astonished by Parliament's hunger for a military solution to a revenue problem, they found it inconceivable that Britain would jeopardize one-third of its trade, by an ill-advised adventure. The Townshend Acts were expected to raise forty thousand pounds sterling, an amount not nearly sufficient to defray the expenses of protecting and administering the American colonies, now expanded beyond the Appalachians. Alexander could

not fathom the resort to arms to enforce the right to exact so insignificant a sum. Untold amounts of pounds sterling in trade were held to ransom, injuring the prosperity of merchants, farmers, and shippers, and the imperial economy. How Parliament could have failed to consider the entire fabric of American trade, when it assessed the prudence of this revenue measure, seemed irresponsible to the apolitical Alexander. To follow this omission with an expensive punitive expedition exacerbated the folly.

He, now, hoped that the debacle of Bunker Hill would convince Parliament that cheap victory was impossible and any other kind, pyrrhic. Expecting little from politicians, he expected men of property to preserve their wealth or, at the very least, not squander it in the pursuit of obviously ruinous ventures. Propertied men, on both sides of the Atlantic, however, abetted those who destroyed life and property. The demonstrably foolish and prodigal were leading the demonstrably prudent and wise. The world was turning upside down.

The Continental Congress reconvened in September, its mood differing from the prior session. In the wake of Bunker Hill, Congress petitioned the King on behalf of reconciliation. John Dickinson's "Olive Branch Petition" was rebuked in England as an "insult and a mockery." For him and other conservatives, whose ability to absorb humiliation was equal to Gadsden's ability to discern its intent, this reply was a severe blow. In the aftermath of Lexington and Concord, Dickinson had exclaimed, "What topics of reconciliation are now left to men who think as I do, to address the Mother Country? To recommend reverence for the monarch, or affection for the Mother Country? Will the distinction between the prince and his minister, between the people and their representative, wipe out the stain of blood." It was a measure of the growing estrangement between Britons and Americans that his anguished words, almost immediately recanted, captured more of the political reality than a lifetime of

cautious prose. The Dickinson of Lexington and Concord was more prescient than the Dickinson of Bunker Hill. Or, was inadvertent victory less fearsome than planned success?

However this may have been to conservatives, the Congress would have none of it. With the failure of the Petition, the radicals' assertion that efforts to appease Britain were futile, as well as, dishonorable, gained cogency. The drive to prepare a defense against invasion won new adherents. Naming George Washington Commander-in-Chief, an army was formed. Congress prepared an statement that Washington read to his soldiers:

"We are reduced to the alternative of choosing an unconditional submission to the tyranny of irritated ministers, or resistance by force, the latter is our choice. We have counted the cost of this contest and find nothing so dreadful as voluntary slavery...."

The specter of war loomed over 1776. Congress authorized reprisals against British shipping, banning it from American ports. Canada was invaded by Montgomery and Arnold. Fighting erupted on many fronts, and American ports were bombarded by the Royal Navy. From Northern hot spots, the war spread southward. On the dubious testimony of four Royal Governors, recently sent packing by Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, a campaign to preserve the Southern colonies was undertaken. It was argued, hope father to the thought, that the formidable presence of British regulars would discourage the rebels, encourage Loyalists, and swing opportunists to their cause. Presumably, the failed logic of Bunker Hill would succeed in the South, where a Loyalist combination of wealthy planters, merchants, and back country Regulators, along with many avowed neutrals, would prevent a coordinated defense by the rebels. British strategy depended on the planters' fear that a revolution, based on Natural Rights and other egalitarian concepts, would undermine the slave regime, hoping that instinctively conservative and nervous

planters, would consider Parliament less threatening to their way of life than Congress. Not for the last time, the British were in for a surprise.

Although unappreciated at the time, the skirmish at the Moore's Creek, in late February of 1776, became a metaphor for British miscalculation and American ingenuity. The Americans dismantled the flooring of the Moore's Creek Bridge, leaving greased stringers. While struggling across the bridge, the Redcoats panicked, receiving fire. Many drowned, the rest fled, as the Americans replaced the boards of the bridge better to pursue the disconcerted British. Eleven hundred Americans took eight hundred and fifty prisoners of a contingent of two thousand. They captured fifteen thousand pounds in sterling, thirteen wagons, fifteen hundred rifles, three hundred muskets, and General McDonald. The Americans lost one man. Encouraged by victory the Americans gained confidence, not only in their ability to stand the assault of experienced regular troops, but in their *ad hoc* tactics.

The British lost more than materials of war. They found, they could not depend on the support of the conservative elements of the region, including slave holders, who were reluctant to make commitments, when outcomes were uncertain. Unable to provide what cheap victory promised, defeat placed many Loyalists on the sidelines. Ambivalent toward the Revolution, even when it was defined narrowly, as Independence from the Crown, many planters and merchants wanted to continue their way of life free of interference from both Great Britain and Northern radicals.

Understanding their anxieties, Gadsden never confronted slavery, notwithstanding that the Non-importation Agreements had suspended the importation of slaves. Instead, he tried to convince the planters and the merchants that Independence was more favorable to their interests than Parliamentary control of their affairs and that Northerners could

not influence Southern legislatures, least of all, in Carolina. Moreover, despite inflammatory rhetoric, regarding tyrants and slaves, few, North or South, applied the concepts of Natural Rights or Democracy to enslaved Africans. The slave regime would continue unchallenged, an expectation that proved true, until falsified by the bloody Civil War, decades later. Furthermore, few in 1776, contemplated a national Government sufficiently powerful to transform economic realities in accord with national goals, economic or political. All the newly written State constitutions had weak executives and strong legislatures. The Independence Movement assumed a severely limited Federal Government. Only local legislatures would have the capacity to regulate commerce. Thus, in accord with Gadsden's strategy, planters and merchants had only worry about, who won the struggle for Independence, not about their way of life.

IV. During these months of provocation, in the aftermath of Tea Parties, of the Intolerable Acts, of the rhetoric of war hawks, of Parliamentary myopia, of boot strap Congresses, of lawless mobs and finally, armed insurrection, Alexander struggled to survive the curtailing of rice and indigo exports. To help him cope with the disheartening process of disintegrating commercial ties, the world weary planter sought his father's views. One of the casualties of his increasing involvement with Gadsden's activities was Gideon's regular meetings with his son. Missing his company and aware of his reluctance to use military remedies to treat political illnesses, Alexander believed his father would allay his fears of war and was astounded to discover Gideon was collecting arms on behalf of Washington's nascent army.

"We're about to be invaded, Alexander. It's as simple as that. Clinton and the Irish Fleet intend to destroy Charleston. We must defend ourselves."

"Instead of buyers of indigo and rice, the British are now sending an invasion force."

"That's right."

"I hope Gadsden is satisfied."

"No one has been more accurate regarding British intentions, than he."

"It's easy to prophesy the burning of a building, when one puts the torch to it."

"That's not fair. No one man causes political change on this scale. He doesn't control Parliament, the Congress, or the Assembly."

"He controls quite enough, including my father."

"That's ridiculous."

"How else can you explain your treason?"

"What would you have me do? Welcome a punitive military occupation? Let down my friends? Deny my beliefs?"

"What about your family? I'll be bankrupt."

"There are worse things."

"There certainly are. You can be hanged as a traitor and my son killed, before he's twenty."

"Georgie knows nothing of my work. He mustn't know, until he's old..."

"Old enough? When is one old enough to die on a fool's mission? Do you think he needs to know of your actions to risk his life? He's aware of your views and Gadsden's."

"We must protect our honor. Do I need to be so obvious?"

"I came to town to dissolve my concerns in your good sense. It appears I was on a fool's errand." Alexander left Charleston immediately, certain of war and economic catastrophe and fearing the rebellion would divide his family irrevocably or, worse, destroy it.

Although the Charleston Expedition depended upon the rising of Loyalist elements in the Southern colonies, an expectation defeated at

Moore's Creek and other skirmishes in the late winter of 1775 and spring of 1776, the Southern Campaign proceeded, despite General Clinton's misgivings. In these early stages of insurrection, British contempt for Americans was unlimited and impervious to facts, including military defeat. Once the Imperial Lion shook off its lethargy and the squabbling incompetents in Parliament, no conglomeration of irregulars, however cunning and duplicitous, could fend him off. So the generals believed.

General Clinton proposed to Commodore Parker, when his fleet finally arrived on May 31, a revision of the original strategy. In lieu of pacifying the entire South, they would create pockets of British strength in the Chesapeake. These bases would be havens for Loyalists and outposts for punitive operations against the rebels. A modest plan, one far more likely of success than the prior overly ambitious campaign made still more unrealistic, by costly defeats.

"General Clinton, I concede your doubts. But we didn't come this great distance to establish raiding outposts. We intend to participate in a campaign worthy of our journey."

"Yes, my dear Commodore, but you must..."

"If you'll pardon me, General, I accept the fact that it's too late to pursue our original plan. It's not too late, however, to inflict a grievous blow on the rebels and return to help Lord Howe."

"What do you propose?" inquired the General, who supported his skepticism with knowledge of American resourcefulness.

"To attack Charleston or, more precisely, Fort Sullivan. If we occupy that half completed redoubt, we'll control the city." The Commodore smiled as he recounted the Americans' efforts to build a fort with palmetto trees and sand. "Built properly, the fort would dominate the harbor."

Intrigued, the General responded, "It's almost the plan, I envisaged for the Chesapeake."

"Quite so," the Commodore replied, resisting the impulse to point out how much less diffuse his plan was than the General's, "and with a far greater prize."

Meanwhile, Colonel Moultrie continued his efforts to make Fort Sullivan defensible, which was still unprotected to the north and west, when the fleet arrived. General Charles Lee, the new Commander of Southern forces, tried to convince him to abandon his preparations, calling the fort, a "slaughter pen." It could be bombarded from the south and afforded no line of retreat. Only a successful appeal to the President of the General Assembly, John Rutledge, allowed the redoubtable colonel to continue reinforcing the fort. So matters stood on June 1st. Bad weather granted the Americans six more days of labor and gave General Clinton the opportunity to make a major mistake. He decided to land his soldiers on undefended Long Island, immediately north of the fort across a narrow slip of water. From there, Clinton could support Parker's impending attack from the opposite direction and keep his preparations from being molested by the Americans. Meanwhile, Colonel Moultrie, who continued working, completed the northern line of defenses, in an effort to counter the all too obvious strategy of General Clinton.

It was not until the June 28th at 11:00am that Parker's attack commenced. Clinton's didn't, the seemingly simple task of fording the breach proving impossible. Pockmarked with seven feet deep holes and laced with shoals, his troops could not traverse the water on foot or by boat. Mortified, General Clinton informed Commodore Parker of his inability to support his attack. Parker believed he would prevail anyway. To everyone's surprise the much maligned palmetto trees proved impervious to cannon fire. Parker then detached three ships to the west to bombard the fort from its unprotected side. To his dismay, they ran aground. After hours of arduous labor, only two extricated themselves while the Americans were directing punishing fire on the

ships south of the fort, particularly on Parker's flagship, the Bristol. By 11:00 that night, Parker broke off the engagement, his ships, except the grounded Actaeon, made for the open sea.

General Clinton left three weeks later to join Howe for the New York campaign. Britain had suffered another ignominious defeat. Not for the last time an arrogant invader would fall victim to faulty intelligence and insufficient planning. Not for the last time would an invader, freshly victorious against more worthy foes, find an ill-equipped and irregularly trained lesser enemy difficult to subdue. By their capacity to transform a punitive expedition into a protracted conflict, the Americans created a morass that would exhaust the will of the aggressors. In the process, they would add an important chapter to the history of resistance to imperial aggression.

Still, it was not too late for reconciliation, the way of the maze out requiring only that Parliament pick up the Ariadne's thread of its own tradition of representative Government and the Rights of the governed. No Parliamentary majority could be won for this purpose, though many isolated speeches urging reconciliation were made in Parliament. While there would be difficult times ahead for Americans, as with increasing frequency and deepening pride, they called themselves, these early victories gave them the fortitude and the confidence to persist in the adventure in Freedom, so well begun.

Winning the war of words as well, Patrick Henry's rhetoric soared into Virginia's sky: "Is life so dear, is peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery."

Needless to say, Henry was not referring to chattel slavery. Newer voices sounded throughout the streets of the Northeast, offering "nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense.... Everything that is reasonable pleads for separation. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of Nature cries, Tis time to part." So wrote Thomas Paine. Later 1776, he wrote: "These are the times that

try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now deserves the thanks of man and woman."

Despite mounting death and destruction, no formal state of hostility existed. This momentous step, which would lay the rebels on the block of treason should their cause be lost, would be taken, but not until duly considered by the Congress in Philadelphia. In a statement remarkably unchanged by the disputatious representatives, Thomas Jefferson wrote his way into posterity, as Gideon had to admit.

"For all his shallowness as a thinker, he can certainly write. I understand the Congress accepted his draft nearly whole. To their credit. No committee could have achieved the *Declaration's* rhetorical power and coherence." Gideon read the text in the *Gazette,* the day after Christopher Gadsden returned with it from Philadelphia. It listed American grievances, codified reasons for the insurrection, elevating it from an armed squabble over commercial preferment to a revolution, supplying the embryonic nation with a *raison d'etre*, a foundation that transcended claims for fair treatment. No British financial consideration could purchase American honor. The *Declaration* allayed Gideon's fears about the purpose of the insurrection, if not his anxiety for Gideon George.

V. It was now clear that there was no way to accommodate the unruly American child, who so firmly believed in his manhood, except as an equal in the community of nations. The lines of battle were now drawn to defend the principle of the rightful and inevitable autonomy of the American people. The chance of arms might compel them to submit to tyranny; it could never make them English. For decades Americans had claimed British Rights at every opportunity. Now these once precious Rights were scorned as vestiges of a degrading oppression, the residue of another nation's history, perhaps the best to which decadent Europe could aspire. Now, however, they were

hopelessly inadequate for this brave New Land and its People. *Homo faber Americanus* would build a good free society or perish in the effort. For the first time in man's dismal political history, Americans would create a nation by direct application of advanced learning in the service of "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness." The New Land would transcend history, the most obdurate obstacle to the rule of Right Reason, giving it its long sought home. Thus, the conversation unfolded, Gideon and Gideon George cheerfully elaborating the possibilities of Independence, while Sarah, Elise, and Alexander listened quietly.

Sarah finally asked, "What about slaves? Do they count among the good, free makers of the new order? Are they *Homo faber Americanus*?"

"Yes. According to Gadsden, Jefferson included a condemnation of slavery, calling it another of the King's impositions on the colonies. It was excised to gain unanimity, however, the majority view was plain. Slavery is incompatible with the Rights of Man, no mere editorial decision or political expedient can make it otherwise," Gideon replied.

"The omission is more significant than that, all the more so, given the general acceptance of the document otherwise," Alexander said, sourly.

"I believe it was eliminated, because of its insignificance. Compared to the work at hand, the listing of so obvious an injustice as slavery was not worth the loss of one vote. If the *Declaration* has captured the purpose of the New Nation, and I think it has, when America achieves its destiny as the world's most free nation, slavery will fall of its own weight."

"Crushing some of us in the bargain, no doubt," Alexander rejoined, unconvinced. The ambiguous referent "us" confused Gideon. Was his son speaking as a man with a black mother or as a slave

owner? "Speaking as a planter," Alexander added matter of factly, "I'm already suffering the loss of the indigo market. Almost all my new acreage is worthless."

"Why don't you ask McClintock to take it back?" Gideon snapped, annoyed with Alexander's reduction of political ideals to commerce.

"Political principles, particularly high toned ones, will not survive an economic collapse," his son retorted, blandly.

Sarah interceded, saying, "You realize that slavery is more than a way of growing rice, Gideon. It's far more than the basis of the economy. We are a slave culture. It makes us different from the North. That's what Alexander means."

"The difference between how people earn their bread is not so easily dismissed," Alexander said, evading his mother's attempt to reconcile the dispute. "It cannot be subordinated to politics or culture, except by fools or liars."

"No one tried to do that, Alexander," Elise said, concerned by his acerbic words.

"Everyone knows the importance of commerce, son. But these are politically intense times."

"Where's the dispute?" Sarah queried. "Your father assumes that political principles have to be based on culture and that an important part of culture is commerce."

"I've said only that slavery is inconsistent with the principles of the *Declaration*, therefore, slavery will have to be abolished, if we're to live up to our promise," Gideon responded.

"That's exactly what I took you to say. See here, Father, slavery may well be inconsistent with the *Declaration*, although not saying so explicitly leads me to doubt, whether blacks are considered Americans. Inconsistency aside, what makes you think political ideals are stronger than our economic realities and, therefore, the culture of slavery?"

"They don't have to be stronger. The principles of the *Declaration* are our culture. They're not a set of visionary propositions. Where do you think Americans came from? From the land, from this New Land. We ceased to be English, the moment the land began to shape us. Land is more primal than the economy, although they are intricately and inextricably related. The New Land made us Americans. It transformed those who came to these shores into Americans. Those who were not, those the New Land failed to transform, have gone away or will do so. The *Declaration* did not create America out of nothing or derive it from Eternal Truths. America was a nation before its people realized it. Its people were Americans, before they used the name. This is what the *Declaration* proclaims, and why it met with so little opposition. The truth of our culture pre-existed its proclamation. For the struggle for Independence to succeed, it will need an explicit national identity and a Government dedicated to Liberty and Equality."

"The Eternal Truths," Gideon George interjected.

"To be sure. What makes truths eternal is their permanence, in the face of historical change. They cannot create a culture, any more than they can create a People or the land they live on. They do, however, shape that culture, that People and that land. Every national history reflects this process. What makes us unique is that we're creating ourselves and that we are making Government the servant of the governed, not the other way round."

As Gideon spoke, Gideon George and Elise looked on approvingly, while Sarah and Alexander remained skeptical. Sarah asked, "Does 'the governed' include slaves or only citizens?"

"It includes everyone. Slavery is unnatural and unjust. It contradicts Reason and Natural Rights. The power of the *Declaration* resides in its identification of Reason and Nature, not in its felicitous prose. This identity does not depend on its articulation; once

expressed, however, it lends to it the irresistible force of history. Reason and History, leaving behind the unjust habits of centuries, draw from the People their true values. Injustice can never be part of a culture, only an infirmity. Although slavery is a powerful habit and an important part of our current way of life, our destiny is Freedom and Justice, for all. Slavery has been an imposition, if not of the King, of an increasingly irrelevant past."

"I see no end of impositions, past, present and future. How else can one enforce the distinction between true desires and unjust habits? Those, who persist in their habits, will be dealt with and, if the past is any indication, dealt with harshly," Alexander countered, concluding, "So much for Liberty."

"No human society exists without conflict. Mistakes will inevitably occur, injustices continue, but, in no sense, are they necessarily tyrannical. As a doctor enlists the patient's good health to assist a cure, the State, based on just principles and fair procedures, enlists its society's ideals to defeat its injustices. If the patient resists treatment, the medicine will be administered anyway, at least, when the disease endangers others. All States are coercive. That, by itself, does not make them unjust," Gideon replied.

"All tend toward despotism, endangering Liberty. The power to alter a deeply ingrained habit is the power to tyrannize," Alexander responded.

"Not so long as Natural Rights are given their due," Gideon George said.

"I think that may be overly optimistic, Georgie," Sarah said. "Your father may be right. For example, slavery might become identified with blackness, the evil with its victims. If so, radical amputation will be necessary. No medicinal cure will be adequate, if I may continue with your grandfather's figure."

"I was thinking of property Rights, Mother. What do you mean?"

"Only this, Alexander. If Americans win, and they try to impose the principles of Freedom and Equality, as your father believes, newly freed blacks may not be free in any meaningful sense."

"You're being too subtle, Sarah," her husband said.

"Not at all. A freed slave is free, as a result of his Master's reconsideration of his status, whatever the reasons for it. He'll be torn from his shackles, as his ancestors were torn from Africa. He'll be lost, an unwilling immigrant, in an unwanted land. What's worse, he'll be surrounded by his opposites, willing immigrants in the New Land. To add to his troubles, he will see himself, as his former Masters see him, a freed, not a free, man. In spite of all this, you expect him to be an eager contributor to an adventure in Freedom. I don't think that's realistic."

"Nor do I, Mother, and that leaves aside all the economic disruption that emancipation implies.

Unwittingly in the phalanx of the coming century, Alexander represented the ideal of the financially autonomous and libertarian freeholder, upon which the culture of the New Nation would be built. For men like him, the economic primacy of society was undeniable and salutary. Only productive men, those who create prosperity, can be free. Only they could keep the coercion entailed in Government, no matter how constituted, limited. These men would rely on Government to maintain law and order and to protect property Rights. Holding Government accountable to these principles, both Liberty and Prosperity would be secured.

More politically minded men, like Gadsden and Gideon, disagreed. They feared that the civic ideals of the Founding of the American Republic would dissolve in the corroding acid of faction and greed, as unprecedented opportunities for speculative wealth were exploited, establishing money, not Justice or Freedom, as the idol of the New Land.

Gideon did not represent, however, the New Man asking the impossible of the Old before consigning him to the mulch heap. In his vision, the weak would be able to rely on the State to enforce their Rights and to temper the ambitions of the strong. Good free men would build a good free society. With republican Government reflecting the best instincts of the People, and their leaders employing the wisdom and values of the Enlightenment, the ideals of Equality and Justice would be fulfilled.

Gideon's enemies were those, who would exploit economic opportunity to the detriment of his fellows. Alexander's enemy was the man, who exploited the power of the State to pillage men of property to redress economic inequalities. Thus, were the adversaries set for the political struggles of the New Nation, once it settled down to the work of fulfilling its destiny, with most of the prizes going to Alexander.

Gideon believed slavery would gradually disappear, because there could be no economic justification sufficient to deny the values of Equality and Freedom. Nor would the slaves be kept in bondage, because they were ignorant and weak, for the New Nation would prepare them for citizenship. Alexander's obligation toward the weak or, as he preferred to phrase it, the less productive, differed. They were properly subordinate to the leaders of the economy, slavery but a legal, if odious, recognition of the more important and ineradicable fact of inequality. Slaves would be properly cared for, within the limits of financial capacity and economic prudence. Under no circumstances, however, should ordinary workers, slave or free, much less the unproductive, be allowed to band together to misuse State power, in misbegotten efforts to redress natural and beneficial inequalities. If one desired to establish a new nation on principles of Natural Rights, one could do no better than to apply the natural inequalities of men, as expressed in the economy, to the political arena. The State would then

guarantee the efficiency and the effectiveness of commerce and with its subsequent prosperity, be able to abate the suffering of the deserving poor.

Sarah believed these competing visions confused the purpose of existence with its conditions. Neither the regime, nor the economy, under which people labored, was ultimately significant. One could be a Christian in the bowels of Hell or a sinner in paradise. If one met life with equanimity, charity, compassion and love, one would be content and happy in this world, and saved in the next. The rest was insignificant and ephemeral.

Although these conceptions formed the background to the discussion of the moment, they were not taken up in detail. Instead, Alexander began a new tack. No longer wishing to defend his economically oriented misgivings about his father's vision of the New Nation, he attacked the sincerity of his father's belief in Democracy and its cardinal principle, Equality.

"It's the same old story—too many people too willing to tell others what to do and how to do it. Democracy is nothing but the not rule of the ordinary by the ordinary. Democracy necessarily offends the superior person, who identifies the commonplace with the vulgar. Every word associated with majorities carries the stigma of mediocrity. If you are seriously in favor of Democracy, you must eliminate the superior," Alexander said.

"If you mean by superior, the privileged, the hereditary aristocracy, we all agree," said Gideon, certain that Alexander had no such restriction in mind. "Otherwise..."

"Otherwise," Alexander interrupted, finishing his father's thought bluntly, "otherwise people like mother and you would have no place in democratic society. This is precisely my point, and why I believe Democracy foolish, except perhaps in form or to deal with matters less important than the economy. Democracy and genius are mortal

enemies. Genius must be shunted to the arts or other impractical forms of expression and the ungifted privileged shunted to the world of manners and fashion or other forms of trivial amusement for Democracy to work."

"No one believes more in Equality than your mother and me. How can you make us the enemies of Democracy?"

"I don't. Democracy does. What you believe doesn't matter, any more than what I believe. Your existence overwhelms ordinary people, making your belief in them, a belief they cannot share, necessarily patronizing. If I wanted to begin a Democracy—and I cannot think of a less profitable endeavor—the first thing I would do is ostracize the superior.

"But who would lead? In what direction?" Gideon asked, amazed at his son's outpouring.

"The People. Some ordinary man, so like his fellows, as to be indistinguishable from them, will lead. Isn't that what Democracy means? Lead in any direction that achieves a majority. What else matters, as long as the People decide? Hasn't this been Gadsden's main idea, the Sovereignty of the People, expressed by majorities, issue by issue?"

"Yes, but, of course, other things matter. Surely one direction may be better than another. Even paragons of equality make mistakes," Gideon responded, weakly.

"To be sure. Democracy amounts to the cumulative mistakes of the ordinary. No matter how many or how serious, the mistakes of Democracy are, by definition, preferable to the wisdom of any other form of government."

"That's an unfair comparison, Alexander," Sarah said.

"Preferable to the correct decisions made by others, if you insist," he modified, having anticipated the objection.

"How can worse be better?" Gideon asked.

"When better is worse," Alexander parried, taking his father off stride.

"Meaning?"

"Only that Democracy is the Government of how decisions are made, not the Government of wise and good decisions."

"If you ran your plantations with so cavalier an attitude toward results, we'd all be in a pretty mess," replied his father.

"My point precisely. My management doesn't pretend to Democracy. My crops don't vote or think."

"What about the slaves?" Gideon George inquired. "They think, don't they?"

"Slaves are properly outside any political or decisional arena. Their thinking is irrelevant. Non-slave workers think, but their relevance is limited to the political realm, a realm properly distinct from matters of practical significance. Free workers express themselves, by their choice of employer and by their willingness to follow the logic of the task. Everything else is properly limited to talk."

"What a regime you envision, Alexander! It would be perfectly dreary: economic autonomy, politically ineffective, and socially trivial."

"A social order doesn't exist to entertain. Rome danced its way into the arms of the vandals."

"The Fall of Rome was a good deal more complex than too many circuses."

"We needn't get into it, Father. My point is that a sincere democrat must be satisfied with self-rule. High culture, if it be permitted to exist, must be kept at arm's length."

"Why must Democracy fear culture?" Sarah asked.

"Because the People don't give a damn about excellence or virtue. Their Government will reflect their indifference, if not their antipathy,

to it," Alexander replied calmly, as he began to appreciate the strength of his position. "They care only about survival and vulgar pastimes."

"All of us need ideals?"

"You need ideals, perhaps more than food, Mother. Most of the rest of us get by with instincts."

"Depending on what you mean by instincts, Alexander," Gideon qualified.

"The instincts of man: hard work, a woman, friends, children, and the fear of no one."

"We all value the family. I don't think it should be called an instinct," Sarah countered.

"Call it what you will. The People are easily satisfied. What's more they resent high culture and those who contribute to it."

"Is everyone to be the same? Is that what you prefer?" Sarah asked, dejectedly.

"I advocate nothing. I merely describe. Very few appreciate excellence. Therefore, no Democracy should allow the superior much space. This vapid, pathetic preservation of the ordinary, you rightly call 'mean' or 'vulgar.' Democracy, the rule of the mediocre, intentionally denies life its depth and savor, as the superior understand it. Can you imagine, living without books, poetry, theater, conversation?" Alexander smiled, accepting their silent assents.

"I don't see why civilized activities are incompatible with necessary ones?" Sarah asked. "They're not, except in a Democracy. The reason is plain. High culture is inherently aristocratic."

"There's truth to what you say, Alexander, but it's overstated. You pose a false dilemma: rule by the ordinary exclusively or rule by the superior. This can only occur in a Democracy, if the superior corrupt the democratic process, or if demagogues turn the People into a mob. There are many middle courses, multiplied by a population that

reflects all aspects of the human species and that gives each its due," Gideon said.

"Each its due. There's the rub. The superior by definition are due more and their ability ensures they get it. The ordinary get the residue and, what's worse, are expected to be grateful. Gratitude is more deadly to the compatibility of the gifted and democrats than inequitable distribution of wealth or suffering. The Sovereignty of the People implies the elimination of the superior, excising the need for gratitude."

"Leaving gratitude aside, surely an accommodation between those fitted to rule and those fitted to follow, so long as the leaders act in the Public Interest."

"I doubt it, Father. The People do not want the government to work for the benefit of all. They want it to serve their interests. Democracy exists to reduce the advantages of the superior, not to express republican virtues. Even if disinterested leadership could exist, and I doubt it, it would be not be perceived as such by the ordinary, even if they benefitted from it. Recall your argument regarding the rule of local fools. Democracy incarnates the rule of local fools. And the sign of the foolish is their resentment of superiors, including the superiors' willingness to rule disinterestedly in the Public Interest. What could separate the superior from the ordinary more than the unchecked appetites of the ordinary and the restraint of the superior?

Democracy does not mean that good free men will build a good free society. It means that the vulgar will make a society that expresses their vulgarity and one that will defeat efforts to have them restrained by disinterested Reason. There are too many differences between ordinary people and people like you and mother for mutual understanding. These differences of temperament, principles, manners, taste, outlooks, intelligence, and interests imply an intolerable instability, because the superior provide a too ready

alternative to Democracy. The People will elect men like themselves, despising their choice. More probably, they would hedge their bets, never giving themselves the chance to rule, to take complete control of their affairs. They would be looking over their shoulders to their betters. On the heels of the People's half measures would follow well deserved failures. The stupid, self-destructive inconsistencies of the Greek city-states would recur. Consider Athens. Never has there been a city cursed by so much genius, and never so completely, as in its democratic phase. No wonder it was doomed."

"Look at its achievements."

"Responses like that strengthen my position. Not one ordinary Athenian—there must have been a few—would have traded one week's food for all the glories of posterity."

"Or for Socrates," Gideon George interjected.

"So much the worse for them," Gideon responded.

"So much the worse for Democracy, isn't this the point? How can you profess your love of it without accepting its consequences?"

"I don't accept your mechanical definition of Democracy. A democrat works for democratic values and purposes as well as democratic means of reaching decisions."

"Only means matter, not results. Moreover, an obviously superior person cannot be a democrat, no matter what he professes, no matter his sincerity, no matter his actions," Alexander said, more interested in his mother's reaction than his father's.

"That's ridiculous!"

"Is it, Father?" Alexander replied, undaunted. "All you have to do is imagine yourself in the presence of someone as superior to you, as you are to your dullest field hand. Then examine your feelings toward your superior's protestations of equality."

"I would be grateful for his help. I would welcome his greater knowledge, skill, experience and wisdom."

"No doubt. Of course, you would be among those who are sincerely grateful. What about those who resent superiority and the gratitude it implies?" Leaving that aside, consider the effects on your own abilities. Wouldn't they atrophy? All your energy and talent would be applied toward getting an audience with the great man. What kind of Democracy is that?"

Sarah and Gideon glanced at one another uncomfortably. Gideon George was astonished at the fervor and power of his father's views. "Are you saying, Father, the very existence of superior people kills Democracy?"

"I think so, Georgie."

"Only if they allow themselves to be drawn into politics," Sarah modified, hoping the discussion was over, but found it directed at her.

"No, Mother, there's no escape. You're as deadly to Democracy as father, perhaps more so."

"Alexander!"

"It's all right, Gideon. I'm fascinated."

"I don't mean to offend you, Mother. Why don't we change the subject?"

"I prefer to understand you. I agree with much that you have said. Your last point confuses me, however."

"It's simple enough," Alexander said. "Where father subverts Democracy by his brilliant participation, you subvert it by Christian forbearance. Father expects too much of people, because he expects too much of Reason. For him Democracy will always have the wisdom to choose the best people to rule, because the People will be sufficiently reasonable to transcend their appetites and short sighted interests. Your willingness to forgive and to accept them as they are asks too little of them. They remain perpetual, greedy children."

"It's wrong to ask people to do what's beyond them."

"You don't even expect an ordinary man to be loyal or obedient, the virtues of a dog."

"It's folly to expect anything from strangers."

"Yet, you are prepared to forgive them?"

"Of course."

"Don't you see that forgiveness is insulting? It implies a standard the poor miscreant can't reach or even understand. Your forgiveness keeps you as detached from him, the ordinary wretch, as father's manifest virtue, and in a more profound and debilitating way."

"That's not a flattering portrait or an accurate picture of Christianity. A Christian is not indifferent to the world and its suffering. I try to be compassionate."

"Your success is the trouble. It drains the energy of the common man."

"I do not understand that, Alexander. I truly don't."

"By being a good person, the incarnation of Christian virtue, you make the rest of us, the ordinary, the commonplace, the selfish, the weak, the vulgar, and the greedy, feel inadequate. When we compare our limitations with the timeless, universal virtues of Christianity, we're diminished. We become too insignificant to act. Instead of seeking the audience of the great man, we seek the forgiveness of God or His saints. Democracy cannot exist in either a cathedral or a monastery. It cannot be built on humility. It requires confidence. In the presence of greatness or Christian compassion, the confidence of ordinary people is impossible. It thrives by finding its own image, homely to be sure, attractive enough, virtuous enough, to reproduce itself. At a minimum, Democracy must value its own acts and actors. Where father destroys the People's belief in their competence, you destroy their belief in their ordinary decency. Superiority, even if it foreswears its prerogatives, even, perhaps especially, if it rules in the Public Interest, is fatal to Democracy. No one could be more virtuous

than you and father and no one more despised by the ordinary. They would prefer you to be corrupt like them. That's why there's no room for you in a Democracy."

"We should pack our trunks," Gideon said, only half facetiously, "should the Revolution succeed."

"I wouldn't be precipitous, Father. The Revolution is a long way from success and still longer from becoming democratic."

"But the *Declaration*..."

"A bill of particulars against an oafish King, nothing more, shorn of rhetoric."

"Words matter. They shape action as well as justify it."

"I don't have to be reminded of that. Words declared me white. Even if the *Declaration* amounts to a democratic document, its progenitors doom the child. That's the burden of my argument all along. What ordinary man writes like that?"

"Assuming that literacy is aristocratic," Gideon countered.

"Assuming, only, that it is perceived as such, as you have shown by praising Jefferson despite your disdain of him."

The discussion turned to domestic matters and soon ended.

V. "I'm not the man I used to be, Sarah," Gideon said, as he climbed into bed. "My mind is not so quick, nor so supple."

"You're less glib, that's all."

"Perhaps? I still believe the rest of you were overly pessimistic. Even Georgie seemed down."

"He was giving his father a chance."

"He seemed preoccupied. I remain convinced that not even Jefferson can reconcile the contradiction between slavery and the *Declaration*. At the very least, if the *Declaration* means what it says, the New Nation will provide a tutelage period for slaves and a transition period for their masters. What else can 'all men are created equal' mean? What else can 'endowed by their Creator with

unalienable rights,' mean? The slaves will be taught the responsibilities of citizenship, while their Masters are provided the time to adjust to a free labor market. Jefferson sensed the direction of the wind. The values of the *Declaration* will become the values of the New Nation, because they are already the values of the New Land."

"Are you so certain of an American victory?"

"Supposing Britain puts down the rebellion, she couldn't reassert her hegemony. Not so easily cabined, Independence can be chained, but not confined. Too many Englishmen believe in it to be worth the expense of suppressing it, not indefinitely, either politically or economically."

"For themselves."

"And for other Englishmen like us."

"Like you."

Like you, too. Being English is an ideal, an outlook, an acceptance and participation in a culture. This may be the most important lesson America will teach the Britain. Anyone can become an 'Englishman' in America!"

"You mean an 'American.'"

"What an idea! Perhaps, we're as special as Gadsden thinks?"

"How's that?"

"We are, or soon will be, a nation of the middle sort, a nation without extremes that takes its spirit and direction from those who create her prosperity. No nobility, no peasants and certainly no slavery."

"Slavery creates prosperity."

"But it's not necessary to it. It's only a bad habit. How long can a region retain a practice in defiance of its very reason for existence? America is dedicated to the Rights of Man. Slavery is not only barbaric but anachronistic."

"If the South doesn't see it that way?"

"If we become one nation, all sections will have to agree on such basic issues. Besides, it's only a question of finance. All that's required is a formula to compensate slave owners for their loss of property. If there's one thing a nation of businessmen can do, it can bargain. No one has an emotional stake in slavery. It's a question of money. Provide the planters with a reasonable alternative, they'll have to take it. The New Nation will not be able to survive so great a division in its moral or economic basis."

"What about its political basis?"

"No fundamental dispute with the values of the *Declaration* can be tolerated. A nation, so divided, is no nation, at all, but a collection of allies. That's what Britain tried to foster among us, when she perceived the danger of American unity. Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill, Moore's Creek, and Fort Sullivan have expressed in blood what Jefferson wrote in the *Declaration*. We are already a nation, whether Britain chooses to acknowledge us or not. As a nation of the middle, we are already more united in attitude and value than any other nation in the history of the world. We shall continue to escape the old sources of injustice and strife. Slavery is an accident of history; the American Nation will set it right. It will do so out of a due regard for our place as the teachers of the world, the carriers of enlightened thought and the progenitors of the Rule of Reason and the Rights of Man."

"High expectations for a nation of shopkeepers."

"Not for shopkeepers, who have the will and skill to rule themselves and the courage to defy the world's greatest military power. Even an accountant can be elevated by the ideas of self-sacrifice and self-rule."

"Even lawyers?"

"More difficult, but not impossible."

"I still see an important flaw in this vision. The reign of money or close accounts is more likely than the reign of Reason and Rights."

"Our old disagreement. You always underestimate man."

"You're too optimistic."

"I don't believe man will invariably be reasonable. Many will try to take unfair advantage of a situation, but no People can endure fundamental contradictions in public values. Thoughtful and practical men will resolve all such contradictions by Reason, issue by issue. Only an autocrat can enforce unity, in defiance of Logic and Reason. Only a foolish king, like George, would try it."

"And Todd? What about slaves who can't be freed, not freed and educated? His mind was as good as anyone's. He bent Reason to his will. He attracted followers. He had every advantage and overcame his slavery. And, then, he became an outlaw. One either had to kill him or be killed by him."

"I'm surprised by your severity, Sarah. Todd never hurt anyone he cared for or respected. In an impossible position, he did what he had to do. I respected him for that."

"Precisely. All those that resent their servitude are in an impossible position: the more gifted, the more impossible, and the more resentment. Nor can they accept their freedom, if it's given to them, as gratuitously as their bondage."

"Are you saying, there's no way out of slavery, no way to abolish it?"

"Only slaves can abolish slavery. Only, if they seize freedom will they be free, rather than freed."

"That may have been true of Todd, but you admit, he was exceptional."

"His courage and mind were superior. His circumstances, except for their ease, were ordinary. A man resents his slavery, if he retains any human dignity, if he doesn't become a slave by circumstance. Your version of Aristotle, if I'm not mistaken."

"Yes, but Todd didn't learn the limits of violence. He was stubborn."

"Like you, and with good reason," Sarah said, smiling.

Wrapped in thought Gideon failed to note her remark or its mischievous expression and continued, "The *Declaration* can accommodate men like Todd. It incarnates Rights, putting them beyond politics and even Reason. 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness'—Todd would have supported those ideals, unequivocally."

"But, could he have forgiven those who had enslaved him, in defiance of those Truths? Could he have done so, on the basis of a philosophy that considers only timeless and universal Rights? How could he forget, what happened to his wife? Could you? That's the question you keep avoiding."

"He wouldn't have to forgive anyone, just let them be."

"How could he?"

"He revenged himself."

"He satisfied his sense of honor, but not his sense of justice."

"Honor being individual and justice, political?"

"I see you remember your own lessons, even when it's inconvenient, Gideon. I've always admired your integrity."

"If you'll roll over, I show you something else you've long admired."

"After all these years? You are a dull fellow," Sarah clucked, as she placed her bare body along his. "The only way you admit defeat is to make love to me."

"I admit nothing. Todd's ancient history. Georgie is more significant to us and to the future."

At this moment, Sarah ached to inform him of Gideon George's rejection by the Carolina militia. Instead, she picked up a thread ignored by him earlier.

"Haven't you ever been curious about your similarity to Todd?"

"He was my pupil."

"I mean of temperament and looks."

"What?" Gideon sat up in bed.

"Todd may have had a white father."

"I was in England, when he was conceived."

"Do you suppose, you are the only white man to have slept with a black girl?"

"Of course not."

"They say your father was enamored of a housemaid. One day, she disappeared. Later, a foundling, who resembled the master, appeared."

"The old dog. What happened to the mother?"

"Story has it, she was living in the North somewhere, and had not been heard of, before or since."

"Did he see her again?"

"There were occasional trips."

"I'll bet he freed her and wanted to raise the boy himself," Gideon said, as he slid next to his wife. "And he died before he could really begin."

"Perhaps?"

"It proves my point in any case. Todd was my brother," Gideon said conclusively, putting his arm on her thigh.

"It does?" Sarah asked lost in his *non sequitur*.

It would not occur to Gideon until the next day that Jessie was Georgie's cousin, the most important reason for Sarah's objection to their union.

VI. On Alexander's plantation another conversation pushed into the night. "I suppose your mind is fixed? Will you, at least, tell me your plans?"

"I'm going to Boston."

"Why Boston?"

"Grandfather knows John Hancock through the warehouse business. I'm sure, he'll have use for me."

"Your grandfather hasn't approved?"

"No, I haven't told him. Please don't, until I've gone. Presented with a *fait accomplis,* he'll write to Hancock."

"Your mother and I think your duty lies here, not fighting in Boston."

"We need the Revolution."

"We? The changes we need are much more likely to come from Parliament than from our neighbors. Isn't this the lesson of your experience with the militia?"

"No, not to me. The lesson is the British cannot rule America, we must therefore rule ourselves."

"Throwing out the source of moderation will strengthen those who despise us. They've admitted as much and proven it to you."

"The Carolina militia doesn't represent America. *The Declaration of Independence* does. To make its values prevail here and elsewhere, we must not let slave owners win the Revolution, not without our help."

"What makes you think a handful of black soldiers will make a difference? What makes you think, you'll be taken as black?"

"The same reasons that kept me out of the militia. I'm taken for black here and have never made a secret of grandmother. Black soldiers, whatever their hue, must fight for the chance to influence the New Nation. Our numbers are less significant than our willing participation."

"Your grandfather, again. He had no idea his words would send you on a fool's mission to die in Boston."

"His thoughts have more validity, for not being tailored to his preferences. I intend to act on them."

"Causing us great anxiety in the bargain. And don't give me one of his platitudes, for all occasions."

Gideon George continued packing, secure in his convictions, the rightness of his cause, and the support of his family. "There is nothing more to say, Father."

"If I may be mundane, which seems to be my only contribution to this family, how will you get to Boston? Float on one of your grandfather's theories?" Alexander inquired, not without admiration for his son's decisiveness and ideals.

"I'll ride to Charleston and catch a ship."

"Do you have any money?"

"A little."

"Somewhere in this so-called Revolution I hope, there's someone who appreciates the value of money." About to reply, Gideon George was silenced by his father. "Please, please spare me another lecture. I already feel like a Philistine." Alexander paused, then said, "I would like to retain the belief, admittedly practical, that my willingness to provide money might be considered a contribution." Dropping his irony, he added, "Take what's in the house. I'll establish a line of credit for you in Boston."

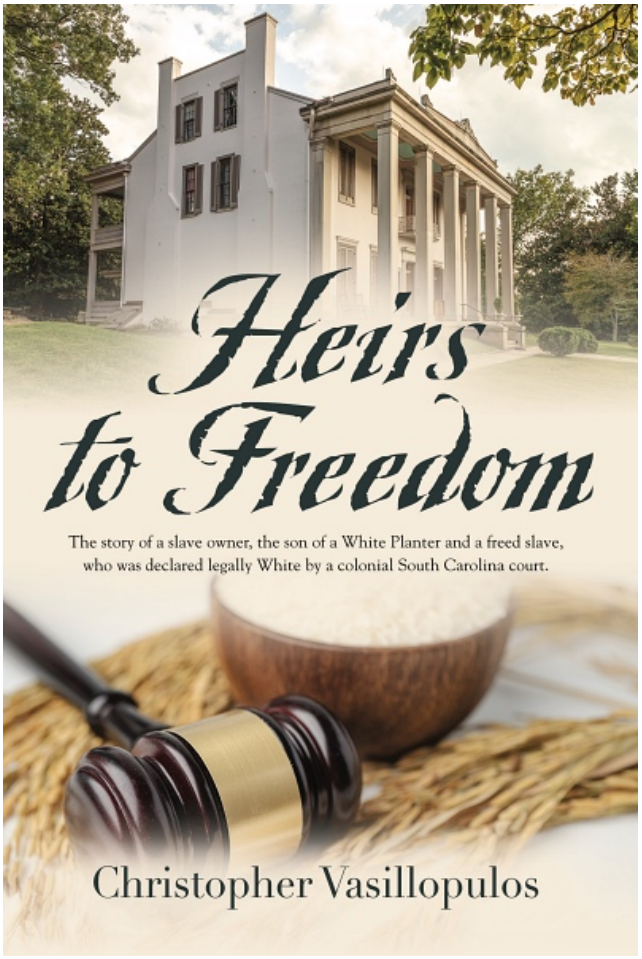
"I won't need much," Gideon George said, with the disregard for practicality that so exasperated his father and made him so resemble his grandfather.

"For God's sake, let me figure that out. You need to be outfitted, fed, clothed, for who knows how long. You won't earn a shilling, and you'll give away the rest. You'll need lots of money. You are your grandfather's blood."

"Thank you, Father. You have always been generous and not only with money."

"The only thing that worries me more than your grandfather's criticism is his praise, whether from you or him," Alexander replied,

equally gratified to find himself son and father to two men he respected as much, as he could not emulate. And grateful, too, for the power to love without reservation, a gift of his mother and his wife. He was a happy man. Father and son embraced. At dawn, Gideon George Gibson rode to Charleston and that day sailed to Boston to seek his happiness.



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