Huck Finn’s Civil War

by

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Chapter the Last

OUT OF BONDAGE.

The first time I catched Tom, private, I asked him what was his idea, time of the evasion ?—what it was he'd planned to do if the evasion worked all right and he managed to set a nigger free that was already free before ? And he said, what he had planned in his head, from the start, if we got Jim out all safe, was for us to run him down the river, on the raft, and have adventures plumb to the mouth of the river, and then tell him about his being free, and take him back up home on a steamboat, in style, and pay him for his lost time, and write word ahead and get out all the niggers around, and have them waltz him into town with a torchlight procession and a brass band, and then he would be a hero, and so would we. But I reckened it was about as well the way it was.

We had Jim out of the chains in no time, and when Aunt Polly and Uncle Silas and Aunt Sally found out how good he helped the doctor nurse Tom, they made a heap of fuss over him, and fixed him up prime, and give him all he wanted to eat, and a good time, and nothing to do. And we had him up to the

Notice

It is the worst ending of a major work in American writing.

Explanatory

HFCW extricates the trio from the wreckage of Chapter the Last and brings them forward into eminently supposable futures.

Part One: Huck Finn, Border Ruffian

Don't call me Huckleberry.

I reject that name.

I'm not a funny yokel.

One day in 1861, I put it aside and took a new name.

Before that, I rode with Captain Billy in Kansas against the Red Legs and the Jayhawkers. Mostly we faced resolute Dutch farmers, steadfast Free-Soil townspeople, pitchfork and shotgun militias, no match for the crash of our cavalry, so we burned their barns and churches, confiscated their property, and got away.

Escaping, that is the big thing. Second escape, I almost got killed, my horse shot, I am dismounted, feet strangely on the ground, I am frozen by the surprise of it, set upon by angry old farmers with rakes and hoes, just barely rescued by returning comrades, pistols firing, shouting, horses dashing and rearing. Here's a fresh horse. I am up and away.

It took something out of me. I lost my heart for the enterprise. I went to Captain Billy and told him I was tendering my resignation, which he sadly accepted, knowing me to be a stalwart. I stayed with John Tibbs at his farm in Clay County that following fall and winter, working in the field and in the barn, more than earning my keep. I've seen John Tibbs shoot a white collared minister in the heart at close range. The minister was shaking a Bible at John Tibbs. I liked long range shooting, each side having a bulwark, an interference, we're in the barn or they're in the barn, they're among trees, so are we. Fighting as a deadly test of individual skill, one that requires accurate aiming, tactical positioning, sides roughly equal, I could do it, I did it. Execution, that was something else. It was our sacred duty, John Tibbs said. I never executed a single person in all my marauding days. I shot at people who were shooting at me. I made a noise, I rode my horse, I shot my pistol, I didn't do much actual damage.

Those old John Browns coming at me with their farm implements, maniac bearded faces, joyous to have this justice, me on the ground, my head split wide open, the shock of it, the slow motion of their lunging approach, I have seemingly a long time to see and consider that I am going to be obscenely mutilated. The injustice of it, I'm the one they'll chop up, my head on a pole. I oppose slavery. I argue it all the time with the boys. My blood brother, Jim Watson, is black. Enough said. Execute John Tibbs, a mean murderous son of a bitch, not me, yours truly, Huckleberry Finn.

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Fall and winter, 1855, John Tibbs was somber and silent while Mrs. Susan Mary Tibbs had at me with Bible verses, wanting me to accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior. Capitalize Lord and also Savior. She was always tired, pale and drawn, married too young to an awful old man, without a child, and it made you think, but not too long, John Tibbs was a stone-cold killer, God anointed. I bunked in an attic loft. I had my oil lamp and my two books. Still the nights were cold and dark and long. I had a lot to think about. For the likes of me in the eighteen fifties, it was either hard labor on the docks or go marauding with Captain Billy. I soon had me a short saber and a big heavy Walker Colt, both prizes taken off a dead Jayhawker in the field, the Walker Colt a glorious treasured find. It was so fine to be riding on a mission with all that equipage bouncing and jingling on my person, in and among my fierce comrades, desperados all, John Tibbs a stalwart, always near the head of the column. I rode a confiscated horse, I was armed with confiscated weapons, I wore a confiscated coat and slouch hat.

Marauding had its good points, apart from the sweetness of exact reprisal. I soon had me my first capital in coinage, a surplus, which I gave to Tom Sawyer to deposit in a St. Louis bank. I didn't want anyone in Hannibal to even guess I had a sum of money in the local bank. I know they'd think it was the Widow's money. It was, of course, common knowledge that my share of Tom Sawyer's treasure money was in Judge Thatcher's bank, but I had signed it over to the Judge for a dollar, realizing it was a death warrant, summoning Pap from some wilderness to search for his moneyed

Huckleberry. I never felt right about my share of that treasure, which was a trunk of loot, stolen goods, not confiscated enemy property. Mind the difference, please.

January wind rattles the window, snow pebbles strike the farm house wall, snowflakes lightly descend in my attic loft, I think of my little pile of silver in the vault of that St. Louis bank, my money, solid, in a box, protected, increasing in value, as I am near to perishing in frozen Clay County, and it would warm me. I had to be true to it. I had promised I would come for it one day, open the box, take out the silver dollars, the two bank notes, the three Spanish doubloons, and discover their magically multiplied value. I never counted Tom Sawyer's silver dollar, which was, as I saw it, more than just a sum of money. It was the hard token of his investment in my future. You had to have capital, Tom Sawyer said, to do anything, to be anyone.

Well, I got my capital the hard way, every cent of it, confiscated. I was almost killed, I was near Captain Billy when we charged, front line, my saber out, and I was always at the rear when we retreated fighting off grimly determined pursuers. I earned every cent of my hoard. Tribute payment, exacted contribution, cashbox in a burning Kansas house. I kept all finds to myself, especially the cashbox, secreted away until I could get it to Tom Sawyer who knew about banks and was up and down the river on business.

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I had, as mental discipline, those long freezing nights, to think of critical events, to strive for exact remembrance, to feel, once more, again dumbly, the outrageous injustice of Fate or God, who let it happen, who made it happen, subtracting the Widow and leaving me bare in the world. I had a bumpy starved raggedy childhood, one bad turn after the other, with no time to despair, too tired to despair. I deserved my rescue, deserved the kindness of the Widow. Then she is gone, I am orphaned again, cast out, my very existence on the line. In ice cold Clay County, in that little cocoon of blanket, coat, rug, I would seethe and simmer. Brooding spared me pneumonia.

When I tendered my resignation, Captain Billy sadly required me to hand in my Walker Colt. He hated to do it, he said, but the pistol was not, as I thought, my personal property, a spoil of war. It belonged to the regimental armory. I had no idea our ragtag

band was a regiment. It grieved me to hand that pistol to Captain Billy, to see him tenderly, respectfully, put it in his saddle bag. I thought about my Walker Colt those long winter nights. “Pack the head of the chambers with lard when loading,” Captain Billy so wisely said, “so a single spark doesn’t set off all six rounds.” He admired my Walker Colt. He didn’t want anything to happen to it. Everybody in the regiment loved my Walker Colt. I had to keep it on my person at all times. Night before a raid, at the fire, I’m greasing my pistol. Next to me, Willy Sands, sharpening his Bowie knife. Over there Dusty Claiborne oiling his boots. Good times, almost an exaltation, those nights before we rode off after Captain Billy wherever in Kansas he was going.

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1853, I think I’m sixteen, I can’t be sure, no birth record exists preparing to seek admission to a college in St. Louis, the Widow proudly supporting my intention. In that moment, just that once, I feel blissfully ordinary, a parented young person going to college, all Tom Sawyer gangsters going off to schools or special training. I am unquestionably a member of their human community. A professional tailor is coming on the next “River Queen” and he will fit me for a suit. This is the big thing. I am going to St. Louis as a young gentleman.

Next, Maisie, our maid, finds the Widow in bed stiff and cold, unseeing eyes wide open, and there is, I’m soon rudely informed, no explicit provision for me in the Widow’s will. Arabella Watson, called Madam, the Widow’s youngest sister, soon arrives in Hannibal to take possession of the Widow’s property. She detested Squire Douglas for his Whig politics, refused to attend his funeral, and she was openly contemptuous of the Widow’s charities. Madam loathed her middle sister, Caroline, for her boring dangerous religiosity. Jesus said: set Jim free. Arabella Watson liked and supported useful religion that kept the peace and justified suffering. She had no patience with useless religion that required self-abnegation. There was a brother, born outside the chain of sisters, a somewhat addled strangely vague person, without ambition or cause, an idler. Little Bella was the engine in the present Watson business. Raised on a Watson plantation in Mississippi, a senior Watson uncle her mentor teaching her the cotton business and

how to invest in politics. When she was just of age, twelve or thirteen, she was called, without irony, Madam.

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All this, through Tom Sawyer who heard the conversation in Judge Thatcher's chamber. Town lawyers, the grocer, the dentist, everyone had an opinion and some private little story to tell. Arabella Watson is a First Families of Virginia person, a so-called FFV, with that pedigree, and there is a Watson coat of arms. She is suspicious of our local jurisprudence and disrespects our law enforcement. She is already at work forcing the resignations of several ministers in different churches. At the long end of this, I'm in the kitchen, breakfast and coffee, at my window table, and here opposite me, I can smell him, horsy manure, a big heavy-set man with a somber bulldog face, materializing out of morning silence and air, he's Madam's bailiff, Edgar Huddleston. Who let him in? He has no respect for my person and space. "You're Mr. H. Finn," he says, and he hands me the Widow's court paper. I'm promptly evicted, warned a strict inventory of the Widow's personal belongings will be done, any malfeasance rigorously prosecuted. When the inventory is done, Edgar Huddleston says, private detectives with writs and warrants will no doubt soon be looking for me. Things have gone missing, be certain of that. He is standing much too close.

I'm astonished, absolutely without a plan. One day I'm a fine young lad with a promising future, a shining example of a bad boy redeemed by a maternal Christian woman, next day I'm a suspected criminal on the run. I wasn't at that moment on the run. I was sitting on a bench in downtown Hannibal, grip at my feet, one thin dime in my pocket, dazed, again presented with that great recurring puzzle in my constantly interrupted life. What to do next? Lighting out for the Territory is leaving light, without truck, without capital. When I was a kid, I knew how to light out for the woods and the

river. I went on instinct. Now I could work my passage to St. Louis on a steamboat, but where do I go when I get there? I had money from the found treasure chest, but I didn't know how to get at it. Arabella Watson's agent followed me from room to room as I collected my things, observing every item I put in my grip and trunk, finally thrusting me out the door onto the porch. I turned to say I still had stuff in the house, things, I'd send a friend to collect them.

The door was already closed. I stood there. This was my home. I lived here with the Widow, with Maisie and Oliver, and when I got up in the morning, breakfast was on the table. I had opened my heart to it, accepted its ministrations, its comforts. Now the house was shut down, closed, a hostile front, its windows blank and dark. I'm done with adventures, so I thought. I liked my bed and my stiff clean sheets. I would miss them.

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I sat on the bench, numb, that long afternoon in 1853, people passing by saying howdy Huck, giving me a long look. Tom Sawyer took charge of me. I was tucked away in Joe Harper's barn, I had food and drink, the lads visiting me to make sure I wasn't lonely. Tom got me passage on the next steamboat to St. Louis. There are some fellows I might look up in St. Louis. He gave me a password. He gave me a silver dollar. Which I never spent. It is in the box in the St. Louis bank vault. First Arabella Watson kicked me out of my home with the Widow and took away my future as an up-and-coming young Christian gentleman. Now Captain Billy, with all sorts of fake courtesies, does pretty much the same thing, accepts my resignation, kicks me out of the encampment that same day, the boys standing around or sitting before their fires ignoring my departure. I miss my Walker Colt, big black machine that it was, way too heavy for my cavalry uses, and then Captain Billy informed me that my frock coat with brass buttons and my slouch hat also were basically regimental property. Also, the saber. Next, my horse and saddle. When I left camp that evening, I walked out bareheaded, unarmed, without my coat, carrying my grip, bedroll on my shoulders, luckily still in my confiscated boots. With that humiliation, I won my freedom.

I bed down under a tree on a hillside not too far from the camp. When it was good and dark, maybe around nine, I'm roused from thin sleep by the sound of someone calling my name down by the road. I answer. He comes up and here is John Tibbs and he has brought me some bread and cheese, which I fall upon, how good it is, crusty bread, sour cheese, I am famished. As I bite and chew, John Tibbs lays out his proposition. He knows I'm a plucky lad, I can hammer a nail, I can lay a brick, he has a big farm in Clay County, he needs a hired hand. Room and board, some silver, a conditional quarter share of the crop money. He wants my ironclad assurance I will show up on the appointed day. Sober John Tibbs has a vial of medicinal liquor. To seal the contract, two good sips each of the liquor. White Lightning. I was left shaken and warming. I thought there might be more shared sipping in the following unforgiving months, but that was the last time I saw John Tibbs produce his special vial. And yet, hello, White Lightning, I'd look to find you again, have you utterly at my disposal, in my bottle.

Under that nut tree, shivering in my blanket, I could say I was free. It had to be done. I didn't have that single purpose any more: ransack the town, pursue into a village, evade capture and torture, for the good of a cause no one in our company could adequately explain. Every explanation got heated dissent. Well, we were protecting our families and our property. I had no family, no property, and I knew slavery was wrong. It was a job, really, for most of us, thrilling and often lucrative. I felt safe riding with our so-called Ruffians, we were that good at what we did, and then, I'm on the ground, something is broken, probably a rib, I can't get my beloved Walker Colt out of its holster, four bearded old men are bearing down on me, rakes and hoes lifted, and yes, the boys came back for me, yes, I escaped with my rescued Colt, the boys coming back to rescue me, present owner of the big Walker Colt pistol. "Gitcher pistol," the boys shout at me as I'm staggering about, dazed.

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We're not bandits. It was the first statement of our civic standing. We are an armed force of private citizens duly constituted to defend our property and personal rights, et

cetera. We were, said Captain Billy in one of his fireside lectures, a posse comitatus, and it fired the boys up, to say we are a posse comitatus. We're not bandits. We're a posse comitatus. Sitting by the crackling fire, the boys talking about how they would posse your comitatus right straight to hell, I thought I'll die in battle for better reasons. I was done riding with Captain Billy's Border Ruffians, which is what folks up north called us. So, where was I? Out in the cold. Back to Hannibal as semi-naked and broke as I was when I first joined Captain Billy's band of bad boys. I had money, but I didn't know how to get at it. I needed Tom Sawyer to show me how to do it, write the sum on a piece of paper and sign it. Here was John Tibbs and the offer of a job, two seasons, more or less, with this silent lethal Christian, and Mrs. John Tibbs, doing hard labor, but out of sight, out of mind, relatives of the slain Red Legs and Jayhawkers doing random searches for the ugly kid with that huge Walker Colt, that cannon, whose weird name was Huckleberry Finn.

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Pap never could tell me what was my actual Christian name. I was just a wild berry on a bush in the field, he said, belonging to no one, for anyone, to be plucked and eaten, to be used. I hated my name. It was the stupid name Pap meanly gave me. I was stuck with it. Huckleberry Finn, named in the school register. Kids said "Huck." Adults said "Huckleberry" with a grave pronunciation I hated. Unbaptized pagan child, they were saying. White orphan child with a slave name. I realize people get stuck with awful names, Oliver or Dudley, but Huckleberry stood out, was in a different order of bad names. In town "Huckleberry" said "wild" and I wasn't anymore. "Huckleberry" also reminded them I was crazy Pap Finn's issue. There was an opinion in the town that I was obscurely brain damaged, Pap's poisonous fluids bubbling in my brainstem, but in school I promptly outshone my sophisticated classmates and, more or less, put an end to that opinion. I didn't mind "Huck." I'm still comfortable with it, just the "Huck." When it later came time for me to write my first name on the dotted line, I took my mother's family name, Marx, changed to Mark.

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Pap did say once or twice he might not be my actual Pap, which, as a child, I took in as a hit without understanding what it meant. Later, when I understood his dirty meaning, I felt strangely liberated, free from any filial obligation. I liked not being his child. If only someone else in town whispered: Pap's not your father, I would have been definitely emancipated. I needed just one corroboration. As it was, I dragged his paternity around like a prison record. First thing folks thought when they saw me was Finn, a Finn. Town legend has my poor malnourished exhausted mother dying when I was three. I think I remember wailing in the midst of her shouting fights with Pap. I do not remember Pap's almost immediate desertion of his family. He disappears from Hannibal, that vile, abandoning the almost dead mother and the wailing child.

Next, I lived a life behind bars in a Hannibal orphanage, mostly cold and hungry. All the while I was there the nurses called me "little Charley," rejecting the name on the admittance form, "Huckleberry." Town legend knew that a childless preacher couple in nearby Palmyra wanted to adopt a strong good looking five- or six-year-old boy, that Hannibal had just the boy, so papers were being drawn up. I must have been, at some point, inspected. I have no memory of it.

Then, as town legend has it, this wretch shows up claiming he is little Charley's legal father, Michael Finn, Hannibal's not so long-ago detested Mickey Finn, and he has some kind of legal paper. He has a lot of stories about who he has become. He is not the juvenile delinquent Hannibal sorely remembered, always in court for something, a turbulent immoral youth. Michael Finn is a grown man. He has been to the schools of gambling and grifting, three years plying his criminal trade on different steamboats, and there achieved a certain self-regard and arrogant manner. He has lawsuits pending in St. Louis and Memphis. Unable to do manual labor, chop wood, dig holes, because of his heart and lung condition, Pap immediately needs donated food and lodging for the poor orphan child and his unfortunate parent. He got minimal quarters down by the docks near the warehouses, the building once the town jail, and there was meager fare, scraps from restaurant and hotel kitchens.

Hannibal woke up one day to discover Finns leechlike affixed to the town treasury, every month a grudged subtraction, and more often than not, almost immediately after the payout, the senior Finn, supposedly reformed, again a public nuisance on the street, drunk and disorderly. A local Democrat politician, a minor official, believed one of Pap's stories, believed in the fabulous lawsuit, so he endorsed Pap as the suffering victim of grave injustices. For all his odious look and obnoxious behavior, Pap had therefore a certain good opinion in Hannibal. People could understand the misery of legal entanglements, how it might drive a person to drink.

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Town legend had Pap as my Pap, without question, so it was hard from the start to disown him. Mam and Pap were 'married,' how and when not known, and they lived in shantytown. Town legend did not say otherwise. Town legend is Auntie Susie Morgan who lived next door to the Harpers, an ancient little bitty lady who knew everything about Hannibal's proper folks, not so much about its other folks. She knew what the proper folks thought about certain improper folks, the Irish Finns, for example, but scarcely anything about the actual Finns whose life in shantytown was beyond her range. Everyone knew Mickey Finn was a public nuisance, maybe even dangerous, that he was inexplicably married to some poor woman and yes, Auntie Susie Morgan had that poor woman's family name. That was all she had, just now, but she would think on it. Mrs. Harper wrote the name on a slip of paper as Auntie Susie spoke it. She checked the spelling with Auntie Susie. No mistake. There it was.

Mrs. Harper gave the slip of paper to Joe who gave it to me as we sat on a bench in front of Melpontian Hall in downtown Hannibal. In the bright sunlight of a midsummer Missouri day, wagons rumbling by, birds twittering in the tree above us, my unknown mother emerged from oblivion just this much, her name, and how full of meaning it was, packed with information. I was shocked to discover my mother was not Irish. Now I saw their different tribes, cultures, histories. I still can't put them together. It must have been some brief moment when Pap had become a glamorous outlaw, a dashing rogue, and she wanted dangerous living. I suppose my arrival, her pregnancy, changed everything, certainly the fun of dangerous living.

I am still at work sifting the scant evidence of my origin, looking for hard facts, wanting to construct a credible narrative of my early life. Who was my father? Who was my mother? At thirteen I already had the pointed question: Ask your Ma to ask Auntie Susie what was my mother's family name. And here it is. I had no interest in the history of the Finns.

Then, said Aunt Susie, Mickey Finn was gone, detested Irish swine, leaving his young child to the mercies of Hannibal charity. I'm in the orphanage. Time passes. Here he is, with that deputy, and I must accept that this unwell wreck of a man, bearded, long black hair with curly ringlets, glittery eyes, is my Pap and I am now in his care and custody, abruptly transferred from the order and security of the hated orphanage to the cold four walls of what had been the town jail. A table, a bench, a chair, two pallet beds, home. He explained the house rules of work and behavior. Fire in the stove was my responsibility, water in the jug and the pan, some cooking, maybe fish, stolen vegetables, greens from the woods. I was to sort through the basket of hotel scraps the deputy brought every morning. Well, the slop bucket, that, too, was my responsibility.

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. I had an evil father. I had a dead mother. A cook at the orphanage told me stories as I peeled her potatoes.

I once asked Pap what Mam looked like. He studied the question. She looked like you, he said, not as a compliment.

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1855-56, John Tibbs went on ahead of me with the buckboard and its load of sugar beets and cabbages. Also, my trunk, my grip, and a bundle of washed and mended shirts, a gift from Mrs. Tibbs, selected from her dead brother's wardrobe. I've never had more than two shirts in my whole life. Now I had six and I looked good in each one. Tightly folded, a small bundle, with some faint herbal fragrance in it.

I was to have a last look around the farm, check all the relevant water levels, then follow John Tibbs on Lucy, a big complacent mare, meet him in town by the clock tower, sunset. We'd do our final reckoning, for sure the ceremonial vial coming out once more. I thought we'd all made the best of it, and happily there was some profit. I'd drink to that, and to the good wife Susan Mary Tibbs, who cooked and cleaned, who had a Gospel verse ready for any occasion, who could sometimes pose an interesting question. "Mr. Finn," she'd say, "how do you see your future? Where will you be two years from now?" I am speechless. She calls me Mr. Finn. No one has ever called me Mr. Finn. The future. She repositioned its thought in my mind.

I was in the barn getting Lucy's saddle. I heard the barn door slide open, just a bit. I could feel Mrs. Tibbs step into the barn proper. I didn't turn around. I just stood there, my hands on the saddle. She approached. I didn't turn around. As soon as I heard the barn door slide open, my member jumped up and was now trapped in my trouser leg, perfectly outlined in its upward thrusting. I had to hitch up my trousers, free my jubilant rowdy member, get him upright and straightforward, before I could engage Mrs. Tibbs. We had already said goodbye in the house. She gave me the bundle of shirts. The bundle was soft and fragrant. I put it to my face and groaned as I breathed in the odor of some flower. "Whoa," I said. I had only stupid things to say. "I do thank you, Mrs. Tibbs," I said. We held each other by the forearms and shook each other's forearms.

Off to the barn, I go. I thought we would have one last farewell embrace and I would press my hard member against her soft belly. That was all I wanted, through layers of clothing, pressing, rubbing. Lord Jesus, I said to the air in the barn, this has been a hard winter and a brutal spring. The whole week before this day I had thought precisely about this situation: a farewell embrace, I would press my hard member against her soft belly, my hands around her waist would slip below to clasp her nether cheeks. She would rub against my member and when I kissed her, her lips would part, signifying I had further liberties.

Mrs. Susan Mary Tibbs was probably my mother's age, thirties, forties, iron gray hair severely pulled back, regular features, and there was a swell of bosom. "Is that a rat?" I ask, pointing at a cat. Rearranged, I turned and faced her. She said: "Huckleberry," and it sounded intimate and sexual the way she said it, "I'm sorry I couldn't bring you to

the Lord, but I'm confident someone will, and soon. I know you love the Gospel." "I do," I said, truthfully. She said: "I'd like to give you my blessing, if I may." Indeed, she might. She stepped forward, put her hands on my shoulders, and started to say a prayer. No one had ever said "Huckleberry" to me with such soft intonation and feeling. I tottered a bit, and to steady myself put my hands on her hips, which felt soft and round. Everything about Susan Mary Tibbs was suddenly soft and round.

Hands on the hips, that was it. Innocent boys, you might not think it, but this is the move that closes the deal. Do not clutch, do not grab, simply clasp, firmly, to steady yourself, not to tumble, she, nurse like, will support your need to stay upright, yet yield to your clasp, which slowly becomes definitely sexual, not innocent at all. Balance has been restored, yet here we are, like dancing partners, squared off, ready to dance, to do something.

Without thinking I pulled Mrs. Tibbs close, she permitting it, saying only, "oh." In my arms, she inadvertently gave me several pelvic thrusts, bum bum bum, it shocked her, even as it shocked me, that bum bum bum, Mrs. Tibbs, slightly out of control, tongue kissing, going bum bum bum, without intending to, then her face to the barn wall, bent over, her dress lifted, she is, I can't believe it, naked under the dress. Susan Mary Tibbs had readied herself for what could happen. She didn't see my naked member when I took it out, didn't see me aim and then enter her.

I like a slow riding horse, I like to rest and think in the saddle, so I was happy on Lucy as we ambled through Missouri countryside on our way to Liberty. John Tibbs would have my money. I would have a steak dinner and brandy at the hotel. Maybe for the first time ever I was feeling at peace with myself and at peace with myself in the world. There were people I disliked, but none I hated, I held no grudges, Pap thankfully out of the picture. Riding to Liberty, warmly embodied, thanks to Mrs. Tibbs's generous ministration, eating a big soft doughnut she had fried specially for me, I was open, as never before, to life's opportunities.

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1840s. Town boys and wharf rats at times and in certain places socialized, shared a fishing site, traded commodities (town boys had marbles, wharf rats had fish hooks), did competitive calisthenics (Little Dukey could stand on his head. No town boy could do it.), talked about river ghosts and river crime, everybody waiting for the arrival of the two glamorous steamboats, the “Susannah Lee” and the “Atlas,” one or two famous persons to gawk at, the unloading and loading, heaven for adolescent boys, heaven and profit for the poor ones. We did freely mingle on such occasions, town boys, wharf rats, shantytown boys, some black and brown, warily, each band of boys, from a defended turf, combing the traffic, running errands, delivering messages, carrying light suitcases, pocketing forgotten articles.

There was often a melee, fists flying, my Irish brothers usually at the center of it. Not me. I wasn’t in anyone’s gang. I wasn’t a good comber, too raggedy. People looked away when they saw me. One day I’m standing apart observing a ruckus, and I hear this perfect Southern tenor voice, just beside and behind me.

“You’re Huckleberry Finn.”

“You’re Tom Sawyer.”

We had both previously noted each other. I flaunted my tattered outfit, my strong bare feet clenched the ground, and, as I’ve said, I already had muscles. I chose to observe the ruckus. If needed in the ruckus, I would enter the fray. Tom Sawyer was a straight up good-looking boy, splash of freckles, curly locks of reddish yellow hair, a broad grin, white teeth. He brightly expected your admiration and happily received it. Because he was already pursuing girls, with some success, he had a buoyant self confidence that was daunting for other boys. As for girls, we were mostly laggards, some of us clueless. What happened to Tom Sawyer? Where is he getting this flash, this energy? Didn’t he get Amy Lawrence to flip her apron? Didn’t he instantly drop the luscious blonde Amy Lawrence for the gypsy dark new girl, Becky Thatcher?

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I saw other children going off to school. I knew it was important, but how did you get in? I imagined Pap and Huckleberry Finn standing before the desk of the school

principal, Pap enrolling me, giving our address, his occupation. I had the native wit to know I had to board an educational train soon or be forever lost. I wanted to join Tom Sawyer's Gang, the best one in Hannibal, and it seemed like I couldn't. I was missing a leg. The Bible school the Christian ladies put us through that one summer let me see how important school was, whatever the torture. Easy as pie, the Widow Douglas enrolled me. She handed me a ticket to give to the teacher.

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I owe my life to Tom Sawyer. I knew how to exist. I could build a fire in the rain. I could snare a rabbit. I could anticipate fits of adult fury and dodge the forthcoming blows, but not at first. I went around with boxed ears, my little brain humming, sometimes I was limping, a kick having dented my shin. I didn't know how to play, didn't know what play was. In my world, even among the tykes, play was competitive gaming and therefore ultimately violent. I avoided play. I couldn't even skip. I tried skipping but got all tangled up and tumbling. I still cannot make a dance move. First step, I turn to stone.
France has to suffer casualties. He can't be as good as you are. I'm sending him home. Next time you'll be someone else." I'm still deeply breathing, scared to realize I can't remember what I did. It had to be muscular, my arms ached, I'd been struck, I had throbs and stings. I still couldn't put words into a coherent sentence. I was ashamed, yet comforted by Tom Sawyer's calm presence and his decent words.

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How to play. I still have trouble with it. I can't be myself and someone else at the same time. Tom Sawyer had wild fantasies, saw himself as all sorts of persons doing weird things, all this in different time zones. He taught us (the Gang and some auxiliaries) how to load and shoot our pistols. Some could only load and that was not a problem, Tom Sawyer said, be patient, it will happen, keep trying. It was good to be in

his gang. I never did quite grasp the concept of play-acting. I knew the actual crooks down at the docks and the wharves. In shantytown and the quarters, I saw people with bloody heads and broken bones. Tom's faked combats and pretend robberies soon wore on me, as it did on the other lads. On hot days it was a lot of running about, shouting, scaring people at church picnics, and the result was almost nothing, maybe a doughnut or a trinket. Joe and Ben would now and then challenge Tom's leadership, but they could never count on me for support.

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Tom Sawyer owned the future in our boyish Hannibal. He swept the floor at the local newspaper office, listening to the talk. He ran errands for Judge Thatcher, listening to the talk. No one in the gang even had the concept of such enterprise, which was to gain adult attention, not avoid it, to insert yourself into important adult spheres, filling water glasses, bringing the requested volume. Tom Sawyer could explain the Fugitive Slave Law to the gang. He was our juvenile J. C. Calhoun. He would be the governor of Missouri or maybe our senator in Washington, D. C., defending our property rights against the claims and challenges of the hated Abolitionists.

When Tom Sawyer woke up in the morning, he knew what he wanted to do, swim, fish, gamble, collect, trade, little things, and big things like robbing the bank in Palmyra or shooting Memphis Dick on the pier in St. Louis. Not me. What next? Pretty much my day was spent scrounging meals and protecting my gear and food caches. My life was the immediate present, eye and ear alert for Pap's approach. Tom Sawyer had an assured future, he told us. Judge Thatcher had plans for him. Pap, of course, had plans for me.

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Long summer days, lounging on the docks, Tom Sawyer would often brag about his Cousin Isaac Phelps, the genius achiever in the Phelps lineage. How he did this, how he did that, lived in Europe, had exciting adventures, came back, became a lawyer,

married the ugly eldest daughter of a local magnate and then had several fortunes to manage. Everyone in the Phelps lineage owed Cousin Isaac money. He was the family bank. Never call him Uncle or Sir. "I'm Cousin Isaac, remember that." I think Tom Sawyer hated him even as he extolled the feats of Cousin Isaac. How was he to surpass this glorious Cousin Isaac in family legend? He wasn't even an entitled patrilineal Phelps. He was an ignoble matrilineal Sawyer. Much later, during the war, Cousin Isaac gave me these certain facts and details. How, at twelve, he went alone on an unforgettable steamboat, the *Mary Anne*, his first, to New Orleans to study at an academy run by an esoteric order of cowled friars. Ten pupils, studying Aristotle and Cicero, doing hard work in the woods chopping and sawing, in the field plowing and reaping. The abbot, Friar Waldemar Something, was a best friend of Isaac's splendid ambitious father, recently dead, Isaac more or less adopted by the order, raised by the friars, with the grateful permission of the widowed Mrs. Phelps, herself an invalid. The splendid ambitious father, along with others in the American foreign service, rescued the White Friars from a murderous persecution in Lithuania. So said Cousin Isaac. He came out of their school fluent in Latin and French, competent in everyday Lithuanian.

On his widowed mother's last thin dime, Cousin Isaac did his postgraduate studies in London and Paris, studied socialism, joined secret societies, came back to Missouri without a useful degree or any kind of valuable certification, came back because his impoverished mother Angelina was probably dying, came back because he would have a hard time breaking into the European action, doing the work of the Enlightenment, defending Reason. At some point, probably in Paris, Cousin Isaac enlisted in the Army of the Enlightenment, an international formation of dedicated soldiers selected for special duties.

Pronounce It, Cousin Isaac said, and I did, sort of. Reason's fist, he said. The Enlightenment Army.

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When Cousin Isaac heard of the ruckus at his Uncle Silas's farm, how a posse comitatus captured a fugitive slave with the assistance of two plucky Southern lads, who

sounded the alarm, he caught the next packet to Phelps Landing. It was, after all, 1851, an intensely debated political compromise had just given rich gold-plated California to the North, a free state, and promised the South a prompt return of fugitive slaves. The North barely kept its promise, caught one in Boston, another in Baltimore, several others, each return fiercely contested, and that was the South's pittance in the Compromise of 1850. Feeling was high in the slaveholding South, 1850-51. Jim and I had launched our little raft right into a vast complex maelstrom of political feeling and statement whirling around the figure of the fugitive slave.

At the farm Cousin Isaac found these two lads, one pert, the other droll, his words, not mine. Droll, I thought, what's that? Where was Jim in all this introduction? Living in the quarters with some church family, I was told, trying to sort things out, maybe locate his family. First private moment I had with Cousin Isaac, I asked about Jim, what was the plan, and he put forefinger to his lips. "Pish," he said, "I'll see to that." Topic was closed. Who indeed was this fabled Cousin Isaac jumping down from the wagon at the Phelps farm, grabbing his satchel before Little Harry could get to it. Not the grand mustachioed six-footer I imagined, listening to Tom, not at all, a smallish man, in his forties, clean shaven, thin brown hair, receding, wearing (surprise) little round glasses. He was quiet, modest, soft spoken. I would soon learn there was another Isaac.

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On our way back to Hannibal, stopping in Memphis, Cousin Isaac took me for an early evening stroll and we sat on a bench in a little public park. He took out two cigars and gave me one. What am I? Thirteen or fourteen, but a canny experienced young fellow. We smoked, puffed, blew streams of smoke, and I thought this strange little man, what is he up to. He said, in that Cousin Isaac quiet voice, "Young Master Huckleberry, you are blessed with that absurd name. If you play your cards right, you can get a lot of value out of "Huckleberry." He was talking looking straight ahead. No person had ever complimented me on my name.

He turned to me now, with that level gaze through the round glasses, gray green eyes, not measuring me, senior to junior, but fellow citizen to fellow citizen. I was

thrilled. “Therefore,” he said, “I think we should be friends, allies, even, we both want Missouri to be a free state. I speak to you in confidence, young Master Huckleberry. We hate slavery. And we live in it, breathe it, eat it, wear it. We can’t live without it, most people in our neighborhood say. I need a bright young person to be my reporter in Hannibal, someone I could count on for an opinion. Come, join the army of good people who want Missouri to be a free state.” I was so honored by his trust; I didn’t know what to say. Then I said, and it was the truth, “Tom Sawyer is the reporter you want for opinion. No serious person in Hannibal is going to share an opinion with Huckleberry Finn.”

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First day on the “Rita Bee” Cousin Isaac introduced us to the captain and the pilot, who congratulated us, showed us around their command station, explained their instruments. I’m not interested. Tom is right at their shoulder with bright pleasant questions. Then we lounged at the railing of our deck in segregated solitude, and that was sweet. Elsewhere the “Rita Bee” was throbbing with noise, machine and human, paddlewheels constantly churning, and where we sat at our privileged site on the top deck a virtual cone of silence contained us. We had the freshest air. At five Cousin Isaac ushered us into the Grand Saloon, which astonished me, the glass and the glitter, the flowers, sculptures, that long buffet table. I will never forget my first meal. Cousin Isaac opened the menu for us. I chose Shoulder of Lamb Stuffed & Mint Sauce, I had “spinnage” and “cellery,” to see what “cellery” was, and for dessert (during the war on dull boring nights I would exactly remember the look and taste of that dessert) I had ladyfingers and vanilla ice cream. Huckleberry Finn, thirteen or fourteen, in a fresh clean shirt, whose lifetime diet was principally greens and fish, is warily holding between his thumb and forefinger a ladyfinger so fragile, so ethereal, it might fly away if released.

***

Tom was content to let Jim cease to exist in his life and thought. He happily expected Jim would collect his purchased family in Hannibal and leave for distant places. Cousin Isaac knew Jim was not going to be a popular fellow with slaveholding folks in Marion County. He had committed the worst of crimes, deserted his ailing mistress, that sweet soul, Miss Caroline Watson, and for this, all told, he had been handsomely rewarded, manumitted, and, it was said, given some kind of annuity. It scrambled one's notion of justice. Rough white boys in Hannibal might want immediately to put Jim in his proper place. Cousin Isaac anticipated that commotion. As the "C. H. Jones" docked, Jim would take the first cargo plank down, maybe amid Holsteins and Jerseys, then sprint for the safety of the quarters. He would carry with him a bright silver dollar, Tom's thank you for the quick exit, more shame money to add to the forty dollars Tom had paid Jim for enduring Tom's "evasion" at the Phelps farm.

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It was almost a week getting back to Hannibal, steamboat transfer in St. Louis, Cousin Isaac departing. We now had modest accommodations on a packet boat. On the "C. H. Jones," overloaded, underpowered, bravely driving its groaning paddles, life on the main deck was more relaxed, the fare simpler. A band of Chickasaws, weirdly exotic, turbans, feathers, amazing hair styles, got all the attention. In the evening I'd look to see how Jim was doing. He was put in the rear of the boat, next to the cattle pens. We'd exchange looks, I'd put a boiled egg or potato next to his bedroll. Tom Sawyer sulked in our cabin. He hated me for being Jim's good friend in this situation. He hated to see it. I was publicly violating written and unwritten race law, and I knew what I was doing, wrongheaded defiance my constant mistake in life. Once again, I had brought my goddam conscience to his celebration, complicating a simple issue. I had chosen to ruin his triumphal return to Hannibal. He thought there might be some kind of a reception waiting for us in Hannibal, the mayor, a band, Joe Harper, Ben Rogers, the Gang, standing in the crowd.

When we got to Hannibal, Tom ready with his speech, but there was no reception, no band and mayor, not even our families, the Widow and Aunt Polly. We stood on the dock, stupefied, luggage at our feet, and just then it began lightly to rain.

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I can't seem to get to Jackson's Island where Jim is waiting to see me. I fight paddle a found canoe, but a strong current turns me back into the channel even as the river drags me along.

Jim can't stay in Hannibal.

White folks refuse to accept the decree of Miss Caroline Watson's will, that her ungrateful runaway servant, Jim, be set free, awarded a small annuity, and given her name. Jim is now Mr. James Watson. When that name was first pronounced in white Hannibal, white Hannibal was surprised to hear it, to see their familiar Jim, a humble lad, in this new guise, a legal person, with a title, Mister, the equivalent of Citizen.

Citizen James Watson.

White Hannibal, high, middle, and low, instantly decided this entitlement was not acceptable. Miss Watson's will had to be contested. Jim had to be put in his proper place. People went around saying "Mr. James Watson" in a sneering way. In rowdy riverside Hannibal, louts cursed Jim's luck. Sheriff Washburn sent his special deputy into the quarters to advise Jim to do nothing provocative, to make no statements. Jim explained to the special deputy that yes, he had come back to Hannibal a free man with money in the bank and this was not a crime. He wanted only somehow to extricate his wife and daughter from Hannibal and then he was gone. He did not expect, nor did I, this inclosing wall of malevolence, white Hannibal incensed, demanding justice.

Two weeks, no word from Jim, no way to get word to Jim.

Tom Sawyer has nothing to say except let justice be done. I ruined his triumphal return on the "Rita Bee." Now Jim is ruining Tom's triumphal reception in Hannibal. Everyone is talking about "Mr. James Watson." No one is talking about Tom Sawyer. Tom was studiously not involved in the town unrest, in its truculence, taking the high-

minded stance of disinterest. When I put it to him, what should Jim do, what could Jim do, he gave me the familiar Tom Sawyer long look, and said, at last: “Let Jim go.” I knew he was troubled and scared, the whole Gang was, to see ugly harm come to our genial Jim, boyhood older friend. Tom had no grand evasion plan for this emergency.

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Black folk were scarce in town. I didn’t know the ones I saw. Who were these people? No intelligence at the Sheriff’s office. No rumor on the wharves. Nothing was happening because people were waiting for something to happen. What is Jim’s crime, that was the question I posed every chance I had in conversations, but that wasn’t the question white Hannibal was pressing. Why did Caroline Watson, upright, churchgoing, Southern lady, free this scapegrace Jim and shower money on him, bequest and annuity? Weren’t the rules for manumission strict and severe? To be eligible, a slave had to risk his or her life for the sake of some white person or persons. Jim was patently not that heroic slave. The town attorney visited the Widow Douglas to discuss the situation. He and his friends in town government felt that if the Widow just challenged the will, with no expectation, it would ease racial tension in Hannibal. The Widow Douglas would not agree to argue her sister was deranged when she dictated Jim’s manumission in her will. Caroline Watson had a profound Christian contrition, life changing, as she was dying, so she wanted to right old wrongs, et cetera. The Widow was witness to the will’s statement. Ah, said a friend in town government, but what does the Widow know about this Jim? Sam Henchard, the lawyer who handled Miss Watson’s estate, who professionally transcribed the will, was, alas, in another state tending sick relatives, out of reach. Was the will valid or not? No one could say with certainty.

In this suspense certain obscene stories began to circulate about old maid Caroline Watson, stiff as a board, and handsome Jim, supple as an eel. I had just heard my first

one, sickening, disgusting, when, some days later, coming out of Sunday church with the Widow Douglas, walking past Hector, the aged church janitor, I heard him softly call my name. I always liked the way people in the quarters spoke my name, “Mister Huckleberry,” and that was exactly how he spoke it. I went over to him to shake his hand and as we shook hands, he passed a wrinkled-up piece of paper into my hand, smiling and nodding. And then I was walking again, but my heart was pounding.

I knew what this was.

It was a time and a place.

***

It was all so dreamlike, the insistence of the channel current, having to fight paddle my way through its pouring weave, then reaching the Island which abruptly loomed up before me black browed and menacing, weird channel current here as well, slow going in my hobbled canoe. I knew that tree. I grabbed its outstretched straggly limb and pulled myself onto the bank. Bare foot on wet rocky sand, shoes dangling from my neck, I was again in actual time, standing on solid ground. The evening sky is dark blue. The cricket clamor is deafening. I hid my canoe. I know where I am on Jackson’s Island. Our old campsite is nearby. Jim has started one of his miraculous invisible fires. I can see the merest sliver of light through the trees. Next, I’m in the clearing, and there he is, struggling to his feet.

“Huck.”

“Jim.”

We went straight to a raft ritual, dropped to our knees, Jim firmly clasped my ears, I held on to his, and we went forehead to forehead, silent as stone. Three big fights on the raft ended with this ritual. Jim said it was African. It was extra hard this time. Hanging on to Jim’s ears, pressing my forehead against his, I tried to meet the calculated force of his energy. He gripped my earlobes so hard my eyes watered. Once, on the raft, after a “disrespect” episode, the head bump, the head wrestle, went on and on, the river quietly slurping beneath our boards, pulling us the wrong way, of course, we were going south, I thought at one point I might pass out, Jim breathing

heavily, moaning now and then, always adjusting his weight and size advantage, I've lost all feeling in my ears, but I persevered and gradually the pressure lightened. He let go of my ears and sat back. Same thing this time. We didn't exchange words or feelings. He was bigger, older, had pains I couldn't imagine, and I had to stand up to that strength, as best I could, he always tested just to where it seriously hurt, and all the while I had to maintain my balance, kneeling on hurting knees, hips wondering why I'm kneeling on a raft in the middle of the Mississippi. Jim said it was African warrior practice.

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Trust.

Well, Jim had it.

"Come," he said, and we went back to his stone sheltered fire, now mostly glowing coals, some flicker, which Jim expertly tended. We huddled around the small blaze. Jim produced a small saddle bag which he thrust into my lap. In it envelopes, two with Cairo, Illinois, addresses, the other two Cincinnati, Ohio, addresses. In the first envelope a notarized copy of Jim's manumission decree. Also In it, $400, four banknotes, for Cousin Isaac to deposit, the fateful bequest from Miss Watson that was now possibly his death sentence. The second envelope was for Sadie. Sadie is Jim's wife. "I dictated this letter to Uncle Henry," Jim said. "Family business, had to get everything just right."

I was holding Jim's estate in my lap.

"Good you're going back to the Widow Douglas," he said. "I need you to be regular and legal. Anything white folks in Hannibal are cooking up for me, you can tell Hector or Minnie." I was still several sentences back, thinking about his calmly recited plan to cross the river first in a rowboat, then a skiff, before plunging into the sectional war zone that was Cairo, Illinois, to find a house that might not be there. We were just back from our first attempt to reach Cairo. This was Jim's second attempt to reach Cairo and I thought it was even more dangerous than the first. He didn't have my boyish innocence and prompt reliance on false names and fake stories to protect him when challenged,

and worse, Jim was different, even with me, he was changed on the “Rita Bee” and the “C.H. Jones,” his posture, his voice. “You’ve still got your cudgel cane,” I said. “In the rowboat,” he said.

I perfectly understood his plight, I knew the people in Hannibal who mightily hated Jim’s luck, that astonishing bequest. What was the sum? Jim got $800. How come? Why? I’m scared to think of a mob in Hannibal with torches and rope. I had just seen a mob in action down river tarring and feathering the Duke and the King. Tar is hot. The old King naked on the rail, broiled, on his bad hips, bouncing up and down, his fat gut and fat ass tarred and feathered, the mob overjoyed, throwing garbage at him as he is carried through the street, look away. Jim had to go. It was different this time, he said, he had control of the flight plan and he would not miss the shining lights of Cairo. We sat before the cold fire, silent, each thinking, Jim following a long thought. “If any harm comes to my family,” Jim said, “you will know the ones who did it.”

The sentence just sat there with us in the cooling night slowly sinking into my mind. It wasn’t the future I’d been considering since my return to the domain of the Widow Douglas. Uncle Culpepper, director of the church choir, close friend of the Widow’s, thought I might do very well at a certain dentistry school in New Orleans. It was famous for the excellent dentists it produced, who were known as Black friar dentists, the school a Roman Catholic institution run by dentist monks in black outfits. Uncle Culpepper went all the way to Paducah to have a Black friar dentist work on his teeth. Big money if you’re an excellent dentist, maybe a surgeon, even better. Such voices and thoughts were promptly in my head once I was back in Hannibal.

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Jim stood up. I did, too.

“This is it, then,” he said. “For now.”

As I paddled back to Hannibal, I thought about Jim alone in his leaky rowboat on the huge surge of that vast river looking for a feeble orange light hung on a waiting skiff, other travelers already on board, then safely underway to free Cairo’s special berth, open sunset to sunrise. He might have been going to the moon, and what were his

chances of survival in free Illinois and free Ohio? A strange young black man, he couldn't just walk around and do business. He needed cover, an alibi person, me.

I can't go with him this time.

Hard pull back to Hannibal.

Not my canoe, borrowed, returned.

Midnight.

Hannibal was asleep, streets empty, buildings dark. Jim's saddle bag was slung on my shoulder. The Widow understood that I was with an ill relative in shanty town. I had my key to the side door. I could let myself in. It really was the end of everything, Pap dead, forever out of my life, the adventures of Huck, Tom, and Jim, concluded. Jim is dead to Tom, finished business, returned to his world. Jim is not finished with Tom Sawyer. He is once again on the run, out there in that immense dark river world, plish plash, the constant stroke of his oars. As I come up the familiar street, I have Jim's saddle bag on my shoulder, the beating heart of his literary remains against my breast, which compels me to feel the dark sludge of slavery all around me in Hannibal, the weight of it, tarring all the fine white houses on this street with its pitch. I'm trudging forward through its mire, smeared, while out there, riding the great rush of the river, plish plash, Jim plying those oars.

I undo the gate to the white picket fence at the Widow's manse, go up the brick walk under big trees, I behold the pillars, the porch ample, my home.

I'm inside. Everyone was asleep. I find a morsel of ginger cake in the pantry. I stood there munching, almost in a state of bliss. I was home. I was in a new life, and this is where I lived, in one of the finest houses in Hannibal. Maisie (who'll get my breakfast in the morning) and Oliver (who'll draw my bath) are slaves. Servants, says the Widow.

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Back to my future. I settled with sour John Tibbs, who calculated to the penny. Captain Billy was now Colonel Billy, and he wanted me back in the regiment. John Tibbs had talked to the regimental agent in Liberty. Outrages in the west, Red Leg

mayhem. Our regiment was reorganizing in Columbia. Colonel Billy would promote me and provide the new equipage. They had a damn fine horse, full gear, waiting for me, belonged to the mayor of Beebe, Kansas. Before I could ask, John Tibbs shook his head. Not that I would have signed up for the sake of a stupid pistol too heavy for effective use in battle, but a big Walker Colt, saddle holstered, its black butt riding beside you, at the ready, did wonderfully inspire your confidence.

The packet boat from Liberty to Columbia seemingly stopped every ten feet to pick up some slowpoke farmer or two-bit peddler. I needed to get to St. Louis and see Cousin Isaac to think what I might do next, to get any messages Tom might have sent, to get any messages Jim might have sent. I needed fresh air. John and Susan Mary Tibbs, it was like living with a toothache, they were both so continually sad in their different ways. He would say a prayer, if asked, and would read a verse, if one was suggested. He was born again, God's warrior. Mrs. Tibbs could work him into speech asking Bible questions (how many times around the walls of Jericho), but she couldn't get him beyond simple Bible facts. Seven. He would lapse back into moody silence. I worked long in the barn in the cold just to avoid a social evening with them before the fire.

In St. Louis, set up in a boarding house, I had to summon Cousin Isaac to my room. "Come quick," I wrote in the message I gave to little Oliver to deliver, "I might be dying, and I need to know why." Little Oliver set out in the dead of night on a rented mule to find the mansion where Cousin Isaac lived.

Part Two: Huck Finn's Mother is Annie Marx

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Catastrophe.

I've been through eight major battles, pieces and bits of the Civil War are inside my skin, resident in the flesh, hah, I stood fast at the Sunken Road just above Antietam Creek, but nothing so soul testing as confronting Cousin Isaac with this mysterious illness, whatever it was. I'm pissing pus and blood, fire in the member, fever, this malady suddenly coming upon me. What was I to do? I was poisoned. What was the antidote? I couldn't believe I was in the grip of this thing. It was in me, a malign creature, and I was voiding it and still voiding it. I was two days alone with it, pissing red and pink, secretly removing the piss in a covered chamber pot, so no one in the boarding house might think the young fellow overheard groaning in the upstairs corner room was a plague victim.

Cousin Isaac looked at me, listened to my outcry, then put his hand up. I stopped in mid-sentence. "Sit down, Huck," said Cousin Isaac. I sat down. "You've got the clap. You're not going to die." In my marauding days, around the campfire, men and boys talked about something they called the clap, I heard the word, and understood you got it from a prostitute, or a woman of low morals, this alien thing, you entered her, it entered you. I was ironclad safe, I thought. Sooner or later, I had to get romantic with a woman, I knew that, but I was at that moment very shy around girls and young women, tongue tied, so later was my strategy. I maintained my disinterest, for now. I hadn't enjoyed a loose girl at the Red Lion in Liberty. My encounter with Susan Mary Tibbs in the barn was so surprising, and quickly done, I hadn't yet counted it as an event in my sexual history. The deed was like a passing dense rain shower, drenching, soaking, then abruptly gone. A little shudder of revulsion went through me. It was Susan Mary Tibbs. She was diseased, she was afflicted, this noble Christian lady, and she gave me the clap.

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“As it happens,” Cousin Isaac said, “I know a doctor who specializes in sexual diseases.” Cousin Isaac’s several businesses took him up and down the river, St. Louis to New Orleans. He knew all the wards and districts in St. Louis and Memphis, who mattered, who was interesting, and he was unfailingly useful with his knowledge. He did favors. He found opportunities for you. He managed our bank accounts, Tom’s, Jim’s, and mine. We were a joint venture in different futures, he taking his justified percent, each future. In 1859 I didn’t matter anywhere, but Cousin Isaac thought I was interesting, his young cousin’s strange companion, a somber unsmiling lad, who had been a wild wolf child living in the back alleys of Hannibal, who had been by all accounts a first-rate Border Ruffian. The lad had come away intact with a tidy pile of silver and swag.

“Dr. Israel Sunshine,” Cousin Isaac said. “He has a clinic in a small village just outside St. Louis. It is in the woods, actually. No one sees you go in. No one sees you come out. I’ve sent many distinguished gentlemen from all over our beloved South to the Sunshine Clinic. Dr. Sunshine is expensive, but you can afford it, Huck, so do what he says.” There was no moral judgment. He was sympathetic, concerned. “I’ll send Eustace off tonight to make arrangements,” he said. “I’ll come by tomorrow with my new horse and buggy, proud to show them off, and we’ll go to the clinic and see what can be done about your clap.” His matter-of-fact voice was calming. As he spoke, my body began immediately to relax, my fever cooled. “You might have to spend a day or two in the clinic. Better pack those two books you always carry around.” He was inspecting the disorder in my room, tangled bed linen, flung articles of clothing, the several chamber pots.

Cousin Isaac fished a small packet out of his jacket. He opened it and took out a small white clay pipe. In it he had wedged a lump of dried dog dung, looked like. “Try to get a little sleep tonight,” he said. “Smoke a bit of this, four puffs, no more, and pleasant dreams.” He had a lively wife, two piano playing daughters, two crack shot sons. He was a Presbyterian Elder. He had also his steamboat life, his casino life, where he did his political business, where he was well versed in the current opinion concerning gonorrhea and syphilis, and had, at the ready, a little white pipe.

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There I sat in Mrs. Duggan's boarding house, again alone in my room, holding this little white pipe on my lap. When the Widow died and I was kicked out, I sat on the bench in the town square, frozen, just as I sat here, stunned, my life again radically changed, hearing the rattle of carriage wheels below, the tooting of steamboat horns, life stupidly going on.

Midsummer St. Louis, Missouri, wet suffocating heat at nine in the morning. Cousin Isaac has an ample top for his buggy and sufficient water, so we rattled along, frequently pausing to let the horse rest and cool down, Cousin Isaac relighting his cigar. He might be away when I wanted to come out, Eustace was my man, Eustace would have instructions. His quietly ruminating on the arrangements, on possible scheduling problems, puffing away on his cigar, filling the air with its pungent aroma, wonderfully took the edge off the throbbing anxiety I was feeling. Horse is drinking at a nearby brook. Cousin Isaac examines his cigar stump. "Not far now," he said. I'm wincing at every bump and lunge of the buggy, and then Cousin Isaac finds the gated private road, which immediately takes us inside a pine and evergreen forest, big fragrant trees, and we're instantly cool in all the windy shade. The well-tended road is straight and level. The horse likes it and we rattle forward. One turn and we're on the grounds of the Sunshine Clinic, the big central building a red brick two storey mansion, behind it another sizable red brick building with a long arcade. It had once been the ducal estate of a local bigwig, a turpentine mogul, also his plantation factory, with an adjoining hamlet of kitchen, laundry, service sheds, dormitories, cottages.

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Jasper Phineaux thought he might build a model community that produced a diverse array of necessary wood products, but, inexplicably, at the height of his ambitious planning and construction, he contracted syphilis, by "innocent proximity," so said a published diocesan ruling that officially cleared his reputation. For all that, he had the same gruesome death. As he lay dying, he wrote a new will establishing funds and

trusts that would put all his money at his long-suffering sister's easy disposal. She had not abandoned him. She had tenderly nursed him though he was ghastly at the end, brown moldy skin, terrible fissures. "A rotten peach," it was said.

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We were in Phineaux Hall, in Jasper's spacious study and library, now the Director's waiting room. I had all this from Cousin Isaac as he walked about looking at the books, talking, slowly turning the big globe at the window. The saintly sister Celine Phineaux promptly converted the entire property into a hospital and laboratory specializing in venereal diseases. She went to Germany, first to Munich, then to Berlin, searching for the best available (transportable) specialists in this field, and found Dr. Israel Sunshine, brilliant physician, highly regarded by his peers, yet strangely free to entertain competitive offers. He had already turned down several offers from major institutes and laboratories outside Europe. Israel Sunshine had no loyalty to his Berlin university hospital which had not justly promoted him, had not sufficiently acknowledged his professional achievement, but he loved his milieu ("Ich bin Ein Berliner!"), and he was one of several patriarchs in an extensive family network.

I was twice to the lavatory, the porcelain urinal attached to the wall a curiosity as I stood to it, groaning, pissing hot pink.

Celine Phineaux had done her research. She had a very clever young secretary who set before her all the quotas and restrictions that confronted Dr. Israel Sunshine in his career in Europe. Studying them, Celine was amazed and angered. Missouri, the American South, would liberate Dr. Sunshine from this unfair confinement. She hired three Sunshines: Israel, director, his brother Abraham, also a gifted physician in the field, associate director, and David, Israel's son, the Sunshine you wanted when you had a skin disease. It was the Sunshine Clinic, not the Phineaux Hospital. The Sunshines would run the Sunshine Clinic. Their expert practice was the major production. Celine Phineaux owned the property. Cousin Isaac had been a protégé of Jasper Phineaux. He knew very well the legend of the three Sunshines and how they came to St. Louis.

Such was the turn of events, the door to the study library opening, and in came Dr. Israel Sunshine, the very man Celine Phineaux had plucked from his comfortable German milieu and brought here to our wild Missouri piney woods. There was a warm greeting, Cousin Isaac and Herr Doktor, which is what Cousin Isaac called Dr. Sunshine. He was a handsome older man, thick wavy gray hair, an iron gray Old Testament beard, round gold spectacles, ruddy cheeks, bright blue eyes, and he had an erect military stance. His English was precisely articulated, even in its jovial register, as he shared a pleasantry with Cousin Isaac. "And this is young Mr. Finn," he said, turning to me, having already made the decision that Huckleberry was not an appropriate name for someone suffering a venereal disease. I appreciated his tact. He held me in his deliberative gaze, which I tried hard to meet, to show I had the courage to endure what was forthcoming, the Sunshine treatment.

"Tomorrow," Dr. Sunshine said, "we attack the enemy. Examination in the morning, consultation in the afternoon, treatment in the evening." I was blinking and swallowing. "Just a gentle wash of your bladder, Mr. Finn," he added, handing me a small glass of medicine, which I downed on the spot.

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That night I fetched up the pipe Cousin Isaac had given me and finished that brown plug of something. It gave me a gust of good feeling. I remembered Cousin Isaac said first off, I was not going to die, which I now accepted as settled truth. I had to pay for that release, typically lose a limb or an organ, I knew that, isn't that the true fact about any hospitalization, and where, after all, was my problem located. Alas, my machinery down there, a soft pile of viscera, an ooze of tubes. I'm the only person who has ever looked at my cock. Mrs. Tibbs did not see it. At an early age, water splashing naked in the creek with other tykes or pissing in the weeds with the lads, I was quickly aware that I lacked the hood that snugly enclosed their cocks. Tom's was hooded. Jim's was shrouded. Neither of them ever mentioned my stripped seared soldier gamely standing beside them when we all stood to piss in the Mississippi river. I took it as a congenital deformity, Pap's ugly piece the original deformity. In my early teens I realized I would

have to explain the bare-naked condition of my cock to a virgin wife and would need a good simple explanation. It was an anxiety in those years, but I put off the problem of the explanation for later, when I took on a marital life.

I stood at my window. The hot humid night was vibrant with insect talk, raspy, humming, little frantic bodies banging into the muslin screen. Sunshine Clinic was shut down. A lantern was hung here and there. I was looking for positives. God said, through his principal agent, Isaac Phelps, I was not going to die. I was strong in this acceptance. I was now finally going to get a medical opinion about my cock's missing hood, what it meant, how it happened, even as I took up the cross of the impending treatment. I'd asked Cousin Isaac did they ever amputate, and he said "course not," with just the merest hesitation.

I remember the examination room, its cabinets and tables, its several sinks, its rows of bottles, its trays and devices. Young Dr. Sunshine interviewed me. In the background Herr Doktor busied himself with a device, listening to my answers. My parents were both dead, my father a drunkard and a criminal. I was a sergeant-major in Captain Billy's regiment. I had sprained joints, was cut to shreds in a melee, here were the scars, three days deaf after that twelve pounder cannon blew up, killing everybody except me. Young Dr. Sunshine wrote it all down, a summary of what I'm telling you in this narrative. Next, he thumped my chest, looked into my yawning mouth, stared into my eyes, peered into my ears, finally parting my curly locks looking for lice. "Just a precaution," he said. We looked frankly at each other. David Sunshine wasn't all that much older than I was, yet he had semi-divine powers, knew the mysteries of nature, could cut a person open, and did. Must be he was leaving his twenties just as I was entering them. He asked me to remove my trousers and linen. Here it begins, I thought. I took them off and put them aside on the near table. I stood there in my shirt tail, my afflicted sore cock hung in space, dangled, ashamed.

I see that young Dr. Sunshine is holding a finely shaped wooden wand, an arm's length wand, with a perfectly cut little ivory hand at the end of it, fingers, thumb, palm, and with it he lifts my cock up for inspection, his other hand holding a magnifying glass. I'm trying to think of how to explain the absence of a cowl for my cock.

"Ah," he said. He sat back in his chair and looked at me, eyebrows lifted.

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There it was, my deformity exposed, I was a freak.

Herr Doktor came over to where I was standing, my cock still in the cool ivory palm of young Dr. Sunshine's wand. Herr Doktor also had a wand with an ivory hand and ever so gently he turned my cock which still lay, inert, in Young Doctor Sunshine's ivory palm. The wands, I'd later learn, were Chinese instruments. Some part of the Sunshines' celebrity in the region had to do with the diverse non-European medical devices and potions they brought calmly into use.

"You're circumcised, Mr. Finn," Herr Doktor said, putting up his wand.

I thought about it. I didn't know what it meant. I knew I had the clap, but this new information was like saying: you have leprosy, and this isn't what we do at the Sunshine Clinic.

"What does that mean?" I said it quietly to myself: sir-cum-sized, and it did sound like a court sentence, like you're doomed.

"Your foreskin was surgically removed at birth," Doctor Sunshine said.

A flash of anger came over me. Who could have done such a cruel thing to an infant? It had to be Pap trying to castrate me, to wreak total havoc on Mam. I said to the Sunshines it had to be the doing of my evil father, and what did it mean, was I already sexually disabled even before I got the clap. "No," said Herr Doktor, "the person who did this cutting was very skillful and did an excellent job." Again, I'm in his somber gaze and this time I can't meet it with a return gaze. I look away because I'm angry and confused. "*Your foreskin was surgically removed at birth*." It was a court sentence. Circumcision was the story of my life, a vital piece of my equipment taken from me as I lay squalling in some dismal charity hospital, unprotected, unwanted. I wanted my foreskin back.

Young Dr. Sunshine was putting away instruments in a noisy tray.

I saw that the wands were kept side by side in a little rack. "Lunch is excellent today," Dr. Sunshine said, "thin potato soup, soft brown bread, and an apple. Enjoy it on your veranda. Bristow will come and get you at four." It was ten in the morning. Well, I

had my books. I could roam in the library, walk in the allotted yard, but I liked nothing more than to settle with a cherished book, so I took to the veranda.

39

Teacher said: “Moisten your slate with a damp sponge. Observe the disappearance of the moisture.” A lifetime ago, seemingly, on a reprisal raid, we looted and burned a hamlet somewhere in south central Kansas. I found in one burning house a shelf of books, which I tried to rescue, but only came away with two. One was an illustrated geography primer. It goes everywhere I go. I can recite passages. “High up in the valley, when the river is low, we see *pebbles* in its bed; lower down, the pebbles are worn into *gravel*; and as we get still farther down, we find the gravel ground into *sand*.” The life history of a pebble. I sat on the veranda holding my singed smoky primer and looked out at the grounds. A sward, some trees, an older gentleman in a wheelchair, hot Missouri sunlight on the old fellow. Here comes the attendant. How would the primer organize the parts of this picture?

Now that consultation was next, I was feeling better, last piss was a pinch here and there, otherwise a fairly normal flow. If I was miraculously self-healing, Dr. Sunshine would certainly say so and spare me the rigor of his treatment, I was almost sure of that. I went back to my primer, to the *strait* and the *isthmus*, to what is a *bay*. At four Bristow knocked on my door. He was a young brown man in the same white linen shirt and trousers the Sunshines wore. His English was Caribbean, musical, precisely pronounced. Bristow was a collegial assistant, a specialist, a magician with a catheter. “Bristow’s catheter” had its own draw at the Clinic, but you had first to affirm with a signature that the color of Bristow’s skin did not offend you. He was here to prepare me for the consultation, which would take, at best, an hour, and to assure me most solemnly of the sacred confidentiality of every patient treated at the Clinic, therefore to speak freely, hold nothing back, as medicine was simply about the truth. Also, he offered his services as Dr. Sunshine’s assistant for the duration of my treatment, if I did not object to the light brown color of his skin.

Two new words: sir-cum-sized, catheter.

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I followed Bristow down corridors finally to a twisting staircase that took us to a cavernous vaulted basement, part of which stored wine and comestibles. I saw a huge wheel of orange cheese. I saw racks of dully glistening wine bottles. A turn and next we were walking through a sleeping area with rows of cots. It was eerily cool, lanterns hung here and there, tables and chairs along the wall. Hard sleeping in midsummer Missouri, but not down here, underground. We reached a green door, Bristow giving it a single knock.

It was the Director's summer sanctum, also the wizard's lair, its walls hung with drawings of the several major human systems, the vascular blue and red, the digestive green-brown and yellow, the nervous (what color was it?), drawings of the skull's interior, cross sections of the face (ugh). And yes, there it was, a cross section of a penis and testicles. His medicine knew our invisible insides. I took it all in, the wall hangings, the serpentine tubing, desk, chairs, bookcases, a round conference table. We sat at the conference table. I thought Bristow had left us, but he suddenly reappeared from behind a curtain pushing a caddie containing a pitcher of cool cistern water, a pot of tea, cups, a plate of biscuits and crackers. I saw white linen napkins. It was the way rich people ate on the "Rita Bee," with white linen napkins and heavy silver. "Stay for a cup of tea," Dr. Sunshine said to Bristow. Bristow said: "I'll just snatch a biscuit," did so, and was gone.

Dr. Sunshine was silent, shading his eyes with his hands, looking down, and when he spoke, he did not lift his head. He spoke to the space directly before him. "So, Mr. Finn," he said, and the German accent was just there, audible, "you were a juvenile runaway who gave material assistance to a fugitive slave and then you were a highly regarded trooper in Captain Billy's slave-catching militia. You've led quite a varied life for such a young fellow, Mr. Finn, and now you have contracted the infection known as gonorrhea, your latest adventure, your present challenge." My tea was suddenly flat, cold. Why bring up my time in Captain Billy's regiment? I had mixed feelings about that whole enterprise. Reprisal is the worst word in the English language.

The Director was still inside his visoring hands, speaking to the table. I would later learn he was famous for his hidden face when he delivered diagnoses. When you got a verdict, he was not looking at you. Cousin Isaac, he said, was his best American friend, his adopted brother. When Israel Sunshine and his large family got off the boat in St. Louis, first time on the Mississippi, first time in the slaveholding American South, Cousin Isaac was there, managing the arrival, seeing them to safe comfortable quarters, giving special attention to a little disabled Sunshine child. Cousin Isaac had more or less adopted me, was invested in me, so, by certain adoption laws, I was also a Sunshine.

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He looked up at me, that deliberate gaze, not unlike Tom Sawyer's juvenile version, at once searching and measuring, sober. "Huckleberry isn't a name," he said. "If you're going to be an honorary Sunshine, you can't be Huckleberry Sunshine. At the moment your name is Nemo, Nobody. You have to find or choose your name. When you do, you are bound by family law to notify your relatives at the Sunshine Clinic."

Somber Sunshine humor.

Nemo Finn, I was thinking, I rather liked the swing of it. There was a Ringo Sweeney in Captain Billy's band and I always admired his name, Ringo. The anchoring drag of the name, Huckleberry, brought me back to the cold fact that Nemo is just a version of Huckleberry, not a name, so the solution of my identity was still before me. I wasn't a Phelps. I wasn't a Sunshine. I was in fact Nemo Finn and I lacked the cowl that kept every other boy's dick snug in its sack. Hello, my name is Nemo, my cock is naked and I've been treated for gonorrhea at the Sunshine Clinic. Full disclosure had to be the rule in my future sexual life, which would probably mean no sexual life. Susan Mary Tibbs, she was a truth I had to tell, if ever I came to it with a woman ready for it. I felt a pinch in my cock, a pour of hot piss was suddenly brewing, I had to interrupt our conversation and go seek the lavatory that was outside the consulting room. Pound the wall, pissing.

When I reentered the consulting room, Dr. Sunshine was just meticulously adding a brown liqueur to a small glass of water. "Sorry," he said, "you're now restricted to water." I sat down to my glass of dead well water, and glumly munched on a cracker.

Herr Doktor was making himself comfortable at the round conference table, had rearranged his pillows, sat in his white linen raiment, the king of this castle. No alcohol at the Sunshine Clinic, with some exception. No smoking at the Sunshine Clinic, with some exception. A long black cigar was produced and lit. "But not for you," he said. Tea I could have and here it was, poured by Herr Doktor, handed to me by Herr Doktor. I was Cousin Isaac's protégé, hence this casual intimacy, which I found vaguely threatening. What if I wanted to refuse treatment? Cousin Isaac had said, do what he says, Israel Sunshine is the best, and it was almost an order, now that I was thinking about it. How to say no thanks to this astonishing person with his European manner, his German accent, his princely powers, his fame as a doctor, and yet withal a modesty, no assertion of his superior personality? He was the very soul of intelligent compassion. I was doomed.

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"Well," Dr. Sunshine said, "perhaps a sip," and produced a silver thimble into which he poured the brown liqueur. I still don't know what it was, I never again tasted anything like it, it was better than white lightning, which was a punch in the nose, this slipped down and made itself cozy deep inside your central cavity, what can I say. I was too shy to ask what it was. Thimble gave up five sips. I could easily have done seven sips. I was doomed, but I relaxed.

"How did it happen?"

I told him the story.

He again went hooded, hands up, face hidden, speaking as if he were reading a text. "She did not know she was infected. She contracted it from her husband. Without active symptoms, she may never know she is infected. She will never again be with a man not her husband. That line of infection is sealed off. The husband is still at large, an active menace to public health, and now you are in the grip of that clap, so to speak, the other line of infection. It's a gift to public health, you're coming to the Clinic to confront this contagious disease, Mr. Finn, to arrest its progression in you and in the world."

I felt a clamp around my wrist.

Undergoing the Sunshine treatment, I was a social hero.

My legs were fidgety at that round conference table, feet tapping. I tried to say no thank you, I decline the Sunshine treatment, but I couldn't speak the words, knowing the question that would follow. What next? Rot and die, I suppose. My mind was fuzzy. I was in a little shock, I heard Dr. Sunshine say I was fortunate, I was in an early stage of the infection, and then came a spill of terms, two of which struck through my mental haze: *caustic* and *meatus*, and are still etched in memory. I was in the chute. I was underway. There was no going back.

Then Dr. Sunshine was talking about morality and venereal disease. "Gonorrhea," he said, "is an accident*,* not *a* punishment*.* Don't moralize the infection." He didn't want me to expend valuable energy on regret and blame. Interrupt those thoughts, he said, with literature, and reminded me that the Phineaux Hall library was at my disposal. Treatment began at eight. I was going to drink salted water, flush my bladder, soften my urethra. Something like that, scary inscrutable terms rushing past me.

Then, a pause. Dr. Sunshine thoughtfully finished his cigar, stubbed it out, put the butt in a little silver container, this into a side pocket. He had to attend a political convention in Columbia. He was leaving tomorrow. He would be back in a week, he guessed. His eminently qualified brother Abraham, called A. D. by his familiars in the clinic, would begin the treatment, Clyde Bristow his assistant, a genius with catheter and syringe. The Director was pulling a bell cord, and here was Henson, a middle-aged attendant, almost bald, with a flat impassive face, in his Clinic uniform. Henson brought me back to my room. A thick slice of crusty bread, a pat of butter, and a wedge of cheese, dinner, was waiting for me, plate and napkin. Henson would return at eight.

When it was over, and I had no symptoms, seemed to be in ordinary health, I sat again in the consulting room, amid the drawn tubes and cavities, before the cross-sectioned penis, my penis, our penis, dangling like Jesus from the cross. I now understood my penis better than any other organ in my body. What a piece of work it is. I had no idea. I was waiting for Doctor Sunshine to appear. Eustace was here with the buggy, I was packed, ready to return to Mrs. Duggan's boarding house in St. Louis. I had passage on the dear old "C. H. Jones" upriver to Hannibal.

The night before Henson took me to the cook and the laundress, to the several attendants, slaves, with soft black Missouri accents, and I gave each a modest gratuity, an acknowledgment of their service. It was Henson's suggestion. I just assumed Cousin Isaac paid the bill and I walked free. To Henson his due. Clyde Bristow was not present at this leave-taking. We'd already had a tender conversation. He was a slave treated as a free man, highly valued for his clinical skills, who had his own quarters on the campus, a modest cottage, and yet a slave, not in charge of his life. When we talked, Bristow mostly held forth on the Director, who had discovered Bristow as a boy working as a stitcher for a barber in Kingston. If you were cut, stabbed, slashed, this skinny kid sewed you up and there was hardly ever an infection. The Director had lifted him into medicine, had given him the finest German and Swiss instruments, had enabled him to perfect his skill. Also, to play the violin, to read the Bible, Old and New Testament. I didn't know what a Prussian was, and Bristow did. It was the key to the Director's personality, Bristow said, his knightly bearing, his military language.

Bristow must have had some kind of arrangement with the Clinic, a salary, a stipend, his signed free papers in a drawer. It was said certain patients thought Bristow's manner a little too free, too familiar, but they did not reject Bristow as their nurse, signing the disclaimers, grumbling to Dr. Sunshine. In some weird way the Sunshine Clinic was the best place for Bristow.

Bristow said Dr. Sunshine's prognosis would go something like this. He couldn't say I was cured. He couldn't say I was no longer infectious. We had attacked my lodged gonorrhea with a heavy charge of poisons, injected right through the meatus into my urethra (spell the word), deftly done by the magician, Clyde Bristow. We had forced the infection from the field. It was seemingly gone. But this infection could retreat to some remote station in your body and lurk there for years waiting for you to stub a toe or sprain an ankle, produce the right inflammation, and then *M'sieu Clapier* would come roaring back and once again, years later, you had *chaude-pisse*, as the French have it.

The Director, Bristow said, was often too dark in his farewell summaries. He didn't want you to leave with a song in your heart. He wanted to quell your enthusiasm. He wanted you to be prepared for bitter disappointment. At the same time, he expects you to know our Sunshine treatment for gonorrhea is the gold standard in your beloved

South. Cotton barons, cotton brokers, businessmen of every kind, military officers, bishops, ministers, ride the steamboats up and down river, snag a venereal disease, it was your ticket, if you were lucky, to the Sunshine Clinic. If you had to ask the price, you already weren't eligible. Wait until Mr. Isaac puts our bill before your eyes. Don't be too surprised. It is pretty fair, whatever it is. We're in a market, you know, other clinics and hospitals in your beloved South, and then all those transient physicians selling ridiculous potions and pills, promising speedy cures.

It was simply true, I was standing there, I felt good, had no fever, and readily, happily, pissed. I stayed some extra days at the Clinic working in the stable calming the Director's prized bay mare, waiting for the Director's return.

Bristow had come to my room. We all knew Dr. Sunshine went to Columbia to discuss a new state constitution, one that would guarantee Missouri's neutrality in the impending war, that he went expecting rational debate, had written a speech urging the Assembly to consider the example of the Swiss Federation, and discovered, to his surprise, that his faction, his political brotherhood, was only interested in how to seize the muskets and ordnance in the Arsenal at Jefferson Barracks. At one point there was a tumult, shoving, punching, the Director was jostled, someone struck him with a stick. Bristow was shown the angry red bruises on Dr. Sunshine's forearm, where he'd been clutched, and the great purple yellow bruise on the Director's hip. Bristow had Jamaican remedies for such bruises.

As the Director submitted to the sting and burn of the oils and lotions, he bitterly regretted he and his family had not given sufficient attention to the political situation in Missouri. In Europe, in Prussia, the Sunshines dealt with ongoing religious strife, Protestant/Catholic, each side a murderous heavyweight, armed to the teeth. Choosing sides, it was a nightmare. Daily life, wherever you lived in north central Europe, was grim, the atmosphere tense, anxious. The Sunshine family was happy in St. Louis, Missouri, and he, Israel Sunshine had built a bubble in the piney woods, a Clinic where religion and politics did not matter. He believed these American sides would negotiate another grand Missouri compromise, one that would let the crisis simmer for another decade, giving each side truly time to consider, time enough for the Sunshine family to reconsider their investment in our beloved South.

The Director had come back to the Clinic at once alarmed and dispirited. Serious people in Columbia and St. Louis said in public meetings that the war would begin in St. Louis at the Jefferson Barracks, each side wanting to seize the Arsenal, all this not too far from the Clinic in its snug piney woods. Israel Sunshine was a Prussian. He knew what quartering armies did. Phineaux Hall was a perfect headquarters. He was also a fatalist. He saw his fields decimated; his livestock butchered. The Clinic had to prepare for war and the first thing was to hide the wine bottles, leaving only a few questionable ones behind, so looters wouldn't be too angrily deprived. We stood and talked, Bristow prepping me on Herr Doktor's mental and emotional state of mind. Family treasures were being sent off to safe deposits in the countryside. I heard a faint jingle of a bell. We shook hands, softy, because his long delicate fingers could not be grasped. "This world is ending," I said. "We'll meet again in the new one."

"You're a curious kind of white boy, Mr. Finn," Bristow said, leaving.

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Here was Herr Doktor in his shirtsleeves and suspenders. His gray locks were awry. I was taken aback. He had been in the laboratory before sunrise doing an inventory. "You've been far from my thought," he said, seating himself at the round table. "I don't need to think about you. I've read my brother's report. I've got Mr. Bristow's opinion. Go, in peace." He thought this over, as I was thinking it over. "Well," he said, "we'll probably next see each other in uniform. Mine will be gray. I own forty-seven slaves." I lingered, afraid to ask, yet determined to do so, until he glanced curiously at me and the light came into his eyes.

"Ach," he said, "Der Schwanz."

He immediately went hand hooded again talking to the table. "Many nations and races practice ritual circumcision, the Jewish people, Muslims, our very own Mormons. You could very likely have been an abandoned Mormon baby. Jewish people circumcise their sons because they believe there is a divine command, and for other reasons, the best one being sanitary. You don't want to be an old uncircumcised man.

Things get moldy and crusty in that hood when you're forty." He looked up at me, eyes sober, deliberate.

I appreciated the information, I said, but in my direct experience I had never encountered a penis without a prepuce (his word). It might be elsewhere in the wide world everyone was circumcised, but in America no one was circumcised, so I was a freak, deformed, and girls will want to know where my foreskin is and who removed it. They could be disgusted.

A long pause, Dr. Sunshine frowning as he thoughtfully engaged my complaint. Then he stood up, undid his belt buckle, dropped his trousers and his drawers, and stood before me, his entire machinery exposed in the morning sunlight, a large brown cock, a glans the size of a Spartan shield, bare to the world. I gazed aghast at Dr. Sunshine's dangling circumcised penis, at the old Billy goat ball sack, scrawny thighs, a bit of a hairy potbelly. Then he nimbly drew his clothes up. "End of argument," he said. "You could have been a Mormon baby. You could have been a Jewish baby. Someone, probably your mother, made the effort, got you to the barber, had your little member clipped to signify who you are, Mormon or Jewish, and she didn't call you Huckleberry. Circumcision was her gift to you." I was still registering Dr. Sunshine's Jupiterian equipment. Mormon baby, Jewish baby, alien creatures, bizarre notions, I didn't let them in. Later, in the buggy, rattling along, I saw how right he was. She was still alive, still spoke, in the fact of my circumcision, her decision, her statement, and I knew her name, another gift, Dr. Sunshine said, from the mystery of your parentage.

He walked out on the porch of Phineaux Hall with me and stood next to a pillar. Efrom was sitting motionless in the buggy drawn up on the gravel driveway. It was a hot sleepy Missouri day. I had learned long ago to relax into the heat, so I stood comfortably beside Dr. Sunshine as he seemed to survey his peaceful realm. "I thought we had ten more years of talking," he said. "I thought compromise was still possible." I had not myself given much attention to the clamor that was everywhere ringing in our Mississippi world. I knew about Jim. I knew about Tom. That was my politics.

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The Director produced another long black cigar, lit it, blew a big plume of fragrant smoke, and passed it to me.

“My beautiful clinic will be bombarded.”

He smoked damned fine cigars. He drank elixirs.

“Finish it,” he said, producing another one, lighting it.

We stood on the porch, smoking. I’m basically still a kid, though I rode with Captain Billy, and this always gave me muscle with adults. Herr Doktor was the master of this domain, a celebrated physician, and yet he was easily confidential with everyone, told them what he thought, listened to what they said, and then again, I was Isaac Phelps’s protégé. I was sort of in the Sunshine family. “We are sending David to Jamaica in September,” the Director said. “A. D. and I are already commissioned officers in the state militia. This is our country, Mr. Finn. I own forty-seven slaves.” It was a number that sealed off further inquiry. They were perforce Confederates, not a Unionist in the entire Sunshine family, and they would all rally to the Bonnie Blue Flag.

My question, which I could not ask, was about Clyde Bristow, about solemn Henson, the other slaves who worked in the clinic and on the plantation part of the Clinic. Must be there were private agreements, contingency plans and policies. I’d like to know what they were.

We stood, smoking.

“Your cousin Isaac is in Montgomery looking out for our interests,” the Director said. “We must be designated a hospital, not available for any military use.”

I wanted Cousin Isaac to be in St. Louis looking out for my interests, and what were they?

“I am happy in St. Louis, Missouri,” the Director said, “hot though it is. My family has flourished in our beloved American South. This clinic is what I have done with my life.” A pause. He put out his cigar, shredded the stump. I continued to puff on mine. I still had something to say to him, to ask him, and couldn’t find the words. “Mr. Finn,” he said, “I hope you find your name.” What were my interests? What will I do with my life? The only useful truth I had at the moment was my circumcised cock. It meant I was briefly beloved, seen to, marked, as you could see by the neat absence of my foreskin. She wrote my name with that bleeding circle, and it wasn’t Huckleberry.

Efrom was picking up my satchel, giving me an incredulous look, how dare I make him sit on the buggy bench outside in Missouri midsummer midday, waiting and waiting. He would freeze me out on the way back to St. Louis. I couldn't make it up to him, short time that I had in St. Louis. Dr. Sunshine walked to the buggy with me. We shook hands. "I hate violence," he said. "Me, too," I said. A pause, Efrom, reins in hand, ready to go, listening intently to Dr. Sunshine look for his words. "You were discussed in Columbia, Mr. Finn. Certain people knew about your exploits with Captain Billy's Regiment, that you were handy with a short saber. I'm authorized to offer you a commission in the Missouri National Guard, second lieutenant, our regiment. You'll have to go, sooner or later, so come with us now. I've got a front-line infantry company that desperately needs your attention. In Hannibal go see Mr. Ford, the district attorney. He'll sign you up properly."

I had got myself up on to the buggy bench, seated myself beside Eustace, and looked down into Dr. Sunshine's mature handsome face. I saluted him. We didn't do much saluting in Captain Billy's regiment, the captain and the first lieutenant, that's about it, but I was moved to salute Dr. Sunshine. This is how quickly things were happening in the world around us. A little while ago we were doctor and patient. Now we were soldiers getting ready to repel invaders from Illinois and Iowa.

He stepped back and saluted me. "Jack Ford is your man," the Director said. I knew Mr. John Ford in Hannibal. He was one of Miss Arabella Watson's minions. "We'll see," I said, and off we went, wheels rolling, Eustace silent beside me, clucking to the horse, snapping the reins. I would not sit behind him on a cushioned seat, lord of the manor, I would do a white person's penance, ride the pine. Remember, I'm fresh from the treatment room at the Clinic, and I was immediately aware that Efrom had our horse in a restful gliding gait, his answer to my penance.

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I had two things to do in Hannibal, connect with Tom Sawyer and find my way to the person who would let me speak to Sadie Watson, Jim's wife, to let her know Jim's estate was in a safety deposit box in a St. Louis bank under her name. She already knew Isaac Phelps was managing Jim's business. I was also to discover her situation and offer assistance, money of course, and it might be Sadie Watson had fresher news of Jim than I had, seeing him off on Jackson's Island. I knew Jim trusted me to make these moves. I had just to manifest myself, stand before her, the only white person Jim trusted, now her white trustee. Encourage her. A civil war was coming, and it would bring Jim back to Missouri and his family. I could tell her that, but she already knew whatever I might tell her. I was just there to affirm Jim's presence, his ongoing spousal vigilance. It would be difficult, but I would arrange this encounter, and bring her a measure of tasty food, a morsel of cheese, a piece of buttered bread.

I was looking forward to this meeting with Sadie Watson. I barely knew she existed. We were almost to the Gulf of Mexico when Jim finally allowed that he was married and had a deaf child. I was surprised. As Tom's gang saw him, Jim was just a big older slave boy who sang and danced on the docks when special steamships arrived. He did man's work, but he enjoyed the gang's juvenile company when he was let in to show a new juju charm or tell a new story about sorcerers or conjurers. Caroline Watson had no idea who Jim was. He was her bumbling slow slave who actually did a great deal apart from the personal service of fetching stuff and tending her garden. For example, he carefully tended the other little slave gardens tucked into Miss Watson's big garden.

At first it shook me, this abrupt revelation of Jim's other life, a life where Jim was a husband and a father, where he was a mature adult, a different person altogether from the genial cooperative Jim I knew on the raft, and then I got over it. Surely, he played me. He had to keep me close. He came upon Pap dead in that boat. My troubles were over. I could jump off the raft any time I wanted to. Jim didn't tell me. It was his useful secret and put me at risk, linking our fates, so we went on together, I'm thinking Pap and his minions are still hunting me to kill me and claim my treasure. As it happens, I'm free. He isn't. I was Jim's only ticket back north to Hannibal and family. We had a single card to play, our act, I'm delivering a mute 'slow' slave to Mr. Gordon Ramsay

who lives hereabout, and do you have any food to spare as I am sure enough powerfully hungry.

***

Jim didn't tell me Pap was shot dead and when he did tell me, later, when he was safe, he had an alibi: he wanted to spare me the sight of Pap's dead face with the bullet hole in his forehead. Actually, I might have gotten a cold satisfaction seeing the old villain plugged. I knew why Jim had to lie to me. His family depended on him, trusted him to return and rescue them, and it was just me, my little puny fate at risk. I understood his reasoning. I never said anything about it. Nor did he. After the Phelps farm fiasco, and his emancipation, the brief time we were together, Jim was completely a mature adult person. Not the Jim who ambled and capered in our shared childhood, who amused us with song and dance, this Jim Watson, the same person, James Watson, was a strong black young man who was about his business. Once he enjoyed entertaining the white town boys, who were a tough audience. We were his relaxation from an arduous life satisfying the first Miss Watson's demands, bringing her stuff, cleaning her stuff, tilling and tending her field, also being a respected citizen in the slave and free black community, performing its civic duties.

Jim needed a break, and his alibi was commerce. He had something to trade or sell. The show was free. I would notice Tom Sawyer critically observing Jim when Jim spun some really good tale that had surprise and suspense. Tom's stories, always about heroes and villains, were pumped up and predictable. I could see the admiration and hatred in Tom's cold observance, that awful stew, beginning to cook. Tom would on occasion rudely interrupt Jim, break up the gathering, on some excuse, send Jim packing with a gibe and an insult, Jim prancing away, ululating, then gone, his interrupted story lingering in our minds. Jim was avidly looking forward to a future in which we gang members, his rapt audience, no longer counted. At some point Tom realized that we, his Gang, were an audience, Jim's audience, that we weren't a gathering of warlords, we were an audience in Jim's expert spell, and that this was a dangerously wrong situation.

***

Tom Sawyer was aghast. I couldn't visit Sadie Watson. The new Miss Watson had rented Sadie to a tobacco farmer outside Hannibal to do hard outside work picking worms from the tobacco leaf in the broiling sun, so intense was the new Miss Watson's hatred for this slave wretch who answered to her surname, Watson, who was Jim's wife. Expert lawyers in New Orleans were at work invalidating the first Miss Watson's will, revoking the emancipation decree, erasing the name James Watson, returning the imposter James Watson to his previous station in life, a slave with a simpler single name. Also, and Tom was vehement on this issue, I should have no connection with white or black Watsons. He and the boys had carefully reassured local people that I was not an abolitionist, that I was basically a true son of our beloved South, so I could move freely about in downtown Hannibal. People were fearful, Tom said, seeing abolitionists everywhere, fomenters of slave uprisings. Special posses patrolled the wharves, checking passengers on and off the boats.

Well, I still had connections. I visited Romeo (Hector's son, Hector deceased), at night in the church basement, where he slept, and I found Maisie, at night, in the back of Ma's doggery down on the South Dock, sitting on a stump, with a mug of beer. Life was now a daily ordeal working for the new Miss Watson; the sweet life Maisie had serving the Widow Douglas was gone for good. Romeo also had bitter grievances, as he had not inherited, with the custodial job, Hector's privileges, his work releases, his freedom to visit relatives. Romeo was doing much more work than his father had, work not becoming a church custodian. The hand that washed and oiled the pew should not also grip the sewage shovel. That was Romeo's position.

Jim, he said, made it to Cairo. Rinsey, that big fireman on the "Eulalia," saw Jim, dressed up, coat, white shirt, tie, and all, giving a speech at some meeting in Cincinnati. Slave crews on the river steamers brought news up and down the river, delivered personal news, even packages. Hector had several encounters with such a courier. He had that good news of Jim, but no personal message. The letter I'd picked up in St. Louis was Jim's most recent communication with Hannibal and me. Find out, his letter

said, wife and child, and I was doing it. Maisie knows about Sadie Watson, Romeo said, go see Maisie any Saturday night she hangs out at Ma's, lurking in the backyard.

***

I brought out two mugs of beer, a wedge of cheese, and a big pretzel. I sat down cross-legged on the ground next to Maisie on her stump and then she slid down and joined me, the stump now our leaning post. She could have been my older sister, probably in her late twenties, and when she was in the Widow's service, always crisply attired, the aprons spotless. Now she was untidy, her hair unkempt, frizzy, one cheek looked swollen, her blouse and skirt ripped and ragged. It broke my heart to see her like that. I said nothing. I had first to secure the news of Sadie Watson and the daughter. Suddenly I didn't want to know, the immensity of the bad news that was necessarily forthcoming staggered me. I was, perhaps, on my way West, organizing my life, planning the journey, and here again, the pull and drag of impossible obligations, Hannibal, crawling with murderous idiots, holding me. I should have been free. I was still without a family, my actual family history the puzzle I'm trying to solve in this memoir. I would never be a member of Aunt Polly's household. I was the Widow's protégé, not ever her son, a Douglas. Jim and I were raft brothers, and if he had family, I was in that family. Slave Hannibal was kind to me when I was a starving tyke. I always liked the way slaves said my name, comfortably, themselves often stuck with comical names.

The news, of course, was awful, worse than I imagined. Sadie Watson was in a special camp on a big tobacco farm near Palmyra, field hands living outdoors in crudely pitched tents. Jim's daughter was sent to do barn work, to fetch and carry. A man named Jake Hollister owned the place. His slave workforce at the camp was hired, as Sadie was, or prisoners from a nearby county prison. Sadie's wages were paid to the new Miss Watson. Other slaves in Sadie's field gang were also doing punishment tours. Harvest in August, the sun blinding and blistering, intensive labor, vigilant drivers patrolling the rows, seeing to proper leaf worming, slaves robotic in their exhaustion, this was Sadie's daily grinding existence. Maisie knew a woman who had survived

Hollister's camp. The brutality was total, backbreaking labor by day, physical assault at night. Maisie was certain the new Miss Watson sent Sadie to the Hollister Estate, so it was called, because she was still furious about the money that had gone from the Watson estate, now her estate, to a wretched felonious upstart Jim, who was going around the country as James Watson. If she couldn't successfully contest her sister's will, she would extract some value from this thieving family, if only a pittance, Sadie's wages, and if Sadie succumbed to malnutrition and heat prostration, alas for that.

***

Then, a night with Romeo and a night with Maisie behind Ma's backyard doggery. Today's labor was to do something about Sadie Watson and little deaf Elizabeth. I promptly raised the issue with Tom who groaned to hear of it. He had stepped away from the Jim business and so should I, all time and energy given to the Jim business a total waste, a kind of moral stupidity. It was the fight we got into on the "Rita Bee," my bringing food to Jim who was in steerage, my exhibiting the strangeness of the association, a young negro man, an adolescent white boy. I had to accept our Southern world as it was, Tom said. A big war was coming, the chance to do something fine and splendid in a single day, a single battle, focus on that. We were going to besiege Washington, D. C. We were going to win the war. Our generation of war comrades would inherit the state, which ever state we were in. We could then appropriately turn to the question of slaveholding and make the necessary social changes. This is your future, Tom said, I know you've already done some fighting for the good old cause, but marauding isn't the same thing. It doesn't offer you the big prize. This is your future, Huck, a rack of medals on your chest, a plumed hat on your head, you're a force in Missouri politics.

Tom Sawyer knew about the penal camp at Jake Hollister's Estate. He was a clerk in the Judge's law office and had seen complaints filed against the Estate: camp bodies buried on private property, sewage overflows, foul fires. The family business, Watson Enterprises, supplied slave labor when Jake Hollister said it was harvesting time at the Estate. In a single day he needed an army of pickers and cutters to comb his fields.

Other slaveholders in the county put their slaves to contract labor at the Estate, collecting wages and benefits, a cut of the crop, gifts of the finest flue cured Virginia tobacco. Judge Thatcher, semi-retired, smoked Jake Hollister's tobacco. So did Tom Sawyer. I looked at my cigar, sniffed it, light and lemony, contaminated.

"I'm getting a headache," Tom said.

***

The new Miss Watson was a political force in Hannibal. Her minions were everywhere. First Presbyterian had a new Reverend Father. Sheriff Washburn had a new deputy. The harsh treatment she dealt her slaves was now considered exemplary. Vigilance is the message in severity, she said in a town meeting, criticizing Sheriff Washburn, and by extension, Judge Thatcher. Imagine Aunt Polly and a huddle of church ladies asking the new Miss Watson to relent in her punishment of Sadie Watson, whose disabled child was given over to barn labor. Impossible, said Tom. We don't know where Sadie Watson is in that camp. We don't even know what she looks like. Guards and drivers patrol the harvest ground. We couldn't get at her. She would have to be brought to us. As he spoke, I could see that the escape artist in him was challenged. "Whatever plot you're cooking up, Huckleberry," Tom said, "remember it has first of all to deal with Miss Watson and she is, I can tell you, a cold implacable woman. The Judge is afraid of her. So, too, is the sheriff, come to think of it." I knew all this. We can't get at Sadie Watson. She has to be brought to us.

Tom said, "What is it about you? We are at this moment engaged in a criminal conspiracy to steal Sadie Watson and her daughter from Hannibal's first citizen, Arabella Watson. You always lead me into these dangerous circumstances. You are such a liability, Huck, such a drag of wronging conscience. I go around apologizing to people, explaining your innocence, that you don't know any better, didn't have Bible training, don't know how to eat proper. Every time I look at that sad face you carry about in the world, I ask myself what am I doing with this gloomy soul when I am such a happy person? I'm going to be governor of the sovereign state of postwar Missouri and

you're asking me to commit political suicide before I even take the first step. I want to be a war hero. I want you to be a war hero.

***

I was in a state of despair and frustration, wanting to do something for Sadie and little Elizabeth Watson, and clueless, only recognizing at once the urgency of their need and all the formidable obstacles to any satisfactory resolution. I had a final card to play, and when Tom finished his speech, I brought it out and placed it on the table. Tom Sawyer had done an improbable and dangerous "Evasion" at the Phelps farm, had done Jim a great wrong by playing with his fate, had shown how little he valued Jim's life, and now here it was, a real thing, a real life, and it was Jim's damsel in distress, in donjon deep and dark, and it was, for me, a matter of honor, to rescue Sadie Watson and her daughter from that horrible situation. In flight on the river Jim saved my life many times. Jim also saved Tom's life. "It isn't the same," Tom said. "I'm not obligated."

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Ma: "Maisie's been looking for you. She's out back."
Maisie: "I hate your white skin, Huckleberry Finn."

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A cold November midmorning, I'm in a crew of just picked laborers, strangers pretty much, we're loading the "Padgett" with barrels and bales, farm produce mostly. I'm coming down the ramp, in a work trance, when I almost run into a loader going up, a guy with a big sack of something on his back. Briefly staggered, we shoot each other quizzical looks, and then we move along with the line. On the wharf I step out of line to look after that guy and he's gone somewhere on deck no doubt stacking bales. What was it? A look of weird recognition, a strange charge of energy, and I see the purple gray rose red upper cheek and left eye, a wound. Someone struck him, a solid blow to

the face, and here he is, at this hard labor, I thought, already sympathetic, this person a total stranger.

Shipment loaded, the crew broke apart, men going in different directions. I lingered, looked into sheds and barns, finally into the saloons and hospitality inns, just briefly, of course, scar face gone, no sight of him, so I turned to visit Ma's on my way back to Mrs. Benson's. I'd take a bowl of Ma's fish soup and a mug from her special spigot, go outside next to the glowing stove, listen to the chatter, see the people, begin to let go of the day. Outside, I saw, at the big fire pit, a wheelbarrow with luggage in it, the guy with the black eye, sitting on a woodpile next to it, with Marcus Brown and someone else, maybe a steamboat cook's helper, the company. I was looking for him and here he was, at ease, in this backdoor crowd. They all stood as I approached.

"What I say," said Marcus Brown, "they could be twins."

***

"I'm Jack Grahame," said scar face, who was scuffed and smudged, yet curiously presentable. I was still taking him in, the luggage, the slouch hat. "We bumped into each other on the ramp this afternoon," he said. "People will say we're lookalikes. I hope that doesn't bother you."

"Huck Finn," I said.

We shook hands.

I didn't see the resemblance. My nose was broken in a Kansas skirmish. A Red Leg smacked my face just before Ed Bridger gut shot him and I never properly got the nose set right. People have said I am a tad squinty, that I always look mean. Well, damn it, I was a Border Ruffian. Jack Grahame has the face and bearing of a gentleman. I saw that immediately, a real gentleman, not Tom Sawyer's acted version. The black eye would dissolve in time, a good straight handsome face was surely there ready to appear. He's looking at me, I'm looking at him. I didn't see the resemblance, but then I don't really know what I look like. You look like your ma, Pap said.

"You're too coarse and beaten down," Jack said.

"I agree," I said. "I'm older, some."

Marcus is explaining how Jack Grahame was robbed. “He tells it very well,” Jack said. Wallet, signet ring, pocket watch. Jack has been in Hannibal four fairly miserable days, doing day labor on the docks for subsistence money, sleeping in Ma’s ice-cold long shed, waiting for his first chance to get south to St. Louis where his wise older sister has set up a cache of provision for him, his last before his destination, Monticello, Arkansas. Wise good sister, she knew her brother was too trusting a soul to travel safely any distance so she established rescue stations along his way. Local banks held packets of cash for him at his major stops. The sums, never large, were carefully counted. They were for sustenance, not pleasure. He spent them and barely got from station to station. Coming into Hannibal, Jack had five dollars in his wallet, sufficient to get him safely to St. Louis and his last cash packet.

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That was Jack’s situation and he was looking at me, his providential double, a crisp looking local fellow, of some means, roughly his age, abruptly put before him, Heaven sent, and he couldn’t ask, he could only state his situation. “Mr. Brown,” Jack said, “thinks I can work a passage to St. Louis on the “Southern Star” when it gets here. He’s friendly with the head steward. I can mop a deck. I can empty a chamber pot.” I’m looking at him, alarm bells ringing. Is this a con? His story had too much context. He spoke almost like an actor delivering lines. His plight and the promise of a big reward in the next city sounded like a con Pap and his cronies talked about in their good old days. Well, Jack couldn’t get anything out of me as I didn’t have much to take. I was safe, I was vigilant, I knew the many games con men played. At the same time, I was still somewhere pondering the cause of the punch to Jack’s eye. On the spot I decided to make a modest investment in this venture. If it was all a performance, I’d enjoy it. I took charge of the present situation. I was in action. I stood them all to another round of mug and bowl, the cook’s assistant waiting outside while I went inside for refills. A cold night, the bowls steaming. Cheers. I wanted a word with Jack Grahame, Marcus Brown and the cook’s assistant politely withdrawing.

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Did he have a change of clothes, I wanted to know. He did. He produced a work shirt and work pants from his luggage. Ma's Luke would take Ma's wheelbarrow with Jack Grahame's luggage in it up to Mrs. Benson's and tell Mrs. Benson that Mr. Huckleberry Finn has a gentleman guest who needs the back room. Jack and I were off to a bath house just beyond the far dock, its clientele mostly railroad engineers and steamboat oilers, a rank grimy lot. In a misty warm antechamber, you got down to your drawers, and if you didn't have them, you rented a two-penny towel rag to cover your privates. No nudity in the bath house. You hung your clothes on a numbered hook, got a metal disk from an attendant, always the same ancient bald black man, and then stood about, waiting. The door to the bathing room would open, a cloud of steam escaping, and out would come a troop of steamed bathers, soaked, dripping, every form and shape of mature male ugliness.

Jack was gamy, four days without bathing. To meet Mrs. Benson, he had to be presentable. We went in ten at a time, sat on a long bench before a trough. Here and there a dim orange lantern gave the long low room its soft glow. Behind us two tubs of boiling bubbling water cooking over a coal fire, three stout aproned slave women, dippers and splashers, waiting for us to get settled. We sat bent forward facing a wall and here it came, the first bucket of hot soapy water, wow, a little time to rub and scrub, then a bucket of cool water, wow, and so you sat with your brother bathers, silent, savoring the moment. Five times, with regular intervals, some bathers groaning and moaning as the cascades struck them, back of the neck, shoulders. Then a bell rang and that was it, off you shuffled, reclaiming your outer clothes in the vestibule.

As we went out into the cold evening, steaming, Jack gripped my arm. "That was amazing," he said, with some emotion. "I'm in your debt." It gave me great pleasure, that declaration. It was something to feel, feeling good, and it was new to me. Jack truly was now in my debt and there was more debt to come before he reached St. Louis, but I also owed him this good feeling, this sudden move to action. He looked good cleaned up, his wet hair slicked back. I felt like a big brother. Mrs. Benson not only welcomed Jack to her residence, she took him into her kitchen and personally treated

his wounded eye. I left Jack to it and when I saw him next, he was skillfully bandaged. Mrs. Benson had squared him away in the back room, helped him unpack, folded back the sheets on a snug little bed, saw to his toiletries. I stood in the hallway, my mouth open, incredulous, watching the severe but fair Mrs. Benson gladly accommodate Jack Grahame.

***

Later, a knock on my door, and there is Jack with a plate of cold supper in his hand, vegetables and chicken. "I've come to share," he said. I was outraged looking at that plate, its load of roasted chicken, potato, carrot and beet. The possibility of a late evening meal from Mrs. Benson's amply provisioned kitchen did not exist. I never considered it and here it was, as served in Paradise. I had cordial cool relations with Mrs. Benson. She saw me as a persecuted person, the innocent victim of the despised Arabella Watson's ire. She was of that faction of Protestant ladies in Hannibal who opposed Arabella Watson's religious dictate in civic affairs. Mrs. Benson knew I was a Finn, son of the infamous Mickey Finn. She may even have remembered me as a raggedy child on Poverty Row, as a hopeless urchin sitting slack-jawed in her Bible class, but I was Mr. Thomas Sawyer's trusted companion and Judge Thatcher had done me conspicuous service. So, I had a good room on the second floor at a very reasonable rate. Never a sumptuous cold supper. I was not regular at her meals, which she did not like, even though I had explanations. I couldn't eat in the company of strangers. I was a solitary eater. I took day jobs at odd hours. None of the missed meals could be reserved.

I had just gotten a little coal fire going to drive the damp out of the room. I rummaged about in a pack and found at once pipe and wrapped crumb, next found my can of white whiskey, next a morsel of black sausage and a biscuit. I'd deal with Jack Grahame in the morning. I wanted to relax into a precise remembrance of the events of the day, the collision on the ramp, the absurd surprise of finding Jack Grahame at the backside of Ma's doggery, obviously a young white gentleman, at his ease, chatting with brown Marcus Brown and his friend, a cook's helper. He had Tom Sawyer's presentation

of self, confident, humorous, at his ease in language, always knowing what he wants to say. He kept conversation going. Jack Grahame, same guy, but with a real upper class Southern American speech, not Tom's theatrical speech, the real thing, and it was arch and cutting, and it was also silky and soft, and I loved hearing it. What was this little piece of mud smoking in my pipe, I had no idea, Cousin Isaac always had a morsel at hand. It helped me through some bad nights when I was I first at the Sunshine Clinic.

Float, I said, see what happens.

***

But no, soft knock on my door, and here is Jack, and then he is sitting cross-legged on the floor, the plate of supper before him, and I'm to clamber down from my perch in a regular chair and join him on the carpet. I did and brought along a fat orange candle. We were camping out in my room. I passed him the can of whiskey.

"I know you're tired," Jack said, "I am, we both hauled bales and boxes today, so I won't keep you long, but this has been a day of miracles, I didn't think I could do another night in Ma's shed sleeping under stiff horse blankets, my eyeball throbbing, with no prospect of breakfast, and here I am, thanks to you, Huck, scrubbed and rinsed, bandaged, fed, set to sleep in a soft bed tonight. Mrs. Benson's given name is Margaret Mary. Did you know that? She thinks steamboats are cesspools of infection. She took my temperature. I've just a bit of a fever. She thinks I should rest and recuperate in Hannibal until the bruise is gone and I'm no longer feverish, probably five days. I could stay on here, same room, a special rate, of course only if you didn't find my presence intrusive."

I drew on the pipe and handed it to Jack, who drew.

"Monday, first thing," Jack said, "Mrs. Benson is going to her bank in Hannibal and withdraw sufficient funds for me to room and board with her and then safely to reach St. Louis where Sophie's final cache awaits me. I will repay Mrs. Benson with interest."

I was thinking that on Thursday next Tom Sawyer would be in town, back in residence, anxious to see me, full of his stories and his plans, and right there in old Aunt Polly's parlor, still pretty much the parlor we knew in our boyhood, Tom Sawyer would

meet Jack Grahame, my odd lookalike recent acquaintance, refined where I am rough, a startling encounter, and it would take Tom off his game completely. He would have to turn to this urbane handsome Jack Grahame. I was enjoying the novelty of my introducing a person of significance to Mr. Thomas Sawyer, curious to see how Tom would engage Jack's cultured manner, the way Jack spoke, like a minister, in sentences. I really wasn't listening as Jack crossed the dangerous terrain of the money question until he struck the phrase, "you will cosign," and then I was back into his explanation, which had a challenge in it, a testing. "I will give Mrs. Benson a signed note for the sum," Jack said, "and I'm hoping you will co-sign that note."

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I puffed, he puffed. It was getting better and better. I was elated. The crumb glowed in the bowl of the pipe. I was in charge of Jack's situation. No, I would not cosign his note of obligation. I would make him a personal loan sufficient to his need. I could stand the loss, if it came to that. "Hallelujah," Jack said. "Sweet Jesus." The candle flickering, chicken bones on a plate, we're sitting on the floor, as Jim and I did afloat on the big river, and it rather felt like that again, I was utterly relaxed, muscle hung from my bones, I was at liberty to say anything I wanted to say. What a thing that is, raft revery, once you've had it, you must have it again, and it is not easily regained. You can't win it or earn it. Circumstance provides a raft. You're together, alone, under the stars. Jack and I were together, strangely, alone, under the roof of Margaret Mary Benson's boarding house, and I was his rescue, his refuge. He was chewing on the little chicken bones. "Your intoxicants are divine," he said, and truly it was so, the white lightning lay a quiet heat on our full bellies, and we were beyond smoking.

"Before you go," I said, "one pressing question. How do you handle the soldier thing? What's your regiment? What branch of service? I'm asked that all the time, to threaten me, really. Many people in Hannibal still believe I am a secret abolitionist. If you're not with us, you're with them. Neutrals are, de facto, with them. Because we of the South are a threatened minority, we must have cohesion and discipline. How can I be so indifferent, so disengaged, when these great epic days are upon us? That's what

they say, and worse, that Federal troops, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa people, are massing to attack our beloved Missouri and seize its wealth. The emergency is upon us. “You are an experienced soldier,” Krumm the grocer, says, handing me my turnips and lard, drawing the attention of the other customers to my fine fit civilian figure. “You were on that great reprisal raid in western Kansas. People say you came back with an abolitionist scalp dangling from your belt. Your people in Marion County look to you for protection. What will you do, Huckleberry Finn?”

***

It had grown cold in the room. I added fuel to the fire. I could feel the good feeling dissipating, and I didn’t care. Every day the looming civil war confounded my thought and experience, this constant pressure, the crisis impending, this Northern outrage, that Southern outrage, and what was my response, my decision. I was genuinely curious to know how Jack Grahame dealt with the prospect of his military future. I resumed my seat on the carpet. I had a drink of white lightning, offered some to Jack, who was sitting head down, lost in thought. No, thanks. I downed his measure. “I haven’t decided yet,” I said, “I won’t fight to defend slavery. I can’t fight against the South, for obvious reasons.” I hesitated, another truth pressing. I didn’t feel any loyalty to slaveholding Missouri. I grew up as a weed in a Hannibal alley. Who were “my people”? Just as many people in Hannibal suspected, I was truly a snake in the grass, definitely antislavery, a private abolitionist, not an organized one, and yet I could not see myself in a federal army occupying Hannibal or St. Louis.

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“I’m not a patriot,” I said.

Jack looked up at me. A sooty tear had traced its way down his cheek. “Lordy, I’m sober as a judge right now,” he said. “You must understand, dear Huck, I am doomed. My father is a Confederate Founding Father in Montgomery, already a general in the Georgia State Militia, my twin brothers, Lewis and Lester, one is an artillerist, the other a

dragoon, graduates of the Citadel in Charleston, handsome devils, and I'm the disgraced scandalous son expelled from college, sent to farthest Arkansas, to an Uncle Judah I do not know, who manages several Grahame plantations, to learn some hard trade in cotton and pork production. I believe it is a death sentence. I might commit suicide in that roaring wilderness. The General would be glad to hear of it, I'm sure. Sophie delivers his edicts and finds ways around them. I had to be west of the Mississippi as soon as possible, out of sight, out of mind. That decree couldn't be altered, but Sophie has safe stations for me along the way to the frontier and she is planning a new approach to the General. I'm sure she has a spy at the Arkansas plantations who will keep track of me."

I was thinking of the Arkansas of the Phelps farm, of Jim chain locked in that wretched stifling shed.

Jack straightened, sat up, reached for the can. "So good to let that go. Thanks for listening to my pitiful tale, Huck. Throughout the entire scandal, my expulsion, the surprising charges, the law suit, a dueling challenge I had to decline, I saw the General only once, in passing, on one of his rare visits to Grahame manse. I was coming down the porch stairs, he was coming up, and he stopped, surprised to see me, and I stopped, scared to see him. 'Uncle Judah will set you right,' he said, and went on. It is true. I am set wrong in the world. Sophie told me, not so long ago, that our mother hated the General from the start, hated him through all the child bearing, that we were all the children of rape, all set wrong. As the first and a girl, Sophie had the worst of it, infant abandonment, long nights in a cold crib. Next, for both unfit parents, the horror of twins, who fortunately had slave wet nurses and caregivers. Then it was my turn in that sour bitter womb. What happened to mother? One day she was gone. I think I was five. I have no bad memories. She didn't injure me in any way. She has an illness and is recovering at a sanatorium in the country. That was the official story. I was suspicious from the start, but I was satisfied with that account of her departure. I didn't really miss her.

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I was trying to grasp his concept of being set wrong in the world. That was my story. I was set wrong in the world. Jack was the son of a Founding Father, his sister a Fairy Godmother. But he had the bruised eye, still an ugly sight, no money, and was, at the moment, utterly dependent on my charity. So, I granted him a wary acceptance into my league of battered orphans, I sat back against the foot of my chair, I would hear his story. "I can shoot a dueling pistol, Huck, let me assure you," Jack said, misinterpreting my silence. "I'm good for an honest duel."

"I hate the very idea of it," I said.

"So do I," said Jack.

I had contract day labor in the morning. I would leave Jack some small change for the day's pleasures and see him again in the evening. I'd probably be late for Mrs. Benson's supper but I hoped he would use his charm to get Margaret Mary to reserve my supper. It was all too much for me, the events: Ma's doggery, the bath house, Mrs. Benson's immediate infatuation, Jack's mellifluous speech manner, the credit he got just for being a Grahame. It got us liberties, we ate cold chicken off a plate placed on the carpet in my room, the pipe passing, the can, Jack's storybook story. Stupor was coming, but with a pleasant confidence that something had been achieved. I could say I'm not a patriot.

"But Huck," said Jack, "what's your story?"

"I didn't have a father, didn't have a mother, don't have a family," I said, organizing Jack's departure, with plate. I was closing the door.

"But Huck," he said.

"To be continued," I said.

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I am not a patriot. It was a relief, to say it out loud to another human being, yet in strictest confidence. I knew the patriots in Hannibal who were eagerly waiting for me to say I was not a patriot, in public or privately, didn't matter, they had long pole and tar

bucket ready, or worse, the rope. It was the Jim business and the treasure chest, that lucky strike, yielding up its gold coins and diamond jewelry to one so eminently unworthy as Huckleberry Finn, the outrage of that, splutter, splutter. Tom Sawyer was my shield in Hannibal, also the distant majesty of Judge Decatur's bench, a majesty Judge Decatur inherited from Judge Thatcher. I was slowly disappearing in town, a figure in the background, seen as a socially retarded person, perhaps indeed still the child fleeing a homicidal father, my alibi for the Jim business, and then Jack Grahame comes upon the scene and suddenly I'm front and center in the public regard, people looking at Jack's black eye, our weird twinship, and seeing me, once again in a strange relationship, first with Jim, now with a weird young Georgian aristocrat.

Tom would arrive on the "Fairfax" Wednesday evening. He will quickly learn about Huck Finn's new friend, the blond hair, the black eye, the hangout at Ma's doggery, the bath house, dinner at Mrs. Benson's boarding house. He'll briefly stop at Ma's. I'll not prepare Jack, I thought. I'll just let him be. "So, on this raft," Jack said, "Jim pretty much organized the day. You both knew who you were in the world, white master/black slave, and almost immediately it didn't matter. I understand it. In dire straits competence should rule. You were desperate to escape the clutches of Pap's villains. Jim needed you as his cover, his alibi, as he made his way back to Cairo, Illinois, and freedom. Alone, you'd soon be clutched. Alone, he'd soon be caught. Together, as a team, you had chances. Together you could practice the desperate schemes and devices of fugitive life, lying and concealing, backstabbing if necessary.

"Yes," I said.

"But what you couldn't stand, couldn't tolerate, when it came to it, was the last act, the final deed, of Jim's successful escape into Illinois, which of course had to happen, it was why you were aiding him, serving him, in that escape, to leave you, so that final firm handshake, a strong embrace, goodbye, old Huck, that was what it was all about, and you're happy, you're satisfied, you're standing alone on the dock or in the station. Jim's happy ending not your happy ending. No provision made for you at this junction. At the end of your heroic adventure, you're back at square one, alone, without a plan."

"Yes," I said.

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The first conversation was painfully awkward, Jack having no opinion or interest in the questions Tom launched his way. On the steamboats coming down the Ohio, what was the talk about the presidential election? Jack kept to himself, didn't mingle. As for Georgia politics, the General and Jack's two older brothers were the experts. Jack had been a theology/philosophy student at a seminary before undertaking this forced journey to Arkansas. What kind of special law interested Tom Sawyer; Jack wondered. Tom told him, two words. Jack had no further questions. We finished our lunch. Tom produced three blond lemony Hollister cigars. We turned to our wine glasses. "What amazes me," Jack said, "is that you were a famous boy hero, so Huck tells me, those early exploits, and here you are and I suppose there is a lot of expectation in Hannibal that you will be, once again, you know, heroic."

Fresh coffee arrived.

"I don't need to ask what you think of the new president," Tom said, turning to me. I knew the look on his face. I knew all his facial expressions. He was blandly amused but there were trickles of annoyance in the slight smile and a hint of something darker and dangerous. "Better than Bell, better than Breckinridge, better than Douglas," I calmly replied, "and you know it, Tom Sawyer. You don't have to be ultra for Jack's sake. He's not ultra. Here's my speech. I can live without South Carolina in our United States of America." Tom called for Mrs. Regan to refill our wine glasses. It was Tom's third or fourth glass. He lit up his second short Blondie. "My best friend since early boyhood," he said to Jack, pointing at me, "and we've always disagreed. He was born moral, he's a straight shooter, and I was born, so it might be said, a relativist, shifty in my statement. I may or may not affirm what I say. We never had a father, me and Huck. We're both fatherless orphans except I got the luck of the adoption draw, Aunt Polly, and Huck got a drunk Irish criminal who called himself Huck's Pap. Cousin Isaac Phelps, the smartest man I know, says Huck is an uncut gem, and yet, good Southern boy that he is, count on it, he supported Abe Lincoln."

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Day was darkening, snow flurries on the windowpane. It was a blot on Hannibal's escutcheon, Tom said, this assault on Jack Grahame, waylaid as he stepped off the boat. Worse, that the assault was not reported, that Sheriff Washburn had not interviewed Jack, did not have a description of the mugger, who must still be lurking about. Now that Jack was up and about, Sheriff Washburn should file his report, interview Jack, get a description for the circulars. Jack might even have a look at the prisoners currently in the Sheriff's jail. I was speechless, sitting over my wine glass. Tom was speaking to Jack like a police detective. His friendly question hung finally a curious question. Why hadn't Jack reported the crime? "I was struck in the eye and my wallet was taken," Jack said. That was all he remembered. It gave him a throb just to think of it.

"Well," said Tom, "thank God your eye is healing."

"Yes, better," said Jack, amiably.

I was at sea. A challenge had been refused. What was happening in Arkansas, I asked Tom, did he have any useful knowledge? Jack was going there. "Arkansas," Tom said, "is hot secesh, farm boys ready to go. No Yankee army is going to invade Arkansas, I can tell you that. I can't say the same for Missouri. Things are tense in St. Louis. Cousin Isaac is gradually, secretly, relocating his entire operation, family sent off three at a time to farms in Arkansas, bank treasures (including our little fortunes, Jim's Watson money) sent to secure sites in Arkansas and Texas. Cousin Isaac manages. Cousin Isaac is so good at foresight he should have some major position in the new administration." War talk always got Tom going. "We will contest St. Louis," Tom said to Jack, "but we don't have the guns and the men to keep her. We will contest Missouri, same story. The South has to consolidate, contract, not waste energy and resources on indefensible extremities. I heard a judge in New Orleans say that in a public meeting. Indefensible extremities. St. Louis, I thought, Missouri."

Jack sat solemn as a cat, listening. He was going to Arkansas.

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Tom drank his wine and smoked his cigar. Organizing the Confederate resistance in St. Louis was his present labor as a secret agent for Governor Jackson. “This is not going to be a good place for me to fight our war for independence,” Tom said, “far from the main action, and a losing proposition, however bravely we fight. We don’t have the muskets and the artillery. I have to get to Virginia. Cousin Isaac is working on an appointment for me on some senior general’s staff, but there are many applicants and few posts available. Huck, you’ll stay and fight for our Missouri in some band of volunteers. Is Colonel Billy going to reorganize? I can see you back in that saddle.”

Long silence.

Tom rose to his feet. It was best wishes and Godspeed, Tom shaking Jack’s hand, then gripping mine and taking me aside to say he needed to see me at ten in the morning, his cubby in the Judge’s chamber. I said I was doing contract work in the morning, bricklaying, and he said it was urgent business, couldn’t be postponed, as he was leaving the next day on the “Eleanor Dugan” for Memphis. So yes, we’d meet.

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Outside Jack was waiting for me, stamping his feet, his breath smoky. “I’m petrified,” he said as I approached, “we’re like those demonized hogs in the Bible rushing over a cliff, you and me and your friend, Tom Sawyer, and everyone else, all this war talk, it freezes me, I’m ice cold, I’m off to Ma’s for a hot toddy.” I put forefinger to my lips and he nodded. “Don’t talk about politics, I said. “I have contract labor tomorrow,” I said, “I should be back early evening. See if you can get Mrs. Benson to put aside a dish of cold supper for me.” He nodded, a diminished figure, as I now saw him, younger, scared, a kid, not the witty rascal I thought would cut into Tom’s pomposities with clever remarks. It was Tom who was in charge of that first meeting. He let that question appear in the conversation. Why didn’t Jack report this heinous crime of assault and battery on his person

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We went into Judge Decatur's private study, Tom shutting the door. He said something like this. How much did I loan Jack Grahame. A modest sum, I said. You might not recover it, he said. If so, I said, I don't care. I've enjoyed the company.

We were looking at each other.

Then we sat down. I was at the Judge's desk, in his chair, and Tom was in the adjoining big chair. No coffee, tea, biscuit, not even a glass of water. He said something like this, the riffraff down along the docks say that Jack Grahame got frisky with some young Irish stevedore and that's how he comes by his black eye.

I saw Jack in a fist fight with some wharf rat, unfairly struck, no shame in that. Go on, I said to Tom, what next?

We were looking at each other.

"Jack Grahame is a sodomite," Tom said.

I was at first unable to say what that was. I heard a lot of dirty language when I rode with Captain Billy but it might have been in Greek or Egyptian for all I knew what they were talking about. Fuck, as I understood it, was the door to dirty language and obscene images of naked men and women. I found dirty language disgusting. When Ruffians got into it camping under the Kansas skies, I always moved out of the company. Wherever I sat, alone, under the stars, I could hear their coarse laughter.

Yes, I said, and then what?

"Bill Forbes, pilot on the "Eleanor Dugan," says you were twice to the bath house with Jack Grahame. You're both living at Mrs. Benson's boarding house. People say you might not be twins, but you certainly got to be brothers or close cousins. And the point, dear Huck, is that people are seeing the strangeness of Huckleberry Finn and Jack Grahame, and some of them have heard the rumor concerning Jack. How is it, I wonder, said Tom, you get stuck to the wrong people, to Jim Watson, now to Jack Grahame. There is still talk about the golden-haired young gentleman from Athens, Georgia, living destitute in Ma's pony shed. When is Jack Grahame going? Next Wednesday on the "Columbine," I hear. For now, Tom Sawyer said, don't be seen with him. I know you don't respect reputation, but trust me, it matters very much, especially in these times. Jack is an unsavory character. He looks like you. He could do something criminal and the victim would describe you. For now, Tom Sawyer said, don't

be seen with him. He's got a few days to hang about, let him. I need you to take messages to Palmyra. Take my buggy and visit old Pete Winslow in Palmyra. He always remembers how you destroyed the English Army at the Battle of the Big Ditch. We were at play but you drew blood. You swung a mean cudgel in that fight. Pete needs to talk to you. He's thinking of becoming a Roman Catholic. Bring him back to our true faith. Let Jack go, Huck, and if your money flies back to your bank, bravo.

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I had permission to spend Christmas at the Sunshine Clinic, what was left of it. The brothers were gone, son David was in the Caribbean buying medical supplies for the hospitals his father and uncle would soon be organizing in Richmond and New Orleans. The general staff was greatly reduced. Thank God, Clyde Bristow remained, and Henson, impassive, if not somber, the silent ubiquitous majordomo. The elderly Dr. Bascombe, come out of retirement, was now the acting Director and manager of the clinic, but only in name. The very young Dr. Busby Locke, still with his adolescent pimples, and Bristow actually ran the entire operation, made all the business decisions, saw to the remaining patients and clients. Several buildings were already boarded up. Phineaux Hall was stripped bare, rugs gone, the best chairs, walls naked without their paintings. Bristow was still snug in his neat cottage on the grounds, brewing me a root tea, handing me a just rolled cheroot. I needed to replenish my medicine bag. I was low on everything. He had something new for me to taste, looked like a little grungy onion bulb, a dried mushroom.

We got quickly to business. The Clinic would hire me. I would be in charge of maintenance. I would fix things and shoe horses. I would patrol the premises. Here was Dr. Abraham's sawed-off Austrian shotgun, a thing of beauty, almost as good as that long-lost Walker Colt, same kind of heft and authority, maybe to shoot up in the tree and not at the shadowy drifters moving through our woods, just to make the noise and keep them moving. The fleas were leaving threatened St. Louis, looking for livable

countryside. No camping on this estate. Huck might also want a dog or two. Henson had a pack of scary howling hounds. Bristow was not afraid of the impending occupation. He could deal with the provost marshal. He would explain the sort of medicine done at the Clinic. Life would go on. Federal doctors would run the Clinic, but they would need the services of the present staff, especially the gifted Clyde Bristow. A bright new free life beckoned, so he thought, though he was fairly comfortable in his partial and modified slavery at the Sunshine Clinic.

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We were walking the line of the Clinic's estate, tramping it rather, as the trail was icy and dangerous: snaky roots, sudden big stones, fallen trees. Bristow wanted me to see the several places where drifters had tried to camp. The sky was pale blue, the sun a cool lemon disk. I was in my sheepskin coat and fur hat. Bristow was in a shirt and sweater with a scarf flung about his neck. He was a Jamaican man who liked to show his contempt for cold drippy Missouri weather. Where was his hat? Take just one of Henson's hounds, Bristow said. We don't want to wound a drifter, just tree him so you can give him a proper warning.

As we walked, Bristow got excited. He had a gift, a skill, dear to the afflicted older man, who rightly dreads the pipette and the tube, and this skill would keep Bristow safe whoever was in charge. If emancipation came soon, he could expect to be a leader of the new constituency of ex-slave voters and clients. If it didn't, he was personally satisfied with his present circumstances. In the strangest way, though presently enslaved, he was the freest of men.

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The question did soon arrive. What were my plans? Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, were poised to seize Missouri, their well-equipped and drilled armies prepared for intelligent battle, not like our scattered untrained lads on the South side of this coming war. "Every sane person in Missouri," Bristow said, "has at least three ranked

contingency plans beside the present plan of action, which is to support faithfully the noble cause of our independence. I can talk their talk, Huck, I love to talk their talk. The rebel grandees who come to the Clinic for treatment see themselves as founding fathers, as heroes of the first age, building a new nation apart from the old federal union, everything is so exciting, the new ventures, and so forth, but, bladders flushed, tubes scraped, in their long night hours, talking to me, night nurse, technically a slave, they freely predict their necessary defeat, often in abject despair, seeing the ruin of their fortunes.

"How do you fit in all this muddle?" I was seriously interested. "I know," Bristow said, "you think, as I do, that the South, as such, is a make-believe country, fated to collapse, and it might be you'll enlist in the Federal Navy, I can see you as a blue shirted tar, or," he paused, a new idea coming to him, "or you could go to Jamaica and work in the Sunshine's medical supply business." We trudged. "Canada," he said. "No to Mexico, no to Cuba, you don't speak Spanish, you'd be dead soon after you got there. England is possible by way of the Indies." I was freezing inside my fur and skin. He was a frosted jolly Jamaican man, lightly dressed, expounding on my possible futures. "I can grasp the perimeter from here," I said. "We need to get back. This is river cold, snow mist, and I'm plumb struck through." "Tut, tut," he said, "there's always hot soup in the pot back at my place, but we have to return to the subject of your decision." We got back. The stove was reloaded. Soup was cooking, cheroots lit, what to say, I was glad to be there, his guest, his comrade, thank God for the Clinic, and then I couldn't find words to say what was on my mind.

I turned to Bristow. "What exactly is a sodomite," I asked.

"Well," he said, "we have to talk about insertion. A woman has three available orifices. An erect penis can enter the mouth, the vagina, or the anus. A man has two available orifices. An erect penis can enter the mouth or the anus. Generally speaking, Sodomites are men who desire to insert their penis into the anus of other men."

"Hm," I said.

"I was forcibly entered twice when I was twelve and once more at thirteen," Bristow quickly said. "I hate force. My art in the practice of medicine confounds force." He let me ponder that. "Sexual insertion can be mutually satisfying only if permitted, that is

the big thing about such insertion, also there should be adequate lubrication." He was a scientist and therefore straightforward. His life work was insertion. In the Clinic, it was said, he had butterfly fingers inserting catheters into frightened old men. I had myself the benefit of that rare skill, the tender insertion, my dread of the instrument calmed.

I understood the description but couldn't see the action. The door to those scenes of insertion remained closed and I was satisfied with the closure. Later, at the right time, I would open that door.

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Bristow was lonely. There was no one to talk to at the Clinic. Busby Locke lived on a nearby farm with his parents, came to the Clinic only three days a week, and was not available for casual talk. Bristow did visit people in the quarters, mostly to doctor, sometimes to socialize. Henson had a maintenance crew, but they had their own location in the quarters, and they did not socialize. People in the quarters envied Bristow's privileged status and told stories about him, that he was Herr Doctor's brown Jamaican son, that he had island remedies of the rarest kind served only to rich white people, that he could still a shaking person with a single touch, that his prick was large in its dangle.

Bristow needed to chew a mushroom with Huck Finn. Bristow had been a wild child in Kingston, Jamaica. Huckleberry Finn was a wild child in Hannibal, unsupervised, untended, self-sufficient at five. How was it I escaped the clutches of the rapist? A common fate, after all, for wild children. Growing up I was aware that poor unprotected children were at the mercy of evil older men. What did I know about forced insertions? I remembered several hard fights as a kid with an older boy on the Gilroy wharf. He wanted to wrestle me and said he could pin me down in five minutes flat, but I don't wrestle, punching and kicking is my game. I eluded his grabs and lunges. Last fight I broke his nose. He continued to insult me, though we were done fighting. There was something strange in all that hatred of dumb Huckleberry Finn. I had muscle as a baby and at seven or eight I might show a weapon. I knew my guttersnipe sisters were in a war. I saw their bruises and cuts. I never saw the actions, the insertions, and as I write

this, now fully knowing about insertions, I want to go back and accost those older brothers, cousins, uncles, fathers, and take something from them: pinkie finger, pinkie toe, ear lobe, a good tooth, in some extreme cases maybe a testicle.

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"I will ask," said Bristow, "what is the nature of your friendship with Jack Grahame?"

Jack Grahame was still in St. Louis, staying with a maternal aunt before seeking transport to the Grahame cotton and hog farms in Arkansas. How could he not go, that was the question we had in parting and it was the same question I had in returning. Jack was going to the Farms to learn the commercial side of cotton production, far from Georgia and its public opinion, far from murderous brothers and near relatives. That was how the General saw it. Sophie thought her baby Jack might safely ride out the coming war parked in the Monticello office counting cotton seeds and writing poetry. At the same time, she also thought Jack might discreetly observe Uncle Judah's business acumen, his hours, his consultation, his book keeper. He was to accept Uncle Judah's regime, long hours, low pay, and he was also to spy on Uncle Judah. Reverend Chester Hurlbut, pastor of a small church in Monticello, was Sophie's secret paymaster and principal agent in south Arkansas. If things got too rough with Uncle Judah, turn to Hurlbut, said Sophie Grahame to her little brother.

Jack was to think of Arkansas as a brief disciplinary exile. He would soon be called back to the Georgia colors, she was reasonably sure of that, however scary the prospect. His older brothers, Lew and Les, fierce in combat, wanting glory, must fall in battle, seriously wounded or dead, Sophie Grahame was fairly certain of that, so Jack had to stand ready even as he did his employment in Monticello. The General, almost deaf, forgetful, would not risk the newly indispensable Jack in battle. He would get Jack a diplomatic post in some near country. She had already planted the seed in her talks with the General about the situation in Quebec. Jack was indisputably clever, observant, and his French was impeccable.

"She loves me like a mother," Jack said, "we're the infertile ones in the family, Lew and Les are the stud stallions, and she needs me, Huck, that's a big thing, I provide

cover, I sign documents. You and I will manage the firm." She said all this as Jack was shouldering his pack at the door about to set off for Arkansas.

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We needed a journey, a mission, Jack and I, outlaws, on the run, rafting on the river, on our way to the Gulf. We needed to rescue someone, to find someone, using our combined skills. Not to go to the Farms, what then? Join me in my intended retreat to the Clinic? I didn't want to introduce Jack Grahame to my Clinic world. Tom Sawyer was right. Jack and I made a strange pair, one of us a sodomite. Which one? Hard to tell. We might be twins. I didn't want that strangeness to be the subject of conversation at the Clinic. Jack was writing letters and reading religious books at his aunt's house in St. Louis, waiting for my return.

I didn't take charge of Jim's release at the Phelps farm. I failed to reach Sadie Watson in time with some sliver of hope. I did not know where Jim was or how he was. I couldn't satisfy Tom Sawyer and join him in his spy games. I was adrift, knowing I was approaching a roaring waterfall, and then, here, dropped from the blue, is wounded Jack Grahame, a brother soul, a lookalike opposite, smart beyond telling. Second night, talking long into the early morning, Jack came in on my life story with new questions. He had the idea I did have a Hebrew name, given at circumcision, and that the name was still in Missouri, a tiny shriveled thing, my inked Hebrew name, inside some moldering tome. His best boyhood friend in Athens, Alfred Stone, was circumcised and had circumcision stories. There is a Hebrew man who does just that one thing all his life. Whoever took the pains to get me circumcised, Jack said, certainly saw to it that I was appropriately named, taken into the tribe, into the clan. I was wincing as he said this, unable to imagine the primal scene. My name, tossed away with that ringlet of baby skin. So, it was, and we were again smoking my crumb. It felt free and easy, our meandering talk, we might have been on a runaway raft riding a current.

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We shook hands. Jack was off to Monticello, Arkansas. I would return to the Clinic. By messenger or mail, Jack would inform me of his situation. If he needed my help, I would give it to him. When I got back to the Clinic I found the place in an uproar, staff milling about outside Phineaux Hall, their breath steaming in the frosty night air, torches and lanterns moving about, Dr. Locke and Bristow eager to greet me. Earlier in the day, three masked men came riding up the Clinic driveway, pistols in their belts, rifles slung. The Clinic knew of their approach, a posted sentry had come on the run along a secret forest corridor, so there was preparation. Bristow did not participate in the defense, he observed, and when it was over, he was quite ill, couldn't stop retching.

Horses chuffing, hooves stamping, loud angry voices, one pistol shot is fired, boots are on the porch, the locked door is tried, curses, the door then smashed open, and there they are, lunging forward, brought up short, eyes wide with surprise, and here is Henson with the Austrian shotgun, three feet away from them, and behind Henson, with an Allen revolver, young Dr. Locke, hand steady. A single blast of Henson's shotgun knocks all three intruders down. Dr. Locke puts up his revolver.

Boom. Just like that. Out of nowhere members of Henson's crew spring into action, disarm the robbers, set their weapons aside, then drag the bodies out of the house, one clearly dead, the other two grievously gut shot, and quickly put out of their misery. Here comes another crew member with a big wheelbarrow and behind him, still another crew member, with shovels. It is the burial detail. In the back orchard along the big stone wall, a pit already dug awaits these new bodies, naked, stripped. A black man has just shot three white men and the white men are gone into the earth under a rockpile. As I arrive the burial detail is still at work. There has been a thorough search for an accomplice, a scout, who might have been posted also as an exit guard. The locks on each building were examined. Henson's hounds were set loose in the adjoining woods. Meantime everyone helped wash the floor and porch, scrub the blood stains, then board up the entrance.

All this, as I came up in my buggy. I could hear hounds in the woods. Pity that accomplice, if there was one. I knew what he was feeling. It is where I started my manhood even though I was a witless youth, riding with Captain Billy, smiting the abolitionists. As I took on the job of policing the Clinic, I thought I might let Henson

retain the Austrian shotgun. I had weapons spilled on the porch to choose from. Well, not that many. Henson's crew took most of them. Whichever next gang of desperadoes attempted to assault the Clinic; they'd find a determined armed resistance. They might even be ambushed and disappeared, a tactic Henson and his silent crew were very good at. It was the Clinic, idea and practice, the Clinic as sanctuary, that everyone in the community, free white, enslaved black, served.

So it was, 1861.

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"What is your name?" asked the corporal, pen in hand.

"Mark Finn," I said. Mark was as close as I could get to my mother's surname, Marx. It was good enough. I'm Mark Finn now. If I die, I thought, I'll be buried under that name, a strange name, not really my name.

We assembled on a calm cool June day, 1861, Captain Tom Whittington addressed us, calm and cool, and then we got uniformed and armed, each man given an Enfield musket. A lot of these Drew County boys had their own side arms and ironware. I again mourned the loss of my big Walker pistol and my short saber. Never mind, I knew after our first battle with the Federals, I'd be much better equipped.

Company C, "The Confederate Stars," Third Arkansas Infantry Regiment, CSA. That was my moving address for four years. I was in it. I was a specialist. I knew Tom Whittington in the old days of the border war. He rode with a different band of marauders. He was surprised to find me in Monticello just as he was organizing a company of volunteers from Drew County. "Look," he said, "I can get you a commission just like that," snapping his fingers, "but that means paper work. Join my company, I'll make you a staff sergeant, and we'll take it from there."

I was in Monticello to meet with Jack and his two cousins, not to enlist in the Confederate Army. "Look," I said to Tom Whittington, "I don't have immediate command of left right. Often, not always, I stop to think, so I can't do close order drill, I'll collapse files, tumble ranks, I'll be a liability. I can ride a horse, you know that, but I got spooked one time in the Captain Billy days and I gave up cavalry for good, and I'm

holding to that decision. I can't pay attention to commands, I get rattled. Stealth and surprise, that's how I like to fight, tree to tree, across the field." It didn't discourage Tom Whittington. He said: "You'll be my personal scout in the field. You can freelance, move about just behind the advancing front line. You're going to get caught up in this war anyway. We're the best regiment you could join. I know how to use your talent." I had no idea what he was talking about. I had decamped from Captain Billy's regiment. Mounted, foot, big difference. I didn't train to ride with Captain Billy.

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A church elder in Monticello brought Jack's package to me at the Clinic. He came to St. Louis to receive a shipment of bibles and also carried mail from the pioneer folk in frontier Arkansas. Jack gave him five dollars to bring his package to me at the Sunshine Clinic and I gave the elder five dollars as I took the package from him. He stood on the steps of Phineaux Hall and would not enter the building. He knew of the Clinic's reputation and feared some kind of contamination if he entered. I got his hired nag a drink of water and offered to fill the elder's canteen. A sad skinny fellow, I couldn't tell how old, some sad skinny Monticello woman's husband, I could see that. He wanted his five dollars.

The package contained a red silk scarf, for Huckleberry Finn, so the note said, a fine-looking waistcoat with pearl buttons, and a black cravat, an outfit Jack obviously couldn't wear in rugged Monticello. There was also a letter addressed to his sister and a bound manuscript. The note on the envelope said I was to read the letter, make a commentary, if I had one, and send the letter on to sister Sophie Grahame in faraway Athens, Georgia. The letter was ten pages, the manuscript twenty some pages, tightly written, a deal of studious interpretation required. Jack had lifted office stationery from the supply bin in the back room. Each sheet said Ambrose Enterprises. There was nothing to do in Monticello. He wrote letters. He kept a journal.

"Dearest sister," Jack wrote, "Here is our mysterious Uncle Judah. People say the Ambroses are Walloons from a country in Europe called Belgium. A Walloon man in his strong late middle age, I'd say, our Uncle Judah, a deal of frosted dark wavy hair,

scarred pitted cheeks, mustache, when he spoke or ventured a smile, it looked like he was snarling. The Ambrose family is large and extensive, prospering in several Mississippi and Gulf states, we did know that, and Judah is the brains of the whole operation. Just here, people say, one generation, and already the Ambrose family is a political force in southern Louisiana. Uncle Judah is one of their leaders. He's looking at me as through a mask. and he gave me maybe fifteen minutes when he met me. Here's the thing I noticed, his eyes. The eyes glitter, grip, go cold and reptilian. He obviously had the full report on me, that I am a virtually disinherited, a disgraced Grahame, left to his dubious care. He looked me over, no expression on his face, except for the eyes, and then, without so much as a handshake, introduced me to Osgood, his chief clerk in the Monticello office, who was also looking me over. This is the uncle who was going to set me right. I've not seen him since that first abrupt meeting.

I'm living in a small room above a dry goods store. Porridge in the morning, soup or stew in the evening, all this at Monticello's only hotel, the Wild Duck. At the start of my tenure, I had absolutely nothing to do. I copied incoming and outgoing business letters, that sort of boring thing, and then here is Osgood with the news that our Ambrose cousins, Homer and Jesse, are just home from work in another county, swineherding, pig farming, hired labor, indentured boys, Homer and Jesse, and they want to see me. Did we ever hear of these cousins in all our life in Athens, Georgia?"

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As I read this, I put the letter down. Jack had too much family. Friendship with Tom Sawyer did not entail care for or interest in sister Mary or obnoxious little brother Sid. If Bristow had family, he kept their names and problems to himself. Don't get involved in another family's mess, Bristow said. He is, of course, like me, an orphan soul. Don't get involved, that was the warning, and here I am, already a transmitter, I'm in the middle of their brother/sister correspondence, or better, I find myself in a Grahame family conference, advisor, contributor, interpreter. Assumptions, expectations. Yet it

was alluring. I would have a new standing in the world. I would be a familiar, in the old sense of the word, Jack said, and I liked the look and sound of the word.

I turned to the manuscript, entitled “Our Cousins,” and found the section that introduced Homer and Jesse Ambrose. “That Friday,” Jack wrote, “a new Ambrose turned up at the office, a short squat bulldog guy, who identified himself as a policeman. “Don’t be misled by those boys,” he said. “They’re whiners, complainers, ungrateful. They’ve learned the pork trade from snout to tail on our pig farm, and I can tell you right now, when their contract is up and they’ve paid their loans and fines, thanks to my instruction, Homer Ambrose will be a certified butcher and meat cutter, a free man on the open market. Jesse refuses to like or respect the work so he is still menial in his labor. He shovels shit. He’ll aways be shoveling shit. He’s the problem. You’ll see.” Next, to my astonishment, he came around the counter and seized my forearm, actually testing my muscle, and gave me a shake. “The boys have already made two attempts at running away,” he growled. “We’ve got great dogs. Both times the dogs got them inside five miles. Dogs will get them again, if the boys try anything, and I’m getting mighty tired chasing them and catching them.’ With that he gave my forearm a final aggressive squeeze and pushed me back a step. ‘Don’t let them give you any ideas.’ The scowl he gave me had a contempt I recognized. He could grab me. It was permitted.

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I skipped through the next several pages, Jack’s brief account of the fractured Grahame/Ambrose family relation. As children, Sophie and Jack knew there was an Uncle Judah Ambrose who lived in New Orleans. They knew the General and Uncle Judah once had an argument so sharp and personal the two men ceased, from that day forward, to acknowledge each other, though they were related by marriage and Uncle Judah, along with a crowd of lesser Ambroses, capably managed the western reach of the General’s domain. Uncle Judah, it was said, wanted a promotion in the firm, Grahame & Sons, wanted a new standing for the Ambrose family, new titles, new

rewards, and the General, recently married to Uncle Judah's sister, thus arguably obligated, refused each request Judah Ambrose made.

As Cousin Isaac had it, the General was afraid of Judah Ambrose, who knew what he was doing. The General did not. With luck and perfect timing, the General made his big money. Augustus Grahame had gold to spend during Panics and Depressions, had smart advisors, had an instinct. Someone said: "There's this fellow, works for the Lalonde family, says overseers are done, what you want is a manager, course you pay him more, but he'll get your business humming soon enough." This fellow was Judah Ambrose. Someone else said Judah Ambrose was an advocate for scientific slaveholding. He studied the metrics of slave labor at some institute in Charleston. Jack Grahame saw the C Plantation field books while he was at work in the Monticello office, amazing enumeration, each slave. Other large planters in the region were said to be interested in this new kind of supervision. Managers were already happily at work on several major plantations in the coastal South.

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Augustus hired Judah Ambrose and set him going on the G&S trans-Mississippi enterpriset. To Augustus's dismay, Judah Ambrose, with his enumerators and quantifiers, quickly established his mastery of cotton and pork production. In two years, he was reliably reporting significant income, so much so he became virtually indispensable to the economy of Grahame & Sons, a dangerous place to be.

Cousin Isaac probably did know the big secret in the Grahame/Ambrose family relation and chose not to share it with me. After the war, in St. Louis, at the Planter's House saloon, drinking with a journalist who was always writing a book on the Grahame family, I was simply given the secret, unwrapped, put before my incredulity, the journalist insisting, yes, the belle of New Orleans, the gorgeous Clementine Ambrose, was two months pregnant with Augustus Grahame's first child, our little Sophie, when Clementine danced in the Spring Cotillion ball, but not with the young Augustus. An Ambrose uncle was her consort. Augustus (hic) was gone on urgent business. It was Clementine who came by rail and boat to confront Augustus in Memphis. No one knew.

Of course, white people do not count their body servants as credible witnesses. Augustus was caught in an honor's trap and so was married, almost immediately, a romantic elopement, it was said, the groom called away on urgent business, the bride to tend an ailing relative in Syracuse, New York. They were gone two years and returned with a daughter.

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I bought another bottle and ordered two servings of oysters. Get comfortable, Pete Fritzell. How did the General get the nickname, "Old Gus," I wanted to know. "He jumped through a breached wall at some Mexican fortress, holding his saber high, saying something like "Allons, mes enfants," and was immediately shot, twice, and knocked down in the rubble." Old Gus Grahame. The charge succeeded. He wasn't regular army. He was an appointed general. Was it the 7th Georgia Volunteers? The Mexican War saved him. He had enjoyed much sweet success in his early years, Indian fighting, Seminole, Choctaw, Cherokee, acquiring Indian properties, was looked upon as a coming leader, then, abruptly, curiously, he was married to Clementine Ambrose, "Clem" to her friends. Instead of further conquests, Augustus had damaged children. He had first a disfigured daughter whose scarlet face daunted him every day, the sight of her a stab of grief, his daughter, who was, for all that defect, a very clever grown girl, his present secret executive secretary. Next, boy twins, robust but not savvy, slow and thick, then, finally, a clever son who was a sexual pervert. His daughter, a genius with numbers, with computation, all the while highly ethical, absolutely trustworthy, was his for life, considering the scarlet marking of her face. The Mexican War made him General Augustus "Old Gus" Grahame, a war hero, redeemed him as a consequential person, and then, first in California, next in Nevada, coming home from the war in Mexico, he and his war comrades struck gold and silver, for which action he was profoundly and completely hated in Georgia."

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Pete Fritzell was a bitter man, a disgraced journalist (making up stories), who hated the Grahame family, specifically the General. Father Fritzell lost the family farm to a Grahame bank, a lesser Grahame violated a cousin's best friend, and there was no recourse in the county, no satisfaction for the injured. The Grahames, Pete Fritzell said, knew he was writing this brilliant expose and pestered him with writs and affidavits, warning him of severe legal consequences. If I wanted to look at it, he could produce the latest notice of restraint. "No, well, there he was roaring into the fifties, flush with capital, and then nothing happened. He expected to command, to govern, but he was unelectable. He was willful, impatient, people high and low detested him, and then he had a disfigured daughter, a scarlet splotch on her frontal left side face." Well, that's where Pete Fritzell ran out of topics, and I had a load of unasked questions still to ask, but he was a spent force. He had almost nothing to say about the Ambrose family, about the tempestuous Clementine, except maybe this offering, that the General never accepted the twins as his. They did not look anything like him.

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I turned back to Jack's letter. "Our Ambrose cousins, Sophie, a dwarf and an elf, and I'm sitting in their dimly lit malodorous room in my checkered overcoat and woolen cap, almost in tears, thrilled to feel their rapture in seeing me, in having me seated with them. I have been so isolated in Monticello, Sophie, some ugly facts about my life, whether true or false, are evidently in circulation. These cousins were told I was coming to meet them, just that, no big deal. As Homer and Jesse had it, an angel of deliverance had at last come to them, Jack Grahame, their rich city cousin, who could hear their complaint, who could advise them what to do. They were desperate to escape their present situation. They had twice run away, each time caught within five miles of the pig farm, but they were younger and didn't know what to do or where to go. Now they had some ideas.

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Jack: “I am, dear Sophie, paraphrasing their speech. Homer’s tone and articulation was that of a submerged old man of the lake, giving me an outburst of ten toady words. He said he did the lifting Jesse did the talking. Jesse did most of the talking, his voice high pitched, screechy, in a dialect I could not grasp. Well, I recognized certain words, “shee-it” and “sumbitch,” and then suddenly I was, pretty much, in the flow of his speech. He was saying a great deal all at once. Auntie Ambrose, wherever she is, whoever she is, was probably not their birth mother. Homer and Jesse probably had different birth mothers. They never knew their mother. I had to take them as they were, raised in the muck, of the muck, but hopeful ever more for promotion, for the uplifting of God’s grace, to give them a mentor, a spokesman, an advocate, a relative.”

Jack: “I pretty much visited them every weekend, surreptitiously, didn’t want to be seen as if conspiring, heads together, though in fact that was exactly what we were doing. They had a little room at the back of the big horse barn. Their hard cider was pretty good. What little learning and bare literacy they had they got from Sunday church, from summer revivals in the piney woods where they soon met other angry restless apprentices and shared resistance and escape strategies. What would they eat? Where would they sleep? These were issues.”

Jack: “Head for the river and Mexico, that was a popular plan. Homer and Jesse grimly understood they would pass from indentured servitude into actual servitude, unable to pay their accumulated loans and fines. Some years before, an old wizened convict, a skilled carpenter, built their room in the barn, set a stove and fit the pipe. He had his freedom working on the job, showing Homer and Jesse how to do it, and at night, before the fire, he would explain their situation to them. Born and raised in Drew County, the convict carpenter knew the folklore concerning the local Ambrose family, knew and hated Uncle Judah. Everyone in Drew County hated Uncle Judah, despised the lesser Ambroses, feared their ruthless administration of justice. Who was the judge presiding? Judge Ambrose. The bailiff, also an Ambrose.”

This was the convict carpenter’s reasoned sober advice: head for the river and Texas.

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I'd glimpsed the first line of the next page. "I owe my life to Huck Finn." Jack had nothing to do in Monticello at night except read the Bible, brood, and write in his journal. I marveled at his small tight script with hardly any slashes or excisions, as if he thought long about what he was going to say, got it in his mind, and then carefully transcribed it. I think I said to him at one point: "I owe my life to Tom Sawyer," and here was his statement. He was writing to his sister with the understanding that I was reading what he wrote, so, in effect, he was writing to both of us, making us complicit in the effort to rescue wild Jack from his own mistakes and misadventures. He told Sophie that he was going to break his pledge to her (acting as the General's agent) that he would accept exile on the Arkansas frontier and wait for her to arrange a new situation for him. He couldn't do it. Life in Monticello was almost unbearable. Rumor about Jack's propensities was abroad in Drew County. He slept with his derringer under his pillow. Everyone in the county was angry and excited. He kept to himself, a hidden soul in Drew County, Arkansas, as the whole country lurched into full scale war. Soon the river would be shut down to civilian traffic, would be a war zone, and trains would be troop and supply trains.

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This was Jack's plan as he laid it out in this doubly addressed letter. As soon as he could find the way out of Monticello, probably in early spring when he could walk, if wagon or horse was not available, he would somehow climb the river, return to St. Louis, reconnect with his new dear friend, Huck Finn, at this medical clinic outside St. Louis and together, comrades, they would catch the next ship out of New Orleans for Jamaica. If Jamaica didn't prove hospitable, they would sail directly for England. He preferred England. There were Grahame connections in Liverpool and Bristol. Write to them, Sophie, and tell the Grahame bank in St. Louis I'll need a substantial money packet for all this transfer. The Sunshine Clinic had a lucrative position Huck Finn might take up in Kingston. These were the options. Jack hated Arkansas. He could not live his life in Arkansas. I put down his letter. Jamaica, Liverpool. I'm an orphan boy out of

Hannibal, Mo., occasionally schooled, with no family and few friends, and I couldn't imagine sea and ocean crossings to these strange places.

I went outside to get some wood for the stove. Where was Clyde Bristow? He hadn't included Jack Grahame, sodomite, in his plan for my Jamaican refuge. Did I understand the magnitude and the complexity of my undertaking an escape from America with this unreliable dangerous person? I got the stove cooking again. Five pages left in this long confessional letter. Everything he wouldn't say to me he now said to her. Huck Finn, Jack wrote, was sexually ignorant, strangely not conversant as he was a river rat raised in a criminal world. He thought sodomite was, if not the acceptable term for persons of Jack's sexual nature, still an ordinary usage. He took in all the bad things his friend Tom Sawyer said about "sodomites" and simply set them aside. Huck Finn and Jack Grahame, with tender discretion, so Jack felt, moved around the term, the identification, and went back to the question of what they should do in their present emergency.

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"So," said Bristow, looking at my solemn expression and the letter I was holding, "what does the young prince have to say?"

"He wants to run away from Monticello, come here to the Clinic, collect me, then ship out to Kingston, Jamaica."

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"He can't come here," Bristow said. "I don't trust him. If Grahames come after him, they'll hit the Clinic hard. Old Man Bascombe and young Locke are trying to follow the Sunshine's policy, that the Clinic is a political sanctuary, a place where only science rules, but Bascombe is mostly in a wheelchair these days and Busby has a big semi-starving family to feed and look after. We can't count on them when St. Louis, either side, decides it wants the Clinic for its purposes. The other doctors, Tischke and Keller, can't be trusted because they themselves own slaves and none of us, myself and our

people, are totally comfortable around them. We trust you, Huck, you're one of us, I don't know how you were fashioned to be so genuinely human, but you are. Henson will do most of the shooting if it comes to that, Henson and his lads, but it is your shotgun, and so far as St. Louis is concerned, you're the white sentinel at the Clinic. We need you here to protect us poor slave folk."

"Well," I said, "I'm not going to Jamaica anyhow."

I had never seen Bristow so glum. "Slaves are running," he said. "Catchers are everywhere on the river. White folks are selling their properties, land and people, and lighting out for New Orleans and Texas. We've got two patients at the moment looking at me and the staff with cold calculating fishy eyes. Here's a little bonanza that could fall right into their laps, a clutch of smart strong slaves totally spoiled by those damn German doctors. Sometimes when I'm treating old Calvin Hudgens, here for his third time, I see him squinting at me and I just know he's calculating my cash value. I thought I could wait for Lincoln's bluecoats to arrive, but now I'm not sure. I have two different hideouts at the ready if I'm forced to the indignity of running."

I wasn't going to Jamaica. I never was going to Jamaica.

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A long cold March, a cruel early April with days of rain and sometimes a frosting of snow, patients departed, our people restive, genial Bristow in a black mood, I kept to myself in my room in Phineaux Hall, only dining with Bristow when he made it a point to ask me, which was seldom. I wasn't going to Jamaica. He wasn't going anywhere. He was a slave. I was alone as I had been as a child. I went for walks, down to the creek, around the pond, stood, lost in thought, birds twittering all around me. What did I want to do? Where should I go to do it? I was almost frantic with the question. I'm not a patriot, that was bedrock for me. I had a life in each side. I had served in Tom Sawyer's Gang, also I did time as a Border Ruffian, in Captain Billy's regiment, I've already chastised a good share of available Yankees, but I've never liked the proslavery southern side, I'm not on their side. Where is the northern side? It was just across the river. Northerners were prepared to do the necessary work, preserve the nation, free

the slaves. I knew that, but I could not imagine myself, a Southern boy, in a blue uniform coming across a field, fixed bayonet, musket loaded, charging a line of my brothers and cousins, here to defend the sovereign territory of their sister state, noble Virginia.

Days passed, then the mail coach arrived with St. Louis newspapers. Fort Sumter, Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, declarations of war, a summoning of miliary forces, first challenge to your identity. Name your side. Take on the consequences. Still, I lingered, hesitating to place myself. Then, in warming May, little Rollo Hartwick, a runner for the post office, brought me a letter from Jack Grahame.

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"Come to Monticello," he wrote. "We will enlist in a regiment forming in Drew County. I've talked to the enlistment officer who says he knows you, that you were in some battles together in Kansas during the border wars, that he can probably get you a commission, straight off. Whittington is his name. Third Arkansas is going east to Virginia. When I heard that, I was immediately resolved. It is my only way out of Arkansas. People are fiercely patriotic. If I don't join up, I'm probably a dead man. The Ambroses have organized a posse comitatus, a gentlemen's militia, they say in the office, to control the ragtag crowd always forming in the streets, wanting to kill someone, to be avenged. I lay low, eat breakfast before anyone else, retire to my room, go to the office, scribble facts and figures, dinner brought to me in my room by a hired girl, then, after dark, long fast and slow walks out into the countryside."

Jack: "I know you're not a patriot, Huck. I'm not a patriot. Didn't we agree that was a sacred bond between us? I simply see this enlistment as a train ticket to Richmond, an only train ticket to Richmond. Once we're safely in the Third Arkansas and in Virginia, where I know G&S had some serious sway, Sophie will find an escape clause, she'll get us safely reappointed, probably, you to oversee some vast horse pen in central Alabama, I'll be somebody's secretary, and trust me, wherever we are relocated, there will be outlets. Sophie will know where they are. We still might get ourselves to London and Paris France."

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One mid-May early afternoon I came out of the woods with a fairly good catch of fish, enough to feed myself, Bristow, and the people, and there, before Phineaux Hall, was a train of wagons, Henson and his associates loading them with the Clinic's equipment, boxes of vials and glassware, all the library books, the women bringing out blankets and linen. I saw that big wheel of orange cheese in one wagon. There stood Cousin Isaac, calm, collected, formidable, with two of his agents, supervising. Bristow was nowhere in sight. I was astonished. It was as if the sky had opened and all this commotion had tumbled from the clouds. Cousin Isaac shook my hand, introduced me as a famous person to the two agents, older unimpressed men, and said, in his brusque way: "We're shutting the Clinic down, moving everything and everybody to Tennessee, just as the Sunshines want it. You come, too, and ride shotgun on these wagons." I couldn't find the words to speak, and then I had them. "Where's Bristow?" Cousin Isaac looked long at me, a silent appraisal. "Gone," he said, "first thing. Bristow is the treasure I've come to get. The Sunshines want their Bristow." I suddenly had a piercing headache, along with a stab in my heart. I wasn't going to go to Tennessee. I'd not have the chance to say goodbye to Bristow. The loading went on, fast, boxes of books, not *Home Geography*, that I still had, my holy book.

Cousin Isaac took me by my shoulders and shook me, shook me hard. "Come along with us," he said. "I've got a future for you in Tennessee." Then, frowning: "There's nothing here for you. Bad people in St. Louis want to burn the Clinic to the ground and string you up. They think you're an abolitionist, and they're not wrong." I saw Henson pausing at the second wagon to look at me. "Can't do it," I said to Cousin Isaac and went over to Henson to say goodbye. How large and solemn he was. "If you see Bristow," I said, "tell him I said goodbye and we'll meet again." Henson nodded, no words, just his powerful presence, his yellow and chocolate eyes looking at me. He had a velour pouch Bristow had left for me. I knew what was in it without examining it: crumbs, buttons, black leaf. Then Henson was back packing the wagon. "We've left you a horse in the stable," Cousin Isaac said when I rejoined him. "I didn't think you

would come with us. Here's some money, back pay. Don't let that mob in St. Louis catch you alone out here. Head for the river." The uncles and aunties were already sitting in their wagon.

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What a lovely spring day it was, birds twittering in the trees, yellow dandelions everywhere, the air fresh and breezy. That was the day an entire world, the Sunshine Clinic, so beautifully constructed, free white, almost free black, vanished. Governor Jackson had withdrawn his order of protection. My favorite sorrel horse was in the stable, saddled, ready to go. Auntie Ella had my fish in a pail of water in her wagon. Early supper for the people. We looked out for each other. I didn't wait to see them off, the whole noisy rattling train of wagons. I added a small sack of grain to my equipage, found the Navy revolver Bristow had set aside for me, and then struck out for the back trail, a narrow corridor through the woods. I'd go wide around dangerous St. Louis and reach the safe little village of Carondelet by nightfall. I was going south, of course. Miserable Arkansas was waiting for me.

Part Three: Huck Finn near Antietam Creek

"He's a dwarf, actually," said Jack. "A tall dwarf."

We're on a train chugging east and north to Virginia, a troop train, our car packed with noisy happy recruits, C Company. Pretty much we all believe we've been chosen by God first to defend Richmond, then besiege Washington, D.C., capture President

Lincoln, bring sacred victory to our beloved Southern Confederacy. Well, not me, I voted for Lincoln, but not for Lincoln to invade Virginia.

Jack and I are standing near the door of our crowded car. Homer and Jesse, in their gray uniforms and forage caps, are seated in the middle of the car, bright with cheer, in the midst of other shouting recruits. We've just slowly passed a small Tennessee town that had its flags out, a band playing, and pretty girls waving their hankies. The boys in the car are feeling mighty good, Homer and Jesse, free forever from Ambrosian Arkansas, laughing and joking. I'm looking at Homer's large shaggy head. He'd be scary to face in a charge, Homer coming at you with his bayonet, big teeth in his grimace.

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In the encampment outside Monticello where our regiment did its first rudimentary drilling, Homer was mocked by an insolent collegian in I Company, one of the Tulip Rifles from Tulip Village in Dallas County. Homer's murky speech and bad grammar was the issue. The collegian was a trained pugilist and assumed the proper boxing stance, fists up, legs and feet ready to dance. He was promptly knocked about by a wildly swinging unstoppable Homer, the fight almost instantly over. That afternoon Homer was our star. We lads from Drew County were the 'Confederate Stars,' C Company, Third Arkansas, and Homer's reckless assault on the pretentious collegian gave us our first bit of combat glory as a fighting unit. Jesse indeed plays the mouth organ he got from the convict carpenter who made their decent room in the big barn. He taught Jesse some tunes, but Jesse soon learned on his own that he could make up his own tunes, just go on varying and repeating. Troopers at the general encampment came around to our big fire in the evening to hear Jesse play over and again the same tunes. These young soldiers were homesick however glad they were to be free of their farm and town life. A short while ago work slaves of the elder Ambroses, Homer and Jesse were now in boy heaven, free, sought after, having the time of the lives, every day farther and farther from imprisoning hateful Arkansas.

“I thought I would have to protect them,” Jack said, the train rattling and lurching. People still assumed Jack and I were brothers or cousins, though I was lightly bearded and Jack was not. The Ambrose boys already looked like soldiers and thin pale Jack did not. At the next comfort stop, the regiment piling out of the cars and heading for the field and the woods, emptying slop buckets, pissing and shitting, playing around, Jack and I sat under a tree, sharing an apple.

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“I see you’ve gone dark on me, Huck,” Jack said. “I’ve never asked you what you thought of the letter I sent to my sister. Back in Monticello there was too much going on, escaping the bailiffs, enlisting, all that ruckus, for us to reconnect, and I know this isn’t a good time either. I owe you so much. You’ve gotten me out of one jam after the other. In Monticello the boys and I barely had a dime in our pocket. You sold your horse, that beautiful horse, and here we are with new haversacks, good cutting knives, equipment, all thanks to you. We are grateful. I want you to know that I am not going to do anything that would embarrass you.

“Mm,” I said.

Jack was finishing the apple. I had a salt cracker for him.

“Though we do have some beauties here in Company C,” he said. “I’m never going to lie to you about what’s in my mind.”

Jack was satisfactory in marching, but a disaster with his musket, jamming the barrel, dropping his cartridge, shaky in aiming, slow in the procedure, in actual combat a dead man, sure enough, and you didn’t want to be in line next to him. I’d already talked to Tom Whittington about Jack, reminding Tom that Jack was a Grahame, and Tom thought Jack might do his duty as a company assistant cook or as a helper in the field surgery. I had totally forgotten that Jack was a Sodomite, his mind still busy ogling certain handsome troopers in our company, though urgent business was at hand, getting the ball in the barrel of his musket. His hands shook.

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“As soon as we get to Virginia I’ll be in touch with my sister,” Jack said, “and she’ll get us promptly reassigned to some safe comfortable place. We’re not patriots. This isn’t our war.”

“Mm,” I said.

I gave him a slice of dried pear.

Sergeants were blowing their whistles. Our company was a crowd of skylarking schoolboys called in from recess, whooping, shouting, pushing and shoving. Now the locomotive tooted its steam whistle. Come on, come on, the war is starting and we don’t want to miss it.

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Night was coming to the Tennessee countryside. Company C was settling down, commencing to snore, wheeze, cough, fart, softly curse, as the train steadily rolled east and north to Lynchburg, Virginia, where the Confederacy awaited us. In our cramped corner of the car Jack Grahame had contrived a sleeping position, half standing, half sitting, and he was nodding, head regularly jerking when the train abruptly took a change in direction. I still stood, looking out the dirty window at woods and field going by, thinking. I hadn’t gone dark on Jack Grahame. I’d gone dark on myself. I couldn’t really talk to Jack about his sexual nature. I knew it was dangerous. He got himself seriously wounded in Hannibal. I knew now, thanks to his letter to Sophie, that Sodomite was not the word to use in describing him, but what word did describe him? I couldn’t talk to him about that Hannibal beating, about his strange amours, about the life he reported in his letter to Sophie, its boys and men, because I couldn’t talk to him about my sexual history, the deep shame of which still afflicted me. I had shut down my sexual life the very day in the Sunshine Clinic when Bristow inserted the tube into my poor wormy cock, its head stripped, forever naked. I was circumcised and probably, probably, my cock (I reached down and moved it around in my trouser leg, to give it some air) spoke to the issue of my mysterious identity.

And what's more, I groaned to think of it, here I was again my life picked up and attached to a story that wasn't my story. On the river with Jim, I soon discovered I was a character in his story and at the Phelps Farm I was merely Tom Sawyer's accomplice. He told the story and he was its hero. In Hannibal and St. Louis, I more or less did what Cousin Isaac said I should do. Tom Sawyer and then Bristow had me in hand, busily planning what I should do next. What did I want to do? I didn't know. I wanted to rescue Sadie Watson and I couldn't do it. That was at first the attractive promise of handsome Jack now slumbering at my feet. I would rescue him. I would protect him. I was choosing. I was doing. Rackety rack, clickety click, the train was taking me to Virginia, I was in the Third Arkansas Regiment, I would soon be going into combat, and I was again in a Grahame and Ambrose story, not really my own. Bristow wanted me to go Jamaica. Jack wanted me to go to Virginia. Where did I want to go? I hated my stupidity. I did not know where I wanted to go, what I wanted to do. I groaned with the grief of that statement and Jack stirred, looked up at me, and then went promptly back to sleep. Rackety rack, clickety click, I was going to Lynchburg, Virginia.

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I hated Lynchburg, Virginia. I despised Bishop Twigg.

Stifling muggy heat and everywhere I looked I saw gentlemen in straw hats and white shirts, ladies in frilly white linen, raggedy black children fanning them, bringing them drinks, stone-faced black men and women toting luggage, pulling packed carts up and down the streets, white folks reclining, black folks toiling, it was worse than I had ever seen it in Hannibal or St. Louis. We Christian lads in C Company were on church leave that Sunday, come in to an orchard behind some bigwig's mansion to stand about and listen to a potbellied baldheaded preacher tell us we were blessed to be in this noble fight. We Christian lads in C Company were there for iced tea and plum cakes, our reward for listening to Bishop Twigg spout, and then it turned out the iced tea and plum cakes were not available. We were a surly murderous lot marched back to the camp, the bishop getting evil looks and angry muttering as we left the orchard grounds, some Christian lads openly pissing on the apple trees.

Our camp adjoined Lynchburg and it had some trees, not many, giving paltry shade to the officers and sergeants. At five when the trumpets blew reveille it was already sweltering so we fell out into formation, hot, stiff, and hungry. I'll not tell you what a bleak spare thing breakfast was. Our drill instructors were young senior cadets from Virginia Military Institute, impatient arrogant, in gray coats with brass buttons, in white pantaloons. Our platoon had a cadet Mister Crabbe and first day he struck Jesse Ambrose with a cane for grinning at one of Mister Crabbe's commands. He raised an angry welt on the back of Jesse's neck.

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Jack and I sat around a smoldering campfire, red coals, sharing a black cigar. Elsewhere, nearby, around a big fire, C Company boys, and Jesse Ambrose again doing "O Susanna" on his mouth organ. I was tired of that damn song. I couldn't get Jack to the safe rear with the company cook. Our cook wouldn't have him. Jack didn't have the right hands, cook said. He wanted thick hands and big knuckles on his cook's helper, a man who could cut and chop and saw through cabbage and turnips, not a clueless nitwit with skinny fingers who hacked at vegetables and spilled too much salt in the soup. Jack was, in short, strangely suspect, though the boys in his group had only the foggiest of notions. Cook rejected Jack. What was that about? Not good enough to peel a pertater and he's marching beside me. If somebody made a crack about Jack, Homer Ambrose might be sizing him up with his squinty stare, showing those big teeth.

We sat and smoked. I was myself disgusted with Jack, also with C Company, which was proving itself to be a stumbling crowd of apple-cheeked yokels, not the slim trim soldiers who soon must defend Richmond and march on Washington, D. C. Third day of drill, Mister Crabbe, who might have been sixteen or seventeen, took me aside and scolded me for marching too far from the column. "You're a file closer," he said, "you've got to be closer to the column so you can see if the file is too loose or too tight. Two feet away, I'd say, and four back from the head of the column." He was looking up at me with a mean expression. He wasn't scared to be rebuking the likes of Private Mark Finn, a Border Ruffian who rode with Captain Billy. C Company was not, at the

moment, an impressive military unit. The farm boys were good with their Enfields in target practice, the town lads, including Jack, Jack the worst, almost useless, bad at loading, shaky at shooting. What had I gotten myself into, I asked myself that question morning, noon, and night. The cigar was harsh, but I drew on it, and passed it to Jack who coughed and choked on his draw. He had dug a latrine all that day, he and three other bumblers from the company. I had treated his swollen bloody hands and wrapped them in clean rags. They were throbbing, he said, and he had a headache and he thought a fever.

"I've now sent two letters to Sophie," Jack said. "If the new postal service is actually working, I should be hearing soon from her about the arrangement. She'll get the General in action. The firm will put me in some safe place far from this awful Lynchburg and wherever I go you'll be nearby doing essential war work, hooping barrels, shoeing horses. I've laid it all out for her. My sister is an amazing woman. The General almost always listens to her and does what she decides is the best thing to do." I nodded. This was the plan he had privately explained to me back in Arkansas and though I had qualms then and still had them, I went with his reasoning. It was not a desertion. It was an evasion. I wasn't a patriot and had no desire to die for Southern independence. Jack casually dismissed the oath we swore in Monticello. It was compelled, therefore invalid, he argued. It was our only way out of Arkansas, our only legitimate standing for Sophie to work on. She couldn't deal with us as outlaws, absconders, as fugitives from the grand war effort. We had to get into a uniform in order for her to get us out of the uniform. Homer and Jesse Ambrose were not in this conversation. Weeks passed and there was no answer from Sophie Grahame.

***

I had the great distinction of serving under Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee when, early in the war, they were not splendid military figures. The Confederacy was looking to shut the door in western Virginia. Jackson fell asleep under a tree and missed the command to move his regiment. Lee never got his forces properly aligned. It was September and C Company was in thick woods going up Cheat Mountain in the

Alleghenies. It was raining and cold and we were to take a fort at the summit. I didn't like our formation, too crowded on the ascending trail, but Captain Whittington and Lieutenant Anscombe were our leaders, and of course they knew what they were doing. Where Captain Whittington was that early wet afternoon, I'm not sure, maybe back at the rear hurrying I Company along, our reserve. We were strung out, Lieutenant Anscombe constantly cursing and complaining, as rain-soaked troopers lagged, tired and hungry. We were to join other companies, D and F, the Selma Rifles and the Hot Springs Hornets, so called, trudging forward somewhere else in these dense piney woods, and then our combined force would storm the Federal fort at the summit. Jack was in the rear with the mules and our ammunition crates and it was the only thing I felt good about in that rain spattered forest.

Suddenly, as if conjured from the forest air, bluecoats, two lines among the trees and boulders, our several skirmishers running and leaping toward us, screaming "Yankees, Yankees," running and leaping right through our column headed back to Arkansas, I'd guess. C Company, the Confederate Stars, infamous in this early going, not at all legendary, more or less stood amazed at this development. I actually heard the Yankee lieutenant shout, "Fire!" and a fusillade struck our front line. First thing Lieutenant Anscombe was hit twice, spun around, I was near enough to hear the bullets strike him, pack pack, and down he fell, our first casualty on the side of Cheat Mountain. Where was Sergeant Hanley? C Company wavered, several troopers threw their muskets down, turning to flee. I didn't want to die on this miserable mountain. I could see in a moment if our Confederate Stars panicked and fled, the Federals would come after us, bayonets drawn, and there would be no turning to repulse them. We'd get stuck in our backs, crying out like babies. I hate the bayonet. A disgusting way to die.

In the melee, I saw Homer and Jesse, who were in the middle rank, not fleeing, shooting and loading their rifles, and I went to them, got them by their sleeves, and pulled them toward a stand of big spruce trees. They were the point of the wedge I now created, shouting, pulling troopers to their new positions among the trees, which gave them cover, and soon we had a deadly return fire that stopped the Federal charge before it got started. They were fixing their bayonets, I could see the glint of the steel, but Homer and Jesse, cool and collected, were steadily loading and firing, and soon the

bluecoats were fading into their woods. All those years coon hunting, shooting stags and bears, in the Arkansas woods, not to mention the boars they routinely castrated as mere adolescents, that familiarity with blood and gore, now gave them fierce cold concentration. Face the killing charge. Pursuit loves the fleeing back of the enemy. I'd learned that during the border war in Kansas as I covered retreats, my specialty, turning suddenly on yelling pursuers and catching them in the joy of their expectation. As for me, I now felt a strange elation. This was how I liked to fight in combat, from behind trees, with cover, not out in the open marching into a hail of bullets. I got my wedge placed, the flanks protected, C Company engaged, doing their work.

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That night we bivouacked at the base of the mountain in a little meadow. The skies cleared; the stars came out. Homer and Jesse were slumped next to me and already sleeping, their faces black with powder stains, their arms and hands still trembling and jerking. I had not fired a single shot in that fight. I just shouted at people and moved them about. I got a scared Jack Grahame up to our salient with a fresh supply of cartridges. We didn't speak, I just pointed to the troopers who were calling for ammunition, and he jumped to the task. Good old Jack Grahame. Homer and Jesse were now curled at my feet like two hound dogs, their chase over. They were thrilled to have been at the spear point, to have stopped the Yankees as they drew their bayonets, and grateful to me for the honor of that selection. Jack was down at the ambulances helping with the wounded, one of them Sergeant Hanley, his knee smashed by a minie ball. I had a little fire going. I chewed and chewed on a plug of hard sausage, thinking. I couldn't sleep though I was exhausted. I hadn't fired a shot. I was astonished to realize that. Then, out of the darkness, amid our groaning snoring Confederate Stars, littered everywhere on the ground, not everyone with a blanket, stepping carefully, here was Captain Tom Whittington. He had a bundle under his arm. "Huck," he said, crouching down next to me, "I knew I could count on you. The whole damn regiment was ready to run. If C Company hadn't stood its ground, the rout would have been on, and those damn Yankees were not even attacking in force. It was just a sortie coming

down the mountain." He was breathing hard, as if in pain. "I got separated from the company. I was looking to find the Selma Rifles and the Hornets. We were scattered in those woods. Had the Yankees come down in force they could have cut us up in pieces. Dear boy, I was absent from my command. I could be facing a court martial. Instead, I'm probably going to get a citation. My Confederate Stars held the line." It all came out in a whispered rush.

When we talked in public, he was Captain Whittington and sir, yes sir. In private we were Tom Whittington and Huck Finn.

Tom handed the bundle to me. It was Lieutenant Anscombe's frock coat. I looked at the bullet holes, the missing buttons. "I'm making a battlefield commission," he said. "This coat is just about your size. We can get Cook to patch up those holes. The gold bars are yours. It is what I wanted back in Arkansas." He gave me a quick little salute. "Second Lieutenant Mark Finn." In the firelight I stared at the rumpled coat. No one in C company had much cared for Lieutenant Anscombe, who had been a VMI cadet and who treated us from the start with contempt and derision. True, we were not smartly dressed and a stumbling lot in drill, rustic bumpkins from the Arkansas wilderness, and he was hard on Homer Ambrose whose murky frog speech Lieutenant Anscombe found appalling.

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I felt horror, dread, and shame, all at once. "I can't do this," I said softly, handing the bundle back to Tom. Me, marching in front, prime target. I was getting ready for the Grahames to take me away from Third Arkansas, I was positioning my conscience to allow that transfer with an arguable portion of honor. I really believed I could do my best service in the quartermaster corps. I was good with animals, fixing wagons, hooping barrels, as Jack put it, seeing to the comfort and solace of the soldiers at the front.

"I've thought this over very carefully," Tom said. "We'll send back his trunk with his personal effects. Let his family have his bible, books, diary, photographs, but his warm clothes, his good gear, that we'll keep. A cold winter is coming, these mountains will freeze us, sure. We'll use his blanket, his warm jacket and coat, his trousers, his

underclothes, his socks. That all stays with us. We're going to be in deep snow soon. Try to remember Henry Anscombe's hand pegged brogans, Huck. Those shoes are not going into the ground with Henry Anscombe."

I shook my head sadly. I wouldn't do it. I didn't care about Southern independence, didn't believe the Confederacy would ever turn to the challenge of emancipation. I wasn't a patriot, but I couldn't say that to Captain Whittington. His family owned slaves. He was a patriot. I didn't want anything to do with Lieutenant Henry Anscombe. My shoes were good enough.

"It isn't bad luck wearing a dead man's clothes," Tom said, quietly, firmly. "Just the opposite. We'll get cook to put stars on those holes. We call C Company the Confederate Stars. This coat is now like armor. It can't be struck twice, leastways in these mountains. I need you, old boy. You can promote Homer Ambrose, make him your sergeant. You can put Jack Grahame wherever you want to put him."

I was still shaking my head, holding Henry Anscombe's coat, when Captain Tom Whittington took his leave. The sky was now cloudy, stars gone, and a bitter wind blowing. It blew out the fire. Jesse was sleeping under my blanket.

***

End of the month the Federals made another sortie and this time I got Jack up and running with the ammunition crates. I had Bristow's Colt Navy revolver out but I did not shoot anyone. I waved it about like a pointer to the lads, over there, over there. The Federals then returned to their fort on Cheat Mountain. Winter was at hand, snowing, and we moved from our Greenbrier camp to the summit of Allegheny Mountain. On Captain Whittington's report, Colonel Rust wrote me up a citation. First Lieutenant Mark Finn, re-doomed. I could see that silver bar coming, another promotion to complicate my affairs. Jack, poor Jack, when not laid low with bloody flux, got the dirty duty: burial detail, digging latrines, working with the surgeons, washing rags, emptying shit buckets. "Can't be helped," Captain Whittington said. "Everybody must do his part."

***

“Permission to speak to Lieutenant Finn.”

I heard that familiar voice, without its former buoyant tone, outside our cabin door. Tom, Captain Whittington, had been writing at his little tent table, under a tallow candle, and he promptly finished, slid the sheet of paper into his report book, and said: “Huck, I should see the Colonel. I’ll be gone for an hour at least.” I had been reading *Home Geography* under my tallow candle, its simple poems giving me solace, a river’s song: “And darkly flows my wave; / I hear the ocean’s roar-- / And there must be my grave!” I put it aside. “Come in, Jack,” I said, “and bring in some wood from the wood box.” He came in with an armful of sticks and reloaded the stove, then stood before me not at attention, not saluting, just facing me. I knew there had been a recent fracas in the company. He had a cut on his cheek and his lip was swollen. His sack coat was soiled and had two lower buttons missing. I hadn’t seen him up close for several weeks, just at reveille and retreat, standing in line, forlorn. Now I closely observed him. It was like the arrival of a headache.

“Huck,” he said, “I’m not going to make it.”

“Jack,” I said, “get Jesse to find you some buttons and tell cook I said you need some vinegar and water to clean your coat.” He was looking at me. “And wash your face,” I added, reaching for a remnant bar of soap in my small bag. “I’m not going to make it,” Jack said again. He took the soap, looked at it, and put it in his pocket.

“Jack,” I said, “it is true you are on your own, outside the reach of your powerful family, where is your sister, she could be dead, and I think, in some sense, this is the best place for you just now, back against the wall, with no help, do or die. Everyone in this regiment, in this army, is in this place. I am. It isn’t what you and I planned in Arkansas, but here we are. I’m going to be promoted right into an early grave. If I survive the next several engagements, I’ll be a first lieutenant, no question about it. I’m not going to make it either.” That statement just came out of me and surprised me. I wasn’t about to blame Jack for my lethal promotions, and yet, to speak truly, I had counted on Jack’s connections to get us out of this front-line duty, out of this cabin on top of Allegheny Mountain. We gambled, Jack’s sister was our bank, but it had been

shut down and we'd lost everything. Jack stood there. He had made his statement and the idea, I guess, was that I should propose a solution.

"No word from Sophie," I said quietly.

"My father and my brothers hate me for what they think I am," Jack said in a calm even voice. "I don't blame Sophie. I know they've stifled her, set her aside. I've always been a card she could play in the family politics and now the General has thrown me away, that game is over. Whatever her plan was, it isn't happening. I'm almost useless in C Company, as well you know. Next fight either a Yankee is going to shoot me or one of my fellow Stars will do the job."

I got up from my camp stool, my back hurting, a distant headache troubling my head. I saluted Jack, though he hadn't saluted me. "All right then," I said, "we've got this resolved. We are not going to make it, you and I, for different reasons. Get your coat cleaned, new buttons sewed on, and wash your face. Stand tall when next I inspect the formation. I'm going to get Homer to do some extra work with you and your Enfield. Not punishment duty, Homer is your friend, we just want you to be in our flow, forward march, Jack, forward march."

**

Goodbye, western Virginia. I knew how to handle the bushwhackers who sprang up from the fields and meadows as our regiment moved out and began to march east. Civilian cusses, mean Unionists, same kind of people I'd faced in Kansas way back in those border days. I could see an ambush coming, hardly ever where you'd think, so every day I was consulted, Tom, other company captains, about what to look for and how not ever to pursue. One late morning we came upon a deserted hamlet, cattle browsing in the field, birds singing in the trees. Colonel Rust had a conference with the company commanders on a hill just outside this seemingly deserted hamlet. We were in dangerous country, everyone knew that, so we sent scouts into the several houses that comprised the hamlet. Colonel Rust strongly wanted to have lunch in one of those houses sitting on a regular chair at a regular table and maybe have a brief snooze in a soft bed after his repast. We had already come a far piece since daybreak. The scouts

came back to report that the three houses were safely empty, a big house, a medium sized house, and a little house farthest out. Beyond it, up a slope, a rickety barn with a woodpile, and two goats nuzzling sparse grass in an enclosure. I saw the scouts scan the barn, one scout going in and coming back out. "What do you think?" The Colonel had his glasses on the hamlet, sweeping back and forth. His several captains hesitated, making faces. Tom Whittington turned to me; his eyebrows quizzically raised. I said bring up a Napoleon and send a shot into that barn. Which they did, boom, kerwhump, sticks and planks in the air, bushwhackers coming out of holes in the ground thereabout, bushwhackers tumbling out of the wrecked barn, badly wounded, shot down by our Stars. Soon thereafter I was First Lieutenant Finn and one step closer to the grave.

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Hello, Northern Virginia. Jack's original idea was that we would somehow get close to Richmond and this proximity to the illustrious Grahames in Athens, Georgia, and their business and political cohort in Virginia, would make it easy for Sophie to work out a transfer solution. She would remove us from the front line, wherever it was, and we would enjoy the war at a safe distance. Well, here we were, May 31, 1862, Jack and I and all the lads from Drew County, trudging into battle at Seven Pines, shot and shell screaming, minie balls singing, going pack, pack, when they slammed into our Stars, Dimitri Van Gluck one of them, Jack losing an earlobe and a piece of his forearm as he scrambled about with the ammunition chests, Jack spraining his ankle as he carried out legs and arms in the meat baskets down at the surgery wagons, Jack doing all the miserable work incompetent soldiers are bound to do. He still couldn't stand steady enough in line to load and fire his musket. I almost hated Jack Grahame.

Northern Virginia was not our deliverance. It was the worst place on earth, torrential rain, shoe and boot sucking mud, river and brooks spilling over their banks, and when that first day we drove the Yankees back, another load of bluecoats arrived. At Seven Pines, a clutch of buildings, seven scraggly pines standing upright to mock the ferocious artillery fire, and then next day at Fair Oaks, another huddle of buildings, another

desperate fight in muck and mire, we were seven miles from beleaguered Richmond. We could hear the church bells ringing in Richmond. We were just where Jack had said we needed to be in order for Sophie to rescue us.

***

I depended on Tom Whittington for a larger sense of the war. We were going to push McClellan back from Richmond and we pushed mighty hard, let me tell you, and when, after two days of bloody fighting, charging and retreating, we were pretty much in the same situation, back in our original camps, I was, in my quiet way, ready to murder anyone in safe civilian Richmond. They said Jeff Davis came out to observe the battle and I'm glad I didn't see him. I might have shot at him with my revolver. Why didn't McClellan finish us off? He had us by the throat. He knocked our commander, Joe Johnston, off his horse, almost killed him, and then McClellan let us go, he stepped back, he let us reposition our infantry and cavalry, not wanting combat at that moment, I guess.

We were a sullen miserable lot back in our camps. Jack came around with his head bandaged, his arm bandaged, again to reproach me, saying: "I can't do this anymore." I never answered his complaint with encouragement. "Me, too," I said. At Seven Pines we lost Corky Hepner and big Albert Shaw. I had now only one clumsy Shaw, little Arthur, the hopeless Shaw, to order about, and we lost fearless Sam Wood who carried our standard, others too, but these I felt as wounds in my soul. We were sitting down at the commissary wagon, Jack and I, with almost nothing to say to one another. My treat, I gave him a thumb of cheese and a salted cracker. "I should be dead," Jack said. "I was giving Albert Shaw a drink of water when he got hit, smack in the chest." "Mm," I said, chewing a twist of black sausage.

Tom Whittington said we were probably going north. He said we'd won our battles at Seven Pines and Fair Oaks and now we had old Granny Lee as our commander, old Granny Lee who, in western Virginia, couldn't get his troops properly organized, who was either too late or too early, who was now our Napoleon, the genius general who would finally get us out of Virginia, muddy, rainy, bloody Virginia, and maybe chase

foolish McClellan all the way to Washington. We might yet win this dreadful war, said Tom Whittington. We were in camp about a week, nursing wounds, washing clothes, repairing equipment. Insolent Jack failed to salute Captain Ward, F Company's martinet commander, and said something smart when reprimanded. He was back on latrine duty, the golden-haired Grahame prince, shoveling shit. Then, one late afternoon, Tom Whittington came up to me as I sat in the tent reading *Home Geography,* and he had a big package for me, a present from Colonel Rust. It was a handsome new gray frock coat, fresh clean epaulets and braid, and straight cut trousers.

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I had come to believe my star-spangled coat was magically a shield. It was, as Tom first said, once hit, not again. Charging at Seven Pines, bullets whizzing, cannon thundering, I had floated, I had sailed, pushing and pulling new Stars into the gaps in our line, shouting to Sam Woods, who was waving our flag, go there, come here. I dodged bullets. Don't ask me how, my hips would flinch, a shudder would take my shoulder, the ball or bullet would zip past me and strike the ground, or a tree, or someone else. I was superstitious as a boy, believed in charms and spells, believed all the hokum Jim Watson would serve up for us, but then, at a young age, I realized the river went up and down without God's care. Things happened for reasons in the natural world, not because spirits were involved. I didn't at the start want Henry Anscombe's frock coat, though I needed a new coat, and I'd looked sourly at the yellow stars cook put over the bullet holes. Yet here I was, this new uniform on my lap, and I'm tenderly touching my new yellow stars.

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Adieu, Jack. When I got back to camp, Tom Whittington not around, Homer Ambrose came up, saluting in his awkward way. “Mgwgbrz,” he said, his broad shaggy face darkly frowning. “Kgtwgh.” We had made Homer a sergeant, but not C Company’s first sergeant. No one could follow his commands. Instead, he was chief of our skirmishers. Next Jesse Ambrose, coming up after Homer, same awkward salute. “Mr. Jack is gone,” said Jesse. I stood looking at them. There were soldier things the Ambrose boys would never do properly, no matter how much instruction and practice. They couldn’t master a smart salute. They were always unkempt, buttons missing, trousers ragged. They were the best Stars in the company. I soberly took in Jesse’s information. Gone where? Then Tom Whittington was facing me, hand on my shoulder. Behind him other troopers had gathered to behold this significant meeting, Captain Whittington and First Lieutenant Mark Finn, the two principals discussing the situation.

Two days ago, a splendid barouche pulled by two big gray horses had come rattling into the camp, two finely dressed gentlemen in the rear seats, a rather gaudy corporal with crimson stripes on his sleeves sitting on the high box seat, slapping the reins, full of himself, it seemed. They had come from Richmond and they had a letter for our Colonel from President Davis himself. Private John Grahame was transferred from active duty in the Army of Northern Virginia to the Confederate foreign service, his language skills (fluency in French and German) greatly prized by the new secretary of state, Judah Benjamin. Colonel Van Manning said this was the surprising gist of the letter. Our ignoble shit shoveler was a learned gem desired by the high and mighty in Richmond. The two gentlemen had swiftly gathered Jack up, bid him leave his good gear behind, and departed, saluting a surprised Officer of the Day at the gate to the camp, Jack Grahame no longer a Star in our company.

“Did you ever hear him say one word in French or German?” Tom still had his hand on my shoulder and he gently shook it. “No,” I said, still just registering the news. Transferred. Gone. Out of action, for sure.

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Antietam is a creek.

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"You are a caution, Huck," Tom said. "Never had much to say. Back in the day in Kansas, chasing Red Legs, my outfit and yours, we were a raucous bunch, but not you, you were silent as the tomb. Still are." Third bivouac after White's Ford, the regiment bedded down, Tom wanted to try another crumb. It was my last one and I shared it. "They'll probably move that Simpson kid in K Company over here to take your place. He's smart. He'll work out just fine with you." Two draws and I was spiraling off into the night air of godforsaken Maryland. It was said we were liberating Maryland, that Maryland men would flock to our colors and fill our lacking regiments. Maryland did not cheer our troops, did not give us food and flowers. Third Arkansas did not add a single Marylander. It did not disappoint Captain Tom Whittington. He had his happy tune to sing. All the great conquerors, Alexander, Caesar, marching into Persia, marching into Gaul, were vastly outnumbered.

I sat incased in a black mood. The glowing remnant of that crumb put me up in the air like a great night bird and I sailed far from our bivouac. I saw below me the countryside we had yet to traverse, farms, woods, creeks, and beyond them the nighttime illumination of the Army of the Potomac, campfires beyond counting. Somewhere among that endless array of tents someone was cleaning his piece, or sharpening his sword, and this was the fellow, from Michigan or Ohio, who would bring me down, not even knowing it, rushing forward perhaps to his own death. I was not superstitious, I said to myself. I didn't believe in God. I certainly did not believe in providence, yet I had Tom Sawyer's tooth on a chain around my neck and I had the two yellow stars from Anscombe's coat in the breast pocket of my present newly starred gray Confederate coat, two pieces of faded yellow cloth.

***

Antietam is a creek.

Remember that little white church in the woods. Remember the cornfield and the bridge, insane charges and countercharges. Remember that sunken road where we stood against repeated attacks, mowing the Federal boys down, the entire battle, my part in it, silent, soundless, no roar of cannon, no bedlam of cries and commands, just my breathing, hoarse, at times sobbing. I don't know what it was exactly, an explosion near our advancing formation, a thunderclap, just as midmorning we were moving into our first battlefield position, and I was temporarily deafened. We were in a wood, lining up, loading our muskets, I saw Colonel Manning and Captain Whittington, mounted, horses prancing, their swords out, shouting at us.

Ever since Seven Pines and Fair Oaks where Stars had fallen all around me, I'd kept Jesse Ambrose close, Jesse with his pouch of boiled white rags, my personal nurse. Jesse and Homer were quondam butcher boys, had spent their childhood and youth among pig bodies and diverse carcasses, knew anatomy, knew circulatory systems, knew how blood spilled from animal bodies. At Seven Pines and Fair Oaks I'd walked amid the ambulances and surgery wagons to find missing Stars, I saw the horrors of the medical practice, the exhaustion of doctors and their aproned bloodied assistants, and I was determined should I ever fall on the battlefield not to end up on those hospital tables. I put it to the Ambrose boys and they assured me they would think of something or just shoot me propped against a tree or stone wall. It was really up to Jesse. Homer was still active leading the skirmishers. When the bugles blew and the drums rattled, Homer was out of my sight.

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My first hit was a spent shell fragment, a slash in my left calf, which Jesse promptly dressed as we were crouching in the woods, musket balls and shrapnel decimating the trees above us, leaves and branches coming down on us. Next that famous cornfield, bluecoats thick among the stalks, charging, shooting, I'm shouting: "Wait, boys, hold your fire." Let them emerge. Let them appear. We don't want spent muskets. We don't want to be awkwardly reloading as bluecoats are suddenly upon us with their bayonets. I'm shouting, I can't hear myself, but my line is stalwart, muskets raised,

waiting. Before I can shout “Fire,” I’m hit a second time, high on my left thigh, and sent spinning, knocked backward, Jesse Ambrose posted close nearby in the second rank, quickly beside me, Jesse shrieking, “Fire,” and the volley goes forth. We stop the Federal charge

The second hit is a sharp pinching flesh wound. Jesse rips open my trouser leg, slaps a salve on the wound, then a rag bandage, and I’m back on my feet, unbelievably, heart pounding, I’m heaving as breathe. We have a respite; the bluecoats have receded in the cornfield. Then the battle shifts, the regiment relocates itself, and now Stars are dispersed, wounded, killed, I am still deaf, hearing the rumble and roar as if the battle noise was far off, in another country, I command a few Stars, some Texans, Alabamians, North Carolinians, their officers shot dead or wounded. It is here at the Sunken Road, at its fence, that the legend of Captain/Major/Colonel Mark Finn, Confederate Hero, begins. I’m hit a third time, my left arm just below the shoulder. Then four and five, five, the brutal finishing wound, five, shot in my face, I can’t really say how gruesome it was. A brigadier general rallying troops trying to leave the field sees me in action lumbering about on one good leg, one arm lifeless, a dead stick, and he calls out to his colonel, who is that fellow?

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I was carried from the field by the Ambrose brothers, with Captain Whittington’s permission, just as a general retreat was getting underway. No, Jesse did not shoot me as he was supposed to. I’m sure I looked bad enough for Jesse to think I was dying, to give me the killing shot, but he didn’t. In the ambulance wagon, stuffed in among other shot and bleeding soldiers, with Jesse beside me, my head seemingly exploded, pain so fierce I can’t now accurately recall it, I suddenly could hear again, sharply, precisely, Jessie saying over and again: “Your home free, Lootenant, home free.” Every jolt and jar of the wagon, wounded soldiers cried out and cursed. I could only moan and groan, Jesse patting my brow with a rag. We were going to Chimborazo Hospital in Richmond and it was on the other side of the moon. It took ten years to reach it.

***

I'm almost dead. I have a vicious continual headache, my soft brain clenched and unclenched, my jaw burns, my torn cheek simmers, disgusting liquids fill my mouth and I can't most of the time spit them out, as I am virtually unable to lift and turn my head, so they drain down my throat at times choking me so that I can't breathe. A young doctor, bespectacled, in a soiled white coat, feels my forehead, looks at my wounds, tells the soldier nurse to change my bandages, asks me silly questions, only half listening to my groaned or grunted responses. I can see he thinks I am a gone case. As I said, I was almost dead. Death was always sitting in a chair next to my bed, holding my hand, speaking softly to me. It was my only usable distraction. What did Death have to say?

There were six of us in our section of the big ward, two groaners like me, one without an arm, the other without a leg, the other three fairly comatose, two regularly dying and replaced. We lived with death. He was the constant presence in our section. What kept me going was the old black man who took away the piss and shit bottles and basins, who lifted us, turned us, who washed the hinder parts of our blistered and maimed bodies. His touch was slow and gentle and he would speak softly to me as he performed his duties. The soldier nurse, Otto was his name, called the black man Rudy. Rudy would tenderly wash the matter from my eyes and I would look at him, his wrinkled skin, his grizzled hair, his yellow and chocolate eyes. I was bad to look at, but he had seen worse, and it hadn't made him cruel or angry. "Jesus goin' to heal you, Cap'n Finn," he'd say, and his warm rag was heavenly on my raw red skin. It was the only relief I had in Chimborazo Hospital until one evening Otto came to my bedside and said I was going to have a distinguished visitor and could I handle his questions. Otto was the stump of a middle-aged man, an immigrant Austrian with a thick German accent.

That night, like all the previous nights, I lay in bed throbbing, flinching, gagging, sleepless. Life was an unending torment. I didn't want to see Tom Whittington or the new colonel commanding our Third Arkansas, didn't want to see anyone coming to say goodbye to me. I shut my eyes but I wasn't sleeping. A strong hand grasped my forearm, then firmly took my hand. I opened my eyes. It was Dr. Israel Sunshine, his

kindly face, Herr Doktor himself in a grey military uniform, brigadier general stars on his collar, and he said, quietly, “Huck.” I stared at him with my bleary crusted eyes, stared in disbelief. He produced a little brown bottle, lifted my head, and had me drink two swallows. “I’ll come back tomorrow and we’ll see what can be done about your wounds.” He said this as I was sinking back on the pillow and then I crashed into sleep, I fell into it. I wasn’t thinking, I wasn’t feeling, I was instantly asleep, and what a great mercy that was.

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Herr Doktor did not immediately return. It was several days, a midmorning, when he finally reappeared. Standing next to him was a hefty big-shouldered gentleman in civilian clothes, Herr Doktor Herbert König was his name, and he had an uplifted pointy Prussian mustache. Dr. König, Dr. Sunshine explained, was an old friend and former colleague from his days in Berlin who had been working in the Sunshine clinic in Jamaica. He had come up to North America, slipping through the blockade in Florida, bringing boxes of rare and useful medicines. He was here to confer with doctors on the Chimborazo hospital staff, to assist, when necessary, with the wounded patients. I was his first American patient. Dr. König clicked his heels, as the Sunshines did, when introductions were in order, and I of course could only mumble. I still couldn’t easily speak. “You’re going to have several weeks of hell, my dear Huck,” Dr. Sunshine said, Dr. König standing beside him, amiably beaming. “Dr. König is going to reset your jaw, restitch your cheek, remove damaged teeth, and then he is going to look at your leg and arm wounds. He is going to wash everything with a wonderful Jamaican liquor he has brought up from the Indies. His overall treatment will hurt you, but there will be an end to it, and then you can resume your life.”

I said; “mmamder,” and a tear might have rolled down my cheek.

“I want to congratulate you on your promotion, Herr Kapitan,” said Dr. König in his Prussian English, “and the presidential citation.” Dr. Sunshine stood beside him, nodding, his expression as always inscrutable. Perhaps he was remembering his attempt at the St. Louis clinic to enlist me in the Missouri State Guard. That was so long

ago. I wanted to ask about Bristow but couldn't sufficiently vocalize. It was all too much. I needed to rest, my headache, for all the good news, still throbbing, a vise around my forehead.

The two doctors were leaving. "Isaac Phelps is in Richmond," Dr. Sunshine said, close to my ear, placing a tablet in my palm. "When Dr. König is done with you, Isaac Phelps will come out to see you. He is very proud of your heroic exploits at Antietam." It was all too much. "Take the tablet now," Dr. Sunshine murmured, and I did. Where was my coat and my two stars? What had happened to my chain and Tom's boy tooth? I was coming back to life, I could see that, though it meant this new Dr. König, day after day, would bring me back to that terrible day in Maryland, touching each wound with his cold steel.

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I can't say I was significantly healed after Dr. König's work on my wounds, but I was better. Every procedure he did was as painful and devastating as the wound itself. I had fevers and headaches. I still regularly gagged on draining fluids. He took metal from my leg and arm, washed and cleansed the openings and punctures and still the wounds suppurated. He saved the several teeth he had to extract and I still have them in a little brown cloth bag in my trunk. I somehow lost Tom Sawyer's tooth at Antietam. My lucky charm, shot to pieces at Antietam Dr. König was apologetic. But he had Herr Doktor's brown bottle and he had Herr Doktor's tablet, all this from Jamaica, and they helped. I did sleep at times and after a while I could say my wounds began to stop leaking. Second week, middle of October, I did feel better. I had some appetite. I couldn't yet speak, my tongue was still sore and swollen, my jaw fairly rigid in its strapped bandage, yet I could coherently grunt and frame certain basic words.

Then, beginning of the third week, as October drew to its close, I had the expected visit of Isaac Phelps. Rudy got me into a wheelchair and rolled me down to the ward's windowed veranda. How good it was to see Cousin Isaac, who had put on some weight, showed a stomach in his vest, who was well dressed in his respectable black suit, cravat, and silken vest, the very image of substantial prosperity, of the man who

was successful in his business ventures. Mustache, sideburns, wavy combed hair. A broad smile which he laid on everyone, I knew it well. He laid it on Rudy. “My good man,” he said, dismissing Rudy, who left bug eyed and muttering. Cousin Isaac had a briefcase with him and from it he produced a small flask of Tennessee bourbon. He had a wooden sipper for my medicinal use. Cousin Isaac was never without fortification for himself and to share. He also brought a writing tablet and a pen which he put before me.

“Write down five questions that are pressing for you. We can talk about new business later, as best you can.”

I wrote.

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He took up the tablet and looked at me.

“Tom Sawyer,” he said, “is a prisoner of war at Camp Douglas outside Chicago, a terrible place I’m told, and all our efforts to get him paroled have been stymied by Tom’s insolence and bad behavior in the camp. He was in that big battle at Shiloh last June and captured on the second day.”

He paused to take a swig from the flask.

“Can’t say about your Mr. James Watson. As you know, he slipped away north when the white Watsons were after him with detectives and bailiffs. Last we heard these same people were still searching for him in Ohio.”

My questions were just names.

“Clyde Bristow is now living in a Catholic monastery in Tennessee, put there by Dr. Sunshine for his safety, Bristow too loose in his speech to be around white people in wartime Tennessee. The monks who live in this monastery have taken vows of silence. Bristow understands he has to live inside those walls in order to survive. When the war is over, won or lost, the Sunshines will restore Bristow’s future.”

I took a drink using the sipper and the whiskey burned my tongue.

“Jack Grahame, that is a long-complicated story as you might well imagine. He’s alive and well in Canada, but I’ll save that report until I make my later speech to you.”

Two pulls on the bourbon flask and I was almost intoxicated. My headache burned, but in a pleasant way. The daylight was strong in the windows. I could see the spires of Richmond. I could hear church bells. Cousin Isaac had seated himself on a window ledge.

"All your personal belongings are secure. Major Whittington saw to that. He sends his best wishes to you and his congratulations on your promotion.

I rolled my eyes and shook my head, slightly.

"And no, you're not released from service. When you're better, they want you back."

"Mm, I said.

"Maybe I should come back tomorrow to make my speech to you." Cousin Isaac was closely regarding my face, which was no doubt sweaty and pale. He took up the tablet and silently reread my brief questions. "No," I managed to say. "Talk now." I wanted something to think about besides the pain of my wounds.

***

Here it was, the speech he was going to give to me later. He moved closer with his chair, he held my hand, like a father, and he said: "I realize Huckleberry is not a good name for an officer in the Confederate Army, not a good name for a grown man, come to think of it, but it has a certain charm and I'd suggest you continue to use it, but in quotation marks. You are indeed Captain Mark Finn, but "Huckleberry" lets everyone know you remain a good old boy, a hometown fellow. When the war is over and you're back in Missouri, that nickname is pure gold to be liberally spent in any number of political campaigns. Remember, you and Tom were boy heroes, you caught and killed a half breed criminal, you found his treasure chest, and then, amazing to tell, the two of you reclaimed that notorious fugitive slave, Jimmy Watson. Now look at you, nothing but bandages, I can see your eyes and your nose, that's it, a hometown Hannibal boy, and the Yankees couldn't kill him. You were a hero as a boy and you're a hero as a young man. If only I could get a photographer in here."

If I survived, if I recovered, I was still first of all an officer in the Third Arkansas. I hadn't a single thought about political office in Missouri. I was living battle to battle with

only vague thoughts about my postwar future. One of my Stars, Alan Humphrey, talked about building railroads in Arkansas and Mississippi after the war. I did have some money to invest, thanks to Cousin Isaac, and securely stashed, so he said, and that was about it so far as my plans were concerned.

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Cousin Isaac said: “After the war, Huck, I think about after the war. We might win a short war. We can’t win a long war. We will be defeated. Jump ship. Look to a future elsewhere. That might be good advice. It hurts me to see you like this, our little Huck shot five times at Antietam, and for what, defending slavery, God help us.” He was still holding my hand, but it felt more like I was holding his hand, steadying him. He said “I thought I might be the head of some important department in the new government where I could do some good for the cause, but I’m not even the chief of an office. Missouri people do not have much influence in the government, and, as it turns out, Governor Jackson doesn’t trust me. Well, he shouldn’t. I don’t respect Jackson and his Missouri people. I’m not sure about the legality of his Secession Ordinance. I won’t trouble you with this messy piece of business. Procurement, that is where I am stuck, organizing and funding blockade runners, my specialty medical supplies, thanks to my connections with the Sunshines. As the blockade gets tighter and tighter, I’m going to have less and less to do.”

Out came the flask. Cousin Isaac took a serious drink, several swallows, then passed it to me. He was well dressed, as I’ve said, and still had that confident air as he spoke, but, just a bit, I now detected, for the first time, the scent of alcohol in his confidence. He wasn’t drunk, but a certain whiskey fueled emotion had entered his talk. On the eve of a battle Captain Lippard of D Company always had his flask out and this manner of speaking, intimate, confidential, trusting me with his private opinion about the regimental commander and how he thought the forthcoming battle would be wrongly fought. You didn’t want to hear it. You were clearing your mind, thinking about the scouted terrain, just that, and here was Lippard putting mental junk into your mind.

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Cousin Isaac's hand released its grip of mine and went away. "Huck, my boy, can I still call you Huckleberry? I do respect your military rank. I've always thought you might have an important future. I liked your silence when Tom Sawyer was holding forth about his adventures. You were just a raggedy kid and yet you had a certain self-command. I knew what your escape story was about, though you didn't tell it, couldn't tell it. How could you? You and Jim Watson became fast friends during that escape. How did you do that? You're just a kid. I've been in the antislavery business for most of my life, but what do I actually know about knee-grow life, slave or free? I do not have a single knee-grow friend, and you, the merest child, just slip and slide in and out of knee-grow life, best friends with Jimmy Watson, as he's called on the 'Wanted' poster, best friends with Clyde Bristow, whose Jamaican English I could never penetrate and yet I heard the mockery in it, I knew his courtesies were all barbed. Once this war is over, slavery abolished, you will be an excellent spokesman for abolitionist Missouri, a reformed Confederate War hero, that will be the big thing. You'll have counterparts like Watson or Bristow making their case for the knee-grow voting public in Missouri. You have knee-grow friends. You have no idea how important that is going to be."

As he said it, the word was strange in his voicing, not his usual word for black people, but a new one he had to learn to say, "knee-grow." I was myself troubled with the proper usage. I didn't think of Jim Watson as a knee-grow. Others did, of course, but I couldn't. At one point that worse race name was actually his first name, Jim his second name, for all we knew. I didn't think of Clyde Bristow as a knee-grow. Decent white people said "knee-grow," thinking it was polite, when actually it was ignorant. Our lazy white Southern speech colored the statement, knee-grow. It was a name white people put on a person. Jim never said "I am a knee-grow." Decent white people said "Jim Watson is a knee-grow." He never said it. White folk can't properly say "knee-grow" without a hitch somewhere in its expression. I never say it, don't need to.

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From inside my wall of white bandaging, slits for my mouth, nose, and eyes, I contemplated this new and different Isaac Phelps. He still looked good, but he wasn't the alert busy Cousin Isaac who took charge of Tom and me in Arkansas, who was then living several exciting lives at once, in St. Louis, in Memphis, practicing law, living another life on the river boats. Now he wasn't in charge of anything. That's pretty much what he said. He was in the Richmond government. He was an officer of the state, he insisted on that, but effectively he was a government smuggler helping unload and reload cargo in small dark ports. He brought in medical supplies from the Caribbean, principally from Jamaica, critically required medicines, surgical equipment, he had that importance, and, with Richmond's tacit permission, he also brought in sugars, spices, syrups, vinegars, black and red inks, writing paper, sandalwood soaps, sacks of crushed herbs, too much to behold in our pinched starving country, you could faint dead away. Not everyone in our brave coastal Confederacy, said Cousin Isaac, was abstaining from amenities. Here was the flask again, Cousin Isaac offering it to me with the wooden sipper. I sipped just to make him feel comfortable. I thought he would have good news concerning our Missouri people, who was promoted, who got married, something that would lift me out of my gray mood.

No. Nevertheless, he said, I still have plans, I still have friends across the Confederacy ready to spring into action. This was Cousin Isaac's life, planning. Jack Grahame and I joined the Confederate Army in Arkansas to get out of the Confederate Army in Virginia. That was our plan. Here I am, still bleeding. from my wounds, shot to pieces at Antietam, my lucky stars in the pocket of that new coat, not worn, that must have been the difference.

Cousin Isaac said: "Well, enough of that, Huck. I'm here to say that old General Grahame has been all along mighty appreciative of the interest you've taken in his wild Jack and the help and understanding you've given Jack. He thinks you should do your convalescence at his big family home in Athens, far from the smoke and sound of battle. I heartily agree. Richmond is not a healthy place for you. Where else could you go? Give yourself another week, maybe two, get these fevers down, your jaw working, your leg wound properly scabbed, and we'll put you on the Atlanta train. The Grahame estate is a lovely place. I've been there several times. I do legal work for the General.

When you meet him, be sure to bring up Seven Pines and Antietam. He'll tell you about Monterey and Buena Vista. The Mexican War, my oh my, that was his great moment.

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Sore tongue, aching jaw, I said from inside my white helmet, "Jack."

I will see the mansion, his home, his father, his sister, but not the dreadful brothers who are in arms elsewhere in the Confederacy.

A bright light fell upon my gray mood.

Cousin Isaac was gathering his things. "Jack Grahame," he said, "is in Canada third secretary to Rowland Grace, our unofficial envoy to Bishop Ignace Bourget." He gave the name an exaggerated pronunciation. "Boor-jay fears all those radical Protestants just on the other side of the Saint Lawrence River, that mob of emancipators and abolitionists. Richmond wants a reliable friend in Quebec, maybe even its own building in the city, a safe nest for spies and secret agents. Jack's the only secretary truly fluent in French. I'm sure Jack is thrilled to find himself, somewhere, somehow, indispensable."

Part Four: Huck Finn, convalescent in Athens, Georgia

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I opened my eyes and there she was steadily regarding me, a handsome mature woman, blue eyes, regular features, blonde brown hair pulled back in a bun. I didn't struggle up toward wide awake consciousness. There was no long emergence through

the murk of my drugged mind. I opened my eyes; I was alert as ever I was. On her left temple descending onto her cheek and chin a dark red birthmark the shape of a thin island nation. I instantly saw it and in the same moment I noticed her left eye was not straightforward, just a tad turned to the bridge of her nose. She was looking at me, studying me carefully. I returned the gaze and so we were silently engaged. She was doctor/nurse and I was the patient. I didn't feel any pain, no thud of a headache, no ache in my jaw. It was an utterly new sensation.

"Captain Finn," she said, her voice deep and mellow, "I think you're much better."

This was the sister Sophie I'd heard so much about, the sister who effectively managed the vast enterprise of Grahame & Sons, the sister who had consistently rescued Jack from all his difficulties. I was at the Grahame manse though I had no sense of my arrival. I knew I had suffered some kind of relapse on the train, the journey of which was hard and painful, every rock and bump of the carriage a sharp shot to my fragile system. Otto traveled with me as my attendant and I knew he was alarmed most of the trip, often crooning to me in German, prayers, some in Latin. The long night before I reached Athens, I was hot and cold, feverish, late October wind penetrating the carriage, my extremities freezing. After midnight, Roman Catholic Otto telling his beads beside me, I went dark.

"How long have I been here?" I asked. I was in a large airy room, big windows, vaulted ceiling, in a bed with thick white sheets and coverlet, my upper body raised by a mound of pillows. I might have been transferred to paradise. I was in paradise. This was it. What time was it? Midday, I figured, the light was strong in the room.

"Five days," Sophie Grahame said, her sober expression unchanged.

"Can't be," I responded. My jaw still bandaged felt almost normal. My tongue was also almost healed. I could speak.

"You had a long sleep," Sophie continued. "You'd wake up every now and then, talk to your attendant, that funny Austrian fellow, who left soon as he delivered you. He didn't want to be the one in whose care you finally perished. We could not break your fever. All our doctors are in military service except for ancient Dr. Allen and pretty much you have to go to him. He can't come to you. Sister Susan Feldkamp, herbalist, bonesetter, genius Dutch lady from Albany New York, is our doctor and she was

alarmed by your fever. She's hardly ever alarmed so you can imagine how nervous we were." I did suddenly remember a bonneted and aproned older woman putting a chloroform cone on my face, such as I'd seen an older woman in a white bonnet wearing a white apron do at Chimborazo, and someone doing something to my jaw, resetting the fractures, stubby fingers in my mouth, teeth fragments being extracted, as I drifted in drugged sleep, one eye still open and attentive. Sophie was Sister Susan's assistant during these operations.

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The next two days I simply luxuriated staying in bed on those tight smooth sheets propped up on those soft creamy pillows. A small wood fire in a small iron stove warmed the room. In the morning a servant girl appeared with a simple breakfast of porridge, toast, and coffee, all this on a footed tray. Then Sophie came in, Sophie's cool hand resting lightly on my brow, how was my fever. The maid took away the breakfast tray and returned with a smaller tray on which I found, precisely laid out, a warm towel, a small bar of soap, an ivory handled toothbrush, an ivory handled straight edge razor, and two bowls of warm water. All these articles, Jack's toilette. I wasn't in his room, but I was certainly in his night shirt and I used his personal items. In accordance with Sister Susan Feldkamp's treatment, I was to remain fairly immobile for two more weeks, not risking the least stumble and fall. No more fractures in 1862. I was spry enough to use the commode chair in the antechamber. I could make my way there and back. Mostly I rested and slept. I had been transported from harsh unforgiving soldier life in the Army of Northern Virginia to this quiet nursery world run by competent caring women. Paradise, as I've said. At night you heard the wind in the trees. During the day, crows talking. Once before, as a boy just back from my raft journey, I had refuge in the Widow Douglas's home, had a bed with linen sheets, had breakfast prepared in the morning, had tasted domestic peace, and here it was again, the same sensation. I closed my eyes and breathed it in, domestic peace. You deserve this, I said. You were shot to pieces at Antietam.

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A week passed and I quietly mended, still not able to chew solid food, but mending. Every morning Sophie came to take my temperature, fever declining, but fever still, the wounds in my leg and arm still an issue. She would talk, I could barely answer, my reconstructed jaw slowly healing. Did the soldiers in my company, while encamped, talk about the slavery they were protecting? She was just listing the topics. When your jaw is right and your tongue is good, she said, we are so desperate for news of the war, any kind of news. I was thinking of the Ambrose boys, refugees from indentured slavery, happy to be abroad in their proslavery Confederate army, of Tom Whittington and his classical reference, Alexander, Caesar, trim tight minorities prevailing in the struggle for independence. I could only look, nod, grunt. Sophie met my gaze straight on, her loose eye, the scarlet facing on her face, and I never once recognized it, acknowledged it, I necessarily took it in, I looked at the full face, which was handsome and straightforward. I wanted to hear the story of how she dealt with these factors, her drifting eye, her crimson marking, and then we could talk about the abolition of slavery in our Southern homeland.

***

Sister Susan Feldkamp was coming to re-examine me. After Sister Susan's inspection, Sophie and I would discuss the terms of my residence at the Grahame manse. It was understood the family felt they were obligated to put me back on my feet and in the world. Also, the family would contribute to my welfare. All that, understood. It was rather how did I see my convalescence, what were my post-recovery plans? I was secure and content restricted to my room, to my bed, wearing a number of Jack's long nightshirts, reading my way through old issues of the *Southern Literary Messenger*. The question took me by surprise. How did I see my future? Where was I going? What would I be doing?

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When I was shown into the General's study, which was now Sophie Grahame's office and work station, she was there to greet me, again dressed in plain and simple, brown skirt, white blouse, her expression as always sober and straightforward. Rising with effort from her big chair at the window, Sister Susan stood, stiffly stretching her back, finding her footing, and then came and shook my hand, man to man. I obscurely remembered her treating me when I first arrived, remembered her fingers in my mouth working my jaw, palpating my gums, and here she was, the famous Susan Feldkamp, a severe older woman, close cropped gray hair in a white linen bonnet, wearing a belted leather vest that was buckled and tightened, I would soon learn, to correct a certain curvature of her spine. She was there to change my bandages, treat my healing wounds with salves and ointments, to prescribe teas for the stubborn fever that still afflicted me.

"Captain Finn," Sophie said, "Sister Susan is a legend in northeast Georgia, for pigs and cows and horses, also for men and women and children. Doctors hereabout want nothing to do with her, for good reason. She was my mentor while I was growing up here in Athens. She would take me with her in her little buggy when she went off to some farm to treat a sick cow or an ailing goose. I saw Sister Susan thrust her arm inside a groaning cow and pull out a wet bawling calf by its ear. She was fearless and unerring."

I blushed. Sophie was so free and easy in her language. She talked to me as she might have talked with Jack.

"Mam," I said, turning to Sister Susan, bowing.

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Next, I was standing naked in the light of the study's big window. I was tapped and thumped, and yes, to her question, I said I shat and peed with no problem. Sister Susan had a device that enabled her to peer into my orifices. I stood still as a statue while Sister Susan moved around me. I had no shame in submitting myself to the pry and pinch of her cold professional fingers. I remembered my exposures at the

Sunshine Clinic, my penis turned about to medical scrutiny, side to side, up and down, like a cut of meat. Then Sister Susan scrubbed me with a stinging solution, armpits, genitals, businesslike, grunting, with clicking sounds. I bravely stood to it, trusting her competence. At last, she came to my mouth and jaw, still a big problem for me. I sat for this part, my mouth stretched painfully open, and she gently moved my jaw about, speaking a froggy, guttural Dutch/English. I barely understood what she was saying, but I said yes to what I did understand. She next produced a small black case, for the first time looking at me face to face, holding the case up to me. I stood to open it, standing before her naked as Adam before the Fall. Inside the case I saw an orange wax mold and five white human teeth.

"Aha," I said.

Efficiently, quickly, she rebandaged me, less than before, reminding me how I was to chew, gently working the jaw, and my diet, keep to it, boiled mashed turnips, a load of it.

"Mam," I said, awkwardly dressing.

"Captain Finn," Sister Susan said.

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I was feeling good, having passed Sister Susan's examination. I remembered the day at the Sunshine Clinic when I learned I was, for some duration, dismissed from treatment. I hadn't reported my case of gonorrhea to Sister Susan. No need to make that confession, Dr. Sunshine told me, unless I was preparing to come to terms with a decent yielding woman.

". . . you looked after him, you kept him safe," Sophie was saying.

"Yes mam, to an extent," I said. Jack was absolutely without any soldier ability or talent. He could stand at attention for five minutes, maximum, then his legs turned to jelly, or he said something funny, and the platoon lost its focus. He was almost continuously on latrine duty and then we found a place for him, he was a runner, he brought you messages and ammunition. "I swear," said Tom Whittington, "that fellow actually dodges bullets." Jack was a soldier fool, but not a coward. In the heat of battle,

you're out of ammunition, through the smoke and clamor, here is Jack Grahame with a sack of balls.

"We were to repay you for all the lifesaving help you gave Jack," Sophie said, "by arranging a decent honorable exit from front line duty in the Army of Northern Virginia. We were to see you safely installed in a responsible post where Grahame & Sons could provide a future for you in keeping with your talents and abilities. We managed finally to extricate Jack, your regiment could easily spare him, but your colonel wouldn't let you go, you were too valuable a combat officer, so you were left alone to suffer all these terrible wounds at Antietam."

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What kind of sister abolitionist was Sophie Grahame? Grahame & Sons root and branch depended on slavery, owned the vast enterprise the Ambrose family managed in the West, owned sugar plantations in the West Indies, was everywhere invested in the Southern status quo. This pillared mansion, its groomed and barbered grounds, would vanish, go up in smoke, if the Army of Northern Virginia, my Army, did not prevail on the battlefield. I didn't know about the Enlightenment Army. What kind of commander was Isaac Phelps, who led several lives at once, each requiring physical comfort, good food and drink.

Where was this Enlightenment Army? I was in it. Whether you like it or not, Cousin Isaac said, you're in it. You can style yourself a freethinking solitary but when the Army needs you, it can call on you. Well, to some extent, an order explained, yes. I had to say it. But where was this army? As far as I could see, it was just Sophie Grahame, Cousin Isaac, and me. I knew it was out there, people in positions, that it was serious business, people wrote books and went to conferences, people led political parties. There was statement and strategy in our Army, as Isaac explained it, and I was, I think, seventeen. I agreed with everything he said, so far as I understood it. I did know that the Army of the Potomac, which said it was the Army of the Enlightenment, was at our Southern door, boot planted on the threshold, that Sophie and I, whatever we said, were on the wrong side of history's door, with defenders of slavery, losers, whatever we said.

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We listened to Sister Susan hold forth on Confederate politics. She was staying on to help establish a wing of the Mansion as a nursing hospital. “We can’t speak our thought, there is no political opposition in Richmond, tyranny rules,” Sister Susan said. “What can we do? We collaborate just by living our ordinary lives. I hate myself unloading crutches and wooden legs from the supply wagon, but we’ll need them.” Among abolitionists, Sister Susan was an Immediatist. Abolition first, then problem solving. Or she might say, the first article of belief in Richmond is that the negro is not equal to a white man, period. Richmond can’t in any way repudiate that article, so what is to be done? Where is the resistance in our Confederate South? The South must lose this awful war the sooner the better. All this spoken in a broken Dutch English. She was struggling with despair. She had three glasses of a home-grown dark fruit wine at each evening meal, then a cup of the estate whiskey, sitting at the table in her leather corselet, like a battered Amazon warrior, twisted and bent.

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Here I was, ramshackle barely educated Huckleberry Finn, sitting at a fancy dinner table, with napkins and silverware and wine glasses, under two crystal chandeliers, dining like a gentleman, talking to these educated talented women, Sophie Grahame, who actually didn’t say much the first two nights she presided, and Sister Susan, who, second

night, wanting to escape her argumentative monologue, asked me, once a river rat, whether I could do animal imitations. Mallards astir in the early morning, mist rising from the reeds, I said in a low voice, kwek kwek. We were off the subject of politics.

I gave myself up to this new life. I was healing. I could feel my body thanking me for the exercise. I had bread, porridge, and a bowl of coffee, before the morning tutorial, my sitting with Blackstone and common law. Noon I had a chunk of white local cheese and some dried fruit. This was, after all, the Civil War. We ate sparingly in the Mansion. Then I sat with Milton on divorce, or Shakespeare in Scotland. As I studied these texts,

I might in the course of the afternoon also enjoy two modest glasses of the General's finest taken from the closet in his big study, open to me thanks to Sophie.

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I was living in the middle of a toiling army of servants. They brought me things, they took away stuff, they served me cup and plate, made my bed, washed my shirt, I recognized their different voices, I cordially answered their polite low-voiced questions. It was different on the steamboat, the poor and the wretched, black and white, were almost always in view and visibly suffering. Slaves at the Mansion were mostly all in their appropriate dress, and, bear in mind, they were 'servants,' not slaves. They had their brief say and then they were gone. I was in thickest slavery and I did not feel it.

Lords lived well; I saw that. No lords in Hannibal lived like these Georgian lords.

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Retired Justice Stephen Jones, thank God, was not a demanding tutor, far from it. He was elderly with tufts of white hair above his ears, otherwise bald, thick glasses perched on his nose, coming close to hear my question. Sophie Grahame brought him in a carriage every Monday morning. He had a stout breakfast, a brief talk with Sophie, then took a catnap in the big chair in the library as he looked over papers Sophie had given him. Next, upstairs to my room and study space where I awaited him. We would start with volume two of Blackstone's Commentaries, the rights of property. When I asked about volume one, the rights of persons, specifically about Blackstone's pronouncements on slavery, Justice Jones airily dismissed my question. Justice Taney's Dred Scott Decision conclusively settled the issue of American slavery, freeing us to go on to other topics. Slaves were not and could not be citizens of the United States, period. I let the Justice alone with Taney's Decision. He was otherwise a student's delight, an anecdotal tutor, easily set off onto irrelevant interesting narratives. He had stories about the legendary General Augustus P. Grahame, whom the Justice had known since boyhood, stories I eagerly heard, sifting them for facts inside the brag.

Augustus skillfully guided the firm, now known as Grahame and Sons, G&S, through the Panic of 1837 and the Panic of 1857, using its hard currency reserves to purchase broken banks and deserted farms. He was like a shark, Justice Jones said, seizing properties. He rescued a bankrupt Ambrose family in Louisiana, married an Ambrose girl, employed the Ambrose sons to run his southwestern enterprises. He put Stephen Jones, his childhood friend, on the highest bench in Georgia. If you got on the right side of Augustus Grahame, Justice Jones said, good things happened to you.

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My efforts to get him to talk about the Grahame children, Lewis and Lester, Sophie, and Jack, mostly failed or were ignored. As a young girl Sophie showed no interest in a husband and family. She refused to take dancing lessons, would not go to balls and promenades in Athens. Of course, the Justice said, she had her reasons. The General sent her to a seminary in Charleston, South Carolina. I began to fill in his bare bones account. A lonely guarded child, Sophie studied the stars and thought about space. A shy withdrawn girl, she wanted to be an astronomer. She impressed a science teacher at the seminary, but of course there was no future for young women in star or space studies. She was the only daughter of General “Old Gus” Grahame, seriously unmarriageable, and that was her future.

I add irony to Justice Jones’s report. He did say, this is the big thing that Sophie Grahame did, the accidental action that changed everything. One summer when she was seventeen, bored and restless, unhappy, she persuaded the General to let her work as an assistant to his principal accountant in the firm’s main office. Let her go into the archive, he said to Beasley, the chief accountant, challenge her to write a history of the firm’s investment in the Caribbean, every kind of contract, every agreement. It did not interest her. She needed Spanish and French and didn’t have either. She turned to other shelves in the archive, to old ledgers, old account books, recent account books, scanning, leafing. Cotton and pork, the twin pillars of G&S. The General could not know, Beasley the senior accountant could not know, Sophie most certainly did not know, that she could sight compute, take in a complete page of numbers at a glance,

that she had the skeptical instincts of a police detective, quick to see the anomaly, the error, quick to the thrill of the detection.

She was seventeen, without romantic prospects, and here was something real, a rip in the predictable course of her days, a tear, the fact that there was an embezzlement, never grand, early on, then continual, an unseen tax. She was looking at a crime, theft from her family, from her, and she was in charge of the consequences. She alone had gained a knowledge of the crime.

She was seventeen. It was like a religious experience, an elation, that she, so long a dependent, subject to her father's permissions, now possessed in the great world itself a certain power. She could name the criminal. He was the senior partner in the firm, the General's old and trusted Mexican War comrade. It was a service she would bring to the General. He had to accept her verdict. He had to be grateful. She also knew what the General's first move should be. The General wanted his former best friend skinned and roasted. Sophie, at seventeen, saw the damage a public trial would do to the firm. Instead, she suggested, all the doors and keys that gave the partner entrance to the firm should be, over a weekend, changed. All inquiry, personal or legal, must deal with the same simple statement: "Henry 'Buck' Holcomb no longer works for G&S." Mr. Holcomb would find his personal properties lodged at the post office.

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Caleb Croker, my English teacher, my first editor, was a skinny little fellow, twisted and turned in his body, like Sister Susan Feldkamp. His head was always in a slight motion and his right hand could curl up into a claw. A bony face. Thin orange hair. He was Sophie's personal secretary. He was Jack's confidential friend. Jack hated the hidebound conservatism of French Canada. Caleb had two smuggled letters. He would let me read them. He knew I had been kind to Jack. We were in that league of rescuers with Sophie. Sooner or later, Caleb said, Jack will be standing before a judge. We might see him by Christmas. He'll slip across the border slick as can be, in disguise. He'll speak nonsensical French to the guards at whatever crossing.

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A raft is just logs and planks, doesn't come with a rudder, you have to make one, and it is a clumsy craft whatever rudder you contrive. Worst thing is rafting at night, can't go out too far, current will sweep you away, can't come in too close, you'll break up on some rocky shore or get entangled in roots and overthrown tree limbs. The raft wants the rocky shore. It yields to its pull and then again it wants to run away from the shore, to break free from your puny human instrument, that stick of a rudder, and join the headlong rush of the big river. On moonless nights I had to listen to the river, its different gurgles, its wavelet slapping, how distant the constant low roar of the central river, and then make wide slow adjustments.

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Slavery, as the Grahames had it in their personal world, was wonderfully convenient. Unlike the slavery I saw in Missouri, in Arkansas, in Virginia, raggedy, sullen, unhappy people, the Grahame slaves were like the slaves I saw at the Clinic, properly dressed, sociable, effortlessly doing the necessary labor, cooking, cleaning, expert in the domestic and gardening arts. It was seductive. I was relaxing into its comforts. Slavery took away our horses and saw to it that they were fed and watered. Slavery was in the kitchen preparing our supper. Slavery would come quietly into the room and put more wood on the fire.

"In a week or so the General will return," Sophie said. "Every fall he visits his sister Betty, my Aunt Elizabeth, at her nearby farm. She never comes to the Manse. Aunt Elizabeth thinks I am a monster, a single woman with ideas, an old maid who understands business arithmetic and so manipulates her father and brothers. She's sure that I'm falsifying the General's will, that I will finally impoverish them all, Grahames and Ambroses, except Jack, the family scoundrel. Aunt Elizabeth despises and fears

me. You won't see her. You won't meet her. For that matter, you'll see very little of the General. When he is at home, he's not here, not at the Manse. He lives in that retreat house he's built in the back woods. Jacob and Annie and Harry take care of him. Jacob is the General's long term body servant. Jacob applies ointments and removes chamber pots. He holds the General's right arm when they walk. Jacob is also the estate vintner.

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We were in the big study, a crackling fire going, winter throwing icy sleet at our windows. "I hate slavery," I said, "but I rode with Captain Billy, a proslavery hound, and I loved my big black horse pistol, my Walker Colt, and my short saber. It was my first serious job, so to speak. Here I am, Captain Mark Finn, Third Arkansas, a Johnny Reb in the Confederate Army, desperately defending the sovereignty of the Southern states and their institution of slavery. First sentence in the book of my life: I was poor and I was white and when the war broke out, I necessarily soon found myself in Confederate gray. There wasn't a Federal Army enlistment office in either Missouri or Arkansas. Wherever Jim Watson is, I'm sure he is in Federal blue. Summer '61 we all had to choose a color."

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"Caleb Croker says I possibly suffered brain damage at birth, he really does, he calls himself a straight shooter, how else to explain these impediments I have. I've never had command of left and right. I still pause to think. I have never been able to imagine, to suppose, a future I've created, to make my way carefully to it. The future is what is happening to me today. The next moment is the future. People know where they are going. They hitch up the mules. They load up their wagon. I suppose I'll rejoin my regiment in the spring. In the army you never know where you are going."

Sophie Grahame was smoking her cheroot, thinking over what I just said, my soldier philosophy, the future is the next moment. I could see that she herself had not thought

about the terms of my departure. She roused herself, carefully crushed out her cheroot, and said; “I will start your campaign biography. Vote for Captain Huckleberry Finn, A Man for all Sides, hooray. Be cynical, Captain Finn, leave out the sad parts, keep in the funny parts. You’ve positively entranced Sister Susan with your Missouri stories. Your campaign biography isn’t about you as you live and breathe. It is just about your values, your principles and policies, which are, as both Judge Phelps and I agree, rock solid righteous and rational. You are with us and when the Enlightenment Army comes calling, you will be ready to take on missions.”

Inside my taciturn look, I groaned.

“I suppose,” she went on, “since I know a great deal about the hardship and crises of your early life, thanks to Jack’s letters, I owe you some account of my childhood and youth. Many people in Georgia and elsewhere in the South hated my father, and still do. He is quick in foreclosure, ruthless in acquisition. Someone in Athens, Mary Larkin was her name, I will name her, I will never forgive her, she said the General was in league with the Devil. Other people’s businesses failed. His did not. Other people’s fortunes were lost in the several Panics. Not his. The General did not give the Devil his ten percent, Mary Larkin said. To punish him, to show the world the cruel power the Devil had in his transactions, the Devil touched my cheek and forehead with his crimson finger while I was still in my mother’s womb and as I came forth, he next knocked this eye askew. I was the General’s punishment, his seeming single instance of bad luck, a marked daughter, a miserable daughter he would never be rid of through marriage. Satan’s judgment is written on my face. Every time the General looks at me, he thinks, this splotch of port wine stain, bad luck, damage to my career ambition, something to be explained, a weird daughter. My brothers feel the same, I am their grotesque sister.”

I put my hand up to stop this report.

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Both my hands were up, not to stop the report, just to register my amazement.

She smiled sadly at my gesture.

She went on: “When I came upon the crime that was poorly hidden in the General’s books, I had the help of this broken-down drunkard of an unemployed lawyer in Athens, the uncle of one of my few friends at the seminary, an uncle she loved. Uncle Foster was a wizard with numbers, but only clear for several hours each day, in the morning mostly. He loathed the General, hated him, who fired Uncle Foster years ago, Uncle Foster still fuming, fired for drunkenness. He, too, like Mr. Abernathy, loved Euclid. This was Uncle Foster’s favorite postulate. “Things which coincide with one another are equal to one another.” “It is the battle cry of the Federal Union,” Uncle Foster said, “Hurrah, boys, the whole is greater than the part.” He’d swish about an imaginary sword. He hated the General. He hated rich entitled Southern gentlemen. From the start I took Uncle Foster as he was, I listened to his rant, and when it was time to drink, which could be any time, I quietly departed.”

When he had scrutinized my evidence, he sighed. “This is a spite embezzlement,” he said, “petit larceny, not grand theft, the withheld sum always modest, but constant, continual, a tax, a tithe. Undetected, this is the first great thing about a spite embezzlement, the second is that it lasts forever, as long you live, payment, unknown to you, an insidious withdrawal from your wealth and wellbeing. That is the pleasure of the crime, which had accomplices, knowing and unknowing. And there, dear girl,” Uncle Foster said, “there is where you come in, where your fortune is made.” True enough, I immediately thought, The General can’t trust anyone. He expects envy, demands it, but concealed malice, that is something else. He now saw Buck’s hidden partisans everywhere. No one said anything about the disappearance of their beloved chief. Silence was the command at G&S and it was obeyed. The General had trusted Buck Holcomb, had not paid attention to the doings of his principal manager, the one who kept his books. It was, simply put, shameful, that General Augustus Grahame, famous killer of Indians and Mexicans, conceivably the richest man in northern Georgia, was so easily betrayed and by dumb old Buck Holcomb. The only person at that moment he could trust was his skin-blasted brilliant daughter.”

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I was again astir.

"Relax, friend," she said, seeing my hand about to rise. "There it is, so what? That's my hard-won position. Do let me go on, Captain Finn. Next, the General was at sea without Buck 's cleverly devised plans to approve or disapprove. This is what the General did, as he saw it, he approved or disapproved. That was his work. He needed trustworthy subalterns to frame his options and thanks to me, his darling daughter, he no longer trusted his advisors. He quickly had the idea that his entire company, his G&S, his monumental creation, was tainted, that everyone in the firm secretly knew the General was being played false, that he was a sort of cuckold, a fool. True, of course. He was fooled. He lost his focus and really never got it back, not as it was before knowledge of the betrayal made him sick. He is retired, for medical reasons, such is the public story, but he is not really retired. Everything important still needs his signature. He won't ever retire. He has two able lieutenants at G&S headquarters, men he recently hired who very soon were consulting me until we realized we were actually partners in the project of saving G&S so that, we the partners, could do some good with its wealth and influence. Studying the pork and cotton books in the archive, their columns and sums, I had already learned a great deal about the trade."

I remembered Bristow's warning not to be drawn into the Grahame family drama. Not your story, he said. They're the biggest and worst slaveholding family in Georgia.

Sophie Grahame took, from the start, the position of a war comrade, a fellow conspirator, therefore frank and easy in her speech. In our formations, we were democratic, were we not? We were all in the big story of redeeming our Southern homeland and transforming its governance.

"The General," Sophie said, "couldn't forgive me for having found him drowning in his ignorance and not knowing it. His dismissed daughter saved him. She put the evidence before him. The General's best friend, Buck Holcomb, was his worst enemy. I was the keeper of his secret, the only person he could trust, who he had to trust, and the thing is, Captain Finn, I am not, insofar as the General is concerned, trustworthy. At the moment, he has no idea where his money is and what it is doing. We divert, we subtract, we allot, we do pretty much the same thing Buck Holcomb did all those wicked years of embezzlement, except we know where the redirected money has gone, every

penny, and we don't know where Buck Holcomb's embezzled money has gone. We don't embezzle. We reinvest. Isaac Phelps's line."

It was getting dark. I was exhausted. It was too much to take in, the weird facts of Sophie Grahame's young life, the even weirder fact of her executive power. She suddenly saw how tired I was and abruptly rose from her chair. "Time for you to return to the Manse," she said. "Cook will have set out a dinner for you and Sister Susan. I will spend the night here. I need to talk business with Jacob and Annie." She rang a bell and Slavery appeared at the door. "Fetch Captain Finn's horse," she said. I was up and standing, a bit stiff in my still sore joints.

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Sister Susan Feldkamp had come to the Manse with my new teeth. Sophie had invested in Sister Susan's dental practice, false teeth her specialty, purchased teeth coming from slave cadavers on G & S plantations and farms. My new teeth snugly fit my almost completely healed jaw. On previous visits I had submitted to painful tests and impressions. I didn't really believe this application was going to work, yet here I was, tentatively chewing, using the molars of a dead person formerly held in bondage, so to speak. I still could not effectively raise my arms and hands about my shoulders, couldn't comb my hair, couldn't shave my cheeks and chin. Sister Susan wanted no unsanitary beard to sprout on my face. My punctured cheek, healing, still required a bandage. She expertly shaved up and around the scabbed scar.

It was just Sister Susan and myself at dinner. Sophie Grahame was in town meeting with bank people and special lawyers, or just absent. Soup, bread, and greens. This was the Civil War. I was a Confederate hero, I deserved better for my several wounds, but "better" was in short supply all over the fighting Confederacy. I worked away at Blackstone, read cases, and then was at word play with Caleb Croker, my Shakespeare teacher. Dinner, Sister Susan holding forth, "First thing, you cut off the head of the king and show it to the crowd. Then the revolution begins." I see the logic but where, I ask, is the head in Richmond, who is mind and soul the white king of the South, who is he,

where is he, when we need to go after him with an axe? Don't say Jeff Davis or Little Alec Stephens. "You know who it is, Robert E. Lee," said Sister Susan

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As Caleb Croker told the story: When the General looked into the faces of his blocky twin sons, infant and juvenile, he did not see anywhere an emergence of a Grahame feature, a Grahame look. Grahames didn't have blond hair. How did Sweden enter the family with its big bones and square jaw? The twins had no interest in the operation of G&S or in its business. They could write their signature, poorly. They could not go far in their tables of multiplication. They had driven a number of boyhood tutors to desperation, Lester shooting at the last one, barely missing.

At first the General indulged his Swedish sons, admired their strong handsome look, their hunting and riding skills, so he paid their gambling debts and bought off plaintiffs, but, at last, as it must happen, Lewis went too far. Somebody's property lay dead on the floor. The Morgans of Savannah were incensed, wanted justice and damages, sued the Grahames, son and father, sued also for defamation, their Major Harry Morgan roundly insulted by Lewis in several coastal newspapers. The distracted General was furious, Lewis unrepentant, defiant, Lester standing with his brother, adding some remarks of his own. The General was just at that moment in a delicate negotiation with Governor Joe Brown concerning his appointment as a senior military advisor in the State Guard. The Morgan law-suits terminated that conversation.

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The General's questionable children remained ponderous weights tied to his feet. Each move he made promoting his career had at some point, clumsily, awkwardly, to explain or deny Lewis and Lester's bad behavior, shameful Jack was simply always abroad, Sophie could not be in the bright light of Georgian high society, and yes, what

about Madame Clementine? A residential hospital, Memphis, Tennessee, her present address. Journalist friends gave the General a usable public story. He fought the Cherokee, the Choctaw, and the Chickasaw. Next, he slew the Mexican soldados. A fighting general, he couldn't properly attend to his family problems. Now, the present argument went, the General had his house in order. G&S continued reliably profitable, secretly shipping its cotton, feeding the several Rebel armies. How could Lewis bring the litigious Savannah Morgans down upon him just as he was closing an important deal with Governor Brown? He was this close to securing his return to active duty. And not show any contrition, any understanding of what Lewis's single burst of anger had cost the General? No remorse, instead, disputation.

It was said the twins also doubted their Grahame paternity, as boys they heard the sneering commentary, could not themselves find resemblance when they looked at and studied the Grahame visage. They were not patriotic Grahames, had no interest in their father's political plans, no respect and admiration for the monument he was building with G&S, and they were the sons, goddammit, all that he had in the way of usable sons. A knot of rage would choke his throat. He couldn't any longer bear the sight of their square stupid faces. The twins were banished from the family estate, made persona non grata at the G&S offices in Athens, sent off to the army, all this with drastically reduced stipends. Did they not appreciate their father's largesse, his baronial generosity, yes, Lewis could buy that big yellow horse, and yes, Lester, two sailboats in Charleston harbor. Let them now taste near poverty, the General decreed. He named the sums and Sophie wrote the notices that were sent to the twins.

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Caleb Croker knew Grahame family history better than anyone in the family knew it. He had his own Shakespearean perspective, that fair report, and he had Jack's and Sophie's versions. Jack was unsparing in his criticism of his twin brothers. They rode horses and shot game, and what else did they do? They threw the dice. They played their cards. They were mean to people and animals. Sophie tried to understand their behavior but would not tolerate their treatment of Jack, who was, from the start, her soul

mate in the family. In Arkansas, as we were ourselves signing up for duty in some Confederate army, thinking would it be quick or slow, our probable death in battle. Jack said his thick brothers were certain to be shot early in the war. You couldn't miss them, Lester a six-footer, two hundred and fifty pounds. Lewis would be up front every charge. That would simplify everything, Jack said. Jack would be the president of G&S, a wise and benign president, sister Sophie still the canny brains of the operation. Magnificent, he said, please let life work this out. And Jack was right, first year of the war, Lester had his left hand shot off at Scary Creek, Virginia, Lewis went down at Bull Run, his horse falling on him, shrapnel already blasting his left side, face to toe. G&S kept track of these renegade sons, had them recovering in local hospitals, one-handed Lester finally sent South to command a supply depot outside Memphis, Lewis a slow and painful recuperation in Richmond. Sophie's personal inquiries were not answered.

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"Hard to believe," Sophie said, "Lewis is married, to a widow with two adolescent children. Even harder to believe, Lewis is a born-again Christian, recently come to Jesus. He will soon arrive in Athens with his new wife, a devout Baptist lady, so says my Richmond spy, the children remaining behind in Richmond. Lewis wants the General's forgiveness, wants him to see what a changed fellow he is, lucid, sober, a married man. He is ready to take his place in the family business. Look at his scarred face, see him leaning on his cane, a sober Prodigal Son, a wounded war hero. Here is his new wife, a devout Baptist lady."

"Maybe he is changed," I wondered. Sophie looked right past my remark.

"I don't know what to tell you, Captain Finn. Lewis will probably want to challenge you in some way, maybe even in the actual way. I'm sure he thinks you might have compromised me. Aunt Betty has no doubt been sending him reports of my misbehavior. He might even have an opinion about my business decisions. For your sake, for your safety, it might be best for you to leave, so long as Lewis is here, and yet, frankly, I'm reluctant to see you go. I've always dealt easily with little brother Lewis, but he was just an idiot boy then, not the horse soldier he is now. I feel stronger when

you're here. I enjoy the protection I get domiciling a Confederate war hero in my home. It will cool Lewis's temper, seeing you with your height and muscle and your five bullet wounds. I'm not averse to demonstrating you, Captain Finn. I don't for a moment believe Lewis Grahame is a born-again Christian. This new wife is a card in his game. There will be a final will, the General is always writing new codicils, and who should be in charge of that document?"

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The General's signature was on all transactions, all contracts, all checks, and that was the sum of his control. He signed what Sophie put in front of him, but he had other papers and other signatures, and Sophie knew that. Power had the signature and kept it close. When the General died, Sophie would overnight no longer enjoy the power of his signature. She would be the owner of nothing, G&S going entire to her ignorant rapacious brothers and distant ineffective Jack, with the wolfish Ambroses always at the perimeter, watchful. She could do so much good with G&S money, the thought of it going instead to her irresponsible brothers, it was sickening, it must not happen.

I had this part of the narrative direct from Sophie. In 1859, a proslavery secession looming, Sophie began quietly (she thought) to move G&S wealth to banks and financial institutions in Montreal and Quebec, in London and Liverpool, in Kingston, Jamaica, investing in Sunshine hospitals and medical supply companies. When (this was sure to happen) Union troops at last marched into Athens and fell upon the Grahame estate, they would find empty vaults and bare cupboards. Sophie was proud of what she had already accomplished in '62, the Union and the Confederacy stumbling and staggering in Kentucky, the North far from its killing stroke. All this while she was putting up savings for the new South that was coming.

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And where was the will? What was in the will? A bank teller, member of Aunt Betty's church, told her of large sums of money being sent to London, to Montreal, to Kingston,

Jamaica, for what reason, no one could say. As for the will, Aunt Betty was certain Sophie was at work on the General's final will, giving him language, and of course Aunt Betty was, to some extent, right in both cases. Sophie wasn't looting, she was diverting, putting assets in safe storage. She had several G&S experts at work on the phantom will, wherever it was, whatever it said. In fact, once, Sophie discussed the will with the General who, of course, did not want to suppose his empire immediately collapsing, torn apart by contesting brothers and relatives. Aunt Betty was so right. Sophie was in the General's ear, her advice always rational, practical, trustworthy. He had to think about his postmortem existence, how to put his best face forward. She laid out several disaster scenarios for him, family history brought into the litigation, testimony given, no codicil can cover that, and you, General Augustus Grahame, "Old Gus," are not there to deny the terrible things it is said you did. Leave all your money to the firm, G&S. Let Logan and Pierson, your chief lieutenants at G&S, decide on the shares, with your guidance and my supervision, if you wanted it.

The General merely nodded and said nothing.

End of session.

"Good night, father," she said, closing the door.

The will was the General's last card to play and he held it close to his chest.

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As for the twins, everyone says it was that famous Dutch evangelist, Hors Haggan, who was preaching at that Baptist come-to-Jesus campground just outside Memphis. He had long blond hair and a muscular presentation. Aunt Betty is a born-again Rapture Christian. I bet she took our troubled mother to hear the great Hors Haggan preach."

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I had come to think Sophie Grahame was invincible as a manager of the G&S firm, a woman who had stature and respect, even though she was, early on, a mere slip of a

girl, a regular Joan of Arc. She knew what she was doing and she had the confidence of her knowledge, whatever proposal or project was before her. Most importantly she won over, almost immediately, the top people at the G&S headquarters. All the smart and wise things they long wanted to do, a new direction here, a change in personnel there, they couldn't do, the General increasingly negative, proposals disappearing in his briefcase. Sophie never sat at the conference table. She was there to transcribe what was said, to prepare and record a close summary of the meeting. Her summaries, almost immediately famous inside the firm, subtly altered the General's negatives, found a way to humor his insults and insolence, so that petitioners got, after all, pretty much what they wanted. On the strength of those summaries, G&S began to move again, to re-energize its networks, to wield its strength.

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Sophie often went about in men's expensive clothing. She liked leather: boots, breeches, pantaloons, vests, jackets, coats. She never rode side saddle. She was free in her language; would say how she knew by sight her slave half brothers and sisters, and how uncanny it was, to see in passing the resemblance. She would talk about her guilt and the guilt of the Confederacy as if we were brother officers lounging around a campfire, talking about the question of the mulatto.

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Two days later, high early November noon, two wagons and a buggy came rattling and rolling up the major road to the Manse. I looked out at the arrival from my window. I saw, briefly, an old man in a fur lined cape wearing a broad brimmed fur hat sitting stiffly in the buggy, his long white hair spilled out and over the cloak's collar. Then the procession moved past the front entrance and took the dirt lane that would lead it to the retreat lodge some distance away. The General, Jack's cold judgmental Daddy, Sophie's grudging dangerous patron, the master who sowed his seeds abroad in the quarter, when he felt like it, General Grahame, Hero of Monterey, Hero of Buena Vista,

shot and wounded, but not as badly as I was at Antietam, General Augustus Grahame, not a West Point general, a state militia general, was returning to his domain.

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"Here's your uniform," Sophie said, "clean and pressed. I had Auntie Roo sew on those yellow stars that were in your pocket, two right over your heart. Lucky stars, as I remember your story, you getting to wear the dead Lieutenant's frock coat with its two bullet holes, going into battle after battle, shot up finally everywhere but not the lethal ones to the heart. Lucky stars." She handed the frock coat to me and I put it on. "You are a handsome soldier, Captain Finn," she said. "The General is bound to be impressed just by the sight of you."

"I have better wounds," I said, "and I was in bigger battles."

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I rode through the woods to the big pond and the General's retreat chalet. I had earlier dreaded meeting this formidable patriarch, but no longer. I was in uniform, the one with the stars. I was a captain in the Third Arkansas infantry regiment, I had charge of Company "C," I was somebody, I could endure his scrutiny. He was the master of this domain. All his life he bought and sold slaves. His majordomo, Jacob, had been with him since boyhood. Bent and grizzled, he was still at work. His boy, Harold, took my horse. Jacob saw me into the main room. The General sat in wheelchair in front of the fireplace, a good blaze going, a blanket covering his lap and legs. His long white hair was oiled and meticulously combed, parted in the middle of the top of his head, either side falling to his shoulders. His long drooping mustache fell past his chin and off his face. The General had glittery quick eyes, cold rattlesnake eyes, and they darted over me as I stood in front of him. I had bowed slightly and said quietly, "General Grahame." He was skinny as old men are skinny, chest caved in, broomstick arms, silently furious in their physical impotence. I met his cold gaze with a trace of humor. He no doubt

surmised that I understood his situation. Every move, every action, Sophie Grahame undertook required finally the General's signature, and he gave it because the General had no moves, no actions. He simply sat in this chair and glowered.

"Captain Finn," he said, "what d'ye think it will take to make things square with you for rescuing our Jackie out West and then taking care of him in the army? I like to keep my accounts clean and specific. When will your wounds be healed? When might you return to your regiment? You're obviously convalescent. You can't go on living in the Manse. I'm going to send over one of my nieces to stay with Sophie and keep her company."

I stood there and said nothing. I let him glare at me and wait for my response. "The doctors in Richmond said I might be able to rejoin my regiment in the new year," I finally replied. "Miz Sophie has offered me the convenience of the Manse until that time." I was irked. I am an officer and a gentleman, honor bound, and he had laid an imputation at my feet. Also, it was hard to think of leaving the comforts of the Manse for winter quarters in northern Virginia.

The General signaled that I might sit in the adjoining chair.

He leaned back in his chair and held his head by the temples, staring into the fire. "My son Lewis is coming soon to visit me," he said. "Like you, he has been wounded and is on sick leave. We have business to discuss. He won't stay at the Manse and he won't stay with me. He'll stay in the cottage. I don't think it is a good idea for the two of you to meet. Lewis and Sophie have always been in a struggle and are in a big fight at the moment. I know you and Sophie have become good friends. As it is, your presence in the Manse complicates matters, but what is to be done. Best to stay in your room or go for a long ride on Roddy when Lewis is about."

"Well," I said, "I don't hide from anyone. But I won't force any meetings."

Truly, I looked forward to meeting Lewis Grahame face to face, mean brother of Jack, mean brother of Sophie, juvenile abuser of slave girls.

"My niece, Emmeline Jones, is moving into the Manse today," the General said. "You'll find her an upright intelligent woman."

Slavery bustled into the room, stoked up the fire, refilled the General's glass, and gave me the glance that said it was time for me to retire. Which I did, nodding, the General nodding to me.

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I went to Sophie and reported my eviction notice. That a Miss Emmeline Jones was soon to arrive and take up residence was news to Sophie. I could see her, just a little, sag, losing her concentration. It was too much all at once. I'm a captain in the Third Arkansas and I saw she needed immediate reinforcement. "Look," I said, "I've thought it over. I am perfect as your bodyguard. I'll do it. We can work out the details. I'll move out tomorrow and go live in that room over the big stable. Truly, I am no longer a patient. I'll be staff, I'll be in your employ. We remain friends and go on as before." As I spoke, I could see her return to her customary vigilant attention. She said, "Come with me," and led me once again into that hidden antechamber in the General's study, a skinny little place where locked drawers contained treasures and powers. She opened one, inside, a Colt 44 revolver, a six shooter, oiled, wrapped, a sack of cartridges nestled next to it. She lifted it out of the drawer, both hands, as if it were an infant, and gave it to me, I'm receiving it with two hands, carefully holding it. The bulky heft of it, I knew it well, I had one, holstered on my hip back in the Border War days, Kansas, Missouri, and I fired it, I pulled its trigger, many times, I knew and profoundly respected its power, the kick back, damage done.

"I feel better," Sophie said.

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"Lewis was desperate. In two short years his gambling losses at the card table and the cock pit were such that warrant hounds were after him. He gave up his horses and his dogs, his fishing and hunting gear, his Mexican poncho and Spanish boots, but he would not yield any of his personal slaves. They wanted Alice Burns and Fred Skipper.

He said no and again, no. Brother Lester was no help. He had his own money problem. Lewis did not dare approach his father. He came to me, big sister, and I loaned him the money he needed to satisfy his pressing creditors, a sizable sum, almost everything I had, and I took his Alice Burns and Fred Skipper as collateral, talented slaves Lewis inherited from a distant Grahame aunt. Alice sewed, made shirts, and, occasionally, a wedding dress for a local belle, Fred was a joiner whose chairs stood tight and solid for a lifetime. Alice Burns could read and write. Lewis was proud to own them, thought of them as his prime achievement in life, that he, just a young Georgian fellow, was the master of such remarkable creatures. I have their papers," Sophie said, "the signatures, the expiration dates. I promptly got Alice Burns and Fred Skipper safely placed in the high country of northern Georgia. Next wagon transport to timber country, they were on it."

It stunned Lewis. He thought they would still be at work on the estate, just under my temporary ownership and direction. He might see them and speak to them. If they did contract labor, I would collect their wages, sufficient to cover their room and board, fair enough, but he remained their master. Once he had the money, he would reclaim them. Lewis never really understood the language and logic of contract. Lewis never paid a penny back and I never sent him a bill.

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Sophie at the window with her spyglass saw two mounted men come up the main Manse Road followed by a buggy with two passengers, one a woman wearing a fur lined coat and a blue bonnet, the other obviously Sophie's brother, still Viking blond, broad-shouldered, and yet strangely diminished, slouching in his seat. War wounds, no doubt. They took the lane to the Retreat House. Abram Greene, an Atlanta lawyer well known in Athens, almost lost in his fur hat and fur coat, rode, short legged, on a rented nag. Behind Greene, Cyrus O'Day, an older fat man on an old fat horse, both blowing and wheezing, laboring to keep up. Sophie immediately saw Greene's entire first move. Lewis is too volatile to approach the General alone. O'Day served in the General's Mexican war, fought in the General's regiment at Monterrey, and since those glory days

owned a dry goods store in downtown Athens. He was a notorious long talker, the General despised him, but couldn't ignore him, they had served together in the Mexican War. O'Day was there to testify that the community at large had forgiven Lewis his many rampages and was ready to accept him back as a full-fledged citizen and tax payer. Finally, abruptly, the General closed this first meeting beckoning to Greene. O'Day's testimony was recorded, the General said, next meeting just Lewis, the new Mrs. Grahame, and Abram Greene.

Sophie saw it all, supposing the scene. As they left the General, with formal bows, O'Day saluting, Greene would produce an envelope and give it to the General. Inside the General would find Lewis's personal statement, painstakingly dictated, precisely transcribed, no doubt written by the new Mrs. Grahame. She was introduced and then had nothing more to say at this initial meeting. Surely the first item on the forthcoming agenda was Lewis's contrition. Jacob, serving everyone drinks and food, was Sophie's reporter. In their first meeting father and son did not speak to each other. They acknowledged each other with slight inclinations of their head, with occasional glances, particularly as Cyrus O'Day held forth on the power of sanctifying grace. Abram Greene, clubfooted, thick spectacles, was a very smart fellow. Sophie respected him, had previous business dealings with him in Atlanta and Athens, always through intermediaries, Jed Logan, Jim Pierson, and they all found Abram Greene to be a good rational person. Sophie thought she knew Greene's lawyer game, the way he plotted his cases, so she set aside, almost completely, her brother Lewis as a factor, a player, and focused her counter-scheming against lawyer Greene's legal scheming.

A big mistake.

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Lewis, a born-again Christian, it was too much to countenance. Sophie long ago despaired finding a responsible intelligent Lewis somewhere inside the implacable bully he was in the world, and now this new Lewis, light radiant in his eyes, a beatific smile, Sophie couldn't imagine it. This was the new Lewis that Lawyer Greene would put before the General. Yes, Lawyer Greene would say, reinstatement could be gradual,

could be conditional. Nevertheless, Lewis still insisted on the return of Alice Burns, his cherished slave, taken from him while he was backed into a corner by his numerous creditors.

Sophie was taught a militant atheism by her Slovenian tutors. God talk was a waste of time. Pay attention to the real in the material world. When G&S learned that the General's son, First Lieutenant Lewis Grahame, hospitalized somewhere in Virginia, still recovering from his wounds, was romantically involved with his nurse, a widow with children, the firm did immediate research. Lydia Putnam Cole was the fourth daughter in a set of five, also a sister to three brothers, her father, the village chemist, a church elder, who buried three wives in remote wild northwestern Wisconsin. Thomas Cole was an itinerant dealer of patent medicines, some of them tonics Lydia's father made in his store's backroom. Thomas Cole knew the Putnam family, boys and girls. He was particularly interested in pious shapely Lydia. All this biography was in the file G&S had put together. Sitting before a fire, of an evening, sipping homemade prune brandy, we turned the pages of the G&S report.

Cole was the first rung on the ladder Lydia was climbing to accomplish her destiny. He got her out of the stultifying poverty of her northern Wisconsin girlhood. She went to live in his modest Milwaukee home, promptly had two unwanted children, spent much of her early married years helping Cole mix malodorous elixirs in the basement of the house. Every room in the small Milwaukee house stank, had its own peculiar chemical smell. Lydia loathed her dull rut-bound husband. He traveled and re-traveled his circuit, same towns and villages, same selling stations. Then, to everyone's surprise, Cole answered President Lincoln's first call for volunteers as the Civil War began and took his bullet at Bull Run.

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With two grown clamorous children, the family income vanished, Lydia took stock of her failed life in an unendurable Milwaukee suburb. No way out. Well, she still had

church connections, a network of missionaries. A Southern friend in the East, a Confederate Baptist lady, persuaded Lydia to cross the wartime border, accepting the cause of secession, changing sides. Whatever side offered Lydia an opportunity to escape her desperate situation, that was her side. Hired as a nurse without nursing experience, except for a rudimentary familiarity with chemistry, nurses always in short supply in Confederate hospitals, Lydia quickly learned a wounded prince of the Grahame kingdom lay sick at heart in the hospital ward. Soon she was sitting beside him, listening to his bitter recriminations, a Bible in her hand, the mercy of Jesus Christ her constant answer to Lewis's cracked rambling rants.

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Sophie didn't pay sufficient attention to Lydia Putnam Cole Grahame. The new Mrs. First Lieutenant Lewis Grahame instantly demanded, so it seemed, an important role in family affairs, Abram Greene her adviser and advocate, or so Sophie thought. Sophie was too focused on the imminent threat of the bullying Lewis Grahame, and this was her big mistake. That menacing Lewis, who liked to smash things, no longer existed. It was now chastened Lewis plus scheming Lydia plus deft Abram Greene who had suddenly come as antagonists onto Sophie's field and surprised her. Through her agents Sophie effectively managed the operation of G&S, knew what was happening in the firm, and the reason for it. Without consultation, without notice, this huge happening, the return of a dreaded brother, it took Sophie by surprise. It was a family matter, not a business matter, the General said, so he had liberties. He did not share everything with his daughter. He still had his own ventures. Sophie continued to run the Big House, to manage at once the estate's business and still supervise the doings of G&S, life as ever was predictably good, but here was instant enmity, an invented problem, a contrived cause. The General was establishing rivals. Sophie gave up her customary biweekly meetings with the General sending him that message of her unhappiness and the General did not pursue the matter of her absence. He let a cold silence sink into their relationship. All the while Jed Logan and Jim Pierson were back and forth from the main office.

So it happened that Lewis and Lydia were moved into a small cottage adjoining the Retreat House, Lewis given the job of managing a shoe factory outside Athens. The Army of Northern Virginia urgently needed shoes. An extreme shortage of hides and skins, of workable leather, existed, and the workers who had made the shoes when the factory was productive were all dying, shoeless, on diverse battlefields in the South. Lewis would be using slave labor, unskilled resentful workers. It was a test. How sober was he? Could he figure out solutions? There were no solutions. The General had no intention of placing Lewis anywhere in the administration of the family business, but Lydia and Lewis did not know that.

Lydia promptly inserted herself in the daily life at the Retreat House. Jacob, the General's longtime body servant and a principal spy in Sophie's network, lost his velveteen vest and silk striped breeches, was sent to polish silverware in the scullery. It was Lydia, who carefully shaved the General on her almost daily visit, who changed his nightshirt, who mother nursed him, who had the General's attention. She also found ways to amuse him. The Bible was Lydia's battle plan, Luke 15, 11-31, her first move. When she quickly saw that the story of the Prodigal Son would not apply, she smoothly abandoned it. The General did not love Lewis, simply put, distrusted his blond locks and broad shoulders. The bitter old man was a cynical atheist who despised Christianity. Christianity, in the person of that Swedish evangelist, gave the General Swedish sons. He was nonetheless polite, discreet, when he was around important clergy. It didn't matter who you were or what you thought, if you were usable, the General found a way to use you. People who knew him in his private life as well as his public life, who were mostly our spies, all said pretty much the same thing. There was no other side to the General. This mean angry disappointed old man was it. I've no doubt he loathed Lydia Putnam Cole Grahame, but he did not show this in his dealing with her. As they say, he led her on, toying with her expectations, giving a check to Sophie, saying that he had this new friend from Lewis's life, the spouse, a Civil War nurse.

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Lydia kept her Bible in play. She was a good reader and nights were long at the Retreat House. She hit upon the warfare in Deuteronomy, fortress walls destroyed, cities conquered, Hebrew troops marching against Canaan and Moab. To his surprise, the General found the narratives gripping. Jehovah was like a military commander, a strict disciplinarian, ordering attacks and retreats, punishing deserters and cowards. The General recognized Jehovah's furious voice. He agreed with everything Jehovah said. The big thing, the only thing, was obedience. Do my will. Follow my orders.

Lydia's arrival, her brisk competence, Lewis's plausible reformation, his diligence as the new manager of the shoe factory, suddenly altered the General's sense of his hand, let him see he was not doomed to fold his hand, that he still had many different games to play. Who were the rightful owners of Alice Burns and Fred Skipper? Lewis lost them to Sophie, who paid off First Lieutenant Grahame's big gambling debt. Lewis would deduct from his share of the general estate the sum of his debt to Sophie, plus interest and incidentals, and reclaim Alice Burns. Lewis had to have Alice Burns back. She was a shirt and dressmaker whose clothing was greatly prized in the communities around Athens. She had standing in the slave community and she was his slave. As a brash young fellow and fairly stupid slaveowner, Lewis entertained many purchase offers, several from serious citizens. It made him feel important, considering their offers. Alice Burns gave him a certain weight, though at the time Lewis was a wild juvenile fellow. Judge Hopkins wanted to talk to him about purchasing Alice Burns and Lewis was barely twenty. This was the argument, more or less, posed to the General. Sophie had taken advantage of him when he was desperate. It was for him a sore point, a sticking point, that made it very difficult for him to co-exist on the same estate, Sophie in the mansion, Lewis in a cottage. He was back, he was producing shoes for the Confederate Army, he was back on his feet, a redeemed Christian. The restoration of Alice Burns meant everything to him. She was his surprise gift from an unknown uncle or aunt, a distant relative in the eastern branch, a Grahame slave in the very first instance, educated in some coastal school. Sophie would not entertain the proposal. She now owned Alice Burns. Lewis had defaulted on his loan. Here were the signed and notarized property papers.

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Enter Lydia and Lawyer Greene, said Caleb, there to remind the General that he still had decisions to make in this ongoing dispute. Lydia had a solution and gave it to Lawyer Greene to frame. Neither Sophie nor Lewis should own Alice Burns and Fred Skipper. The General should immediately sell Alice Burns to a respectable bishop in Atlanta, Lawyer Greene knew just the person, dividing the profit among all four of his children. It was time for the General to organize his estate, to apportion his assets, reconciling his children to their just inheritances. As the virtual founder of the Grahame line, the General still had momentous things to do. Lydia already had the General seeing himself as a kind of King Solomon. The General did indeed own a small productive gold mine in the far Southwest. He did very well in business. He was a magnate. He might also be a canny ruler of his people. The whole problem of who owned Alice Burns, at first a comedy as the General saw it, had become a tedious repetitive headache. It was a slippery business. He had thought all along that he instantly grasped the point of Lydia's Bible reference, he was outside the fable, ironically registering its overt meaning, and yes, he had, at the same time, to admit he was somewhere ensnared in Lydia's Bible reference, Samuel, Kings and 2 Chronicles, Solomon the wise, Solomon the wealthy. When Lydia put it that way, the General happily seized upon it, the happy phrasing. Neither Sophie nor Lewis. He was like King Solomon dealing with torn loyalties. Thanks to the new Mrs. First Lieutenant Grahame's wife, Lydia Putnam Cole Grahame, and Abram Greene, the Atlanta lawyer, the General was invigorated. He was dealing strokes. Neither Sophie nor Lewis. He would put this onerous dispute behind him.

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Sophie was summoned to the Retreat House. She thought she was going to get a congratulation of sorts for silently tolerating the new living arrangement. Suave gentle Jacob was not, of course, there to usher her in to the Manse. It was a maid Sophie did not recognize. Lydia stood in the hallway, every inch the person who ruled this

household, and greeted Sophie Grahame. At the Retreat House Lydia was an insider, Sophie an outsider. Lydia brought Sophie to the General. It was a dumb-show, the Changing of the Guard, Lydia filling a water pitcher, then departing. Sophie went right to the point. “Why are you doing this?” She did not for a moment believe that the General had replaced her. The General did not care for her tart tone and clipped sentences. He was sitting in that thronelike chair in front of the fireplace, blanket over his knees, shawl around his shoulders. He was well barbered, locks shiny and pleated, mustache combed.

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How had it happened that the General was caught fixed in a confrontation he did not want to happen? He needed Sophie, his brilliant daughter. He enjoyed her company. He respected her conversation. Years ago, she saved him from a public humiliation. His principals at the firm, Logan and Pierson, constantly reminded him of Sophie’s skill in managing the work force, in buying and selling properties. No one ever said Sophie runs the firm, but the proof of it was constantly placed before the General. Lydia, on the other hand, carefully met the General’s household needs and it gave her certain intimacies. She addressed his creature comforts, had his favorite foods cooked and served up on his Mexican War tin plates. She supervised his baths, two maids gently washing his extremities and his privates. “Go lower,” she would instruct the maid who was hesitating in her approach to the General’s genitals. The General never said a word as he was carefully manipulated, looking straight ahead into Lydia’s composed quiet face as she stood before him, the two maids at work.

Still, for all the pleasures she brought to the General, Lydia had no place in his heart. Sophie, however disfigured, was his daughter, his first child. The General could not play upon Sophie’s desires. She was, since an early age, outside the General’s scrutiny, living a private life he could not imagine. If Lewis were to be reinstated, given a position at G&S, her ownership of Annie Burns denied, she would have to leave the firm and move to another city. “Why are you doing this?” It was the first question voiced; the speaker immediately advantaged. The General was on her ground, on the

defense, just then recognizing he was always on the defense in their communication. Neither/Nor was not on the table. Alice Burns belonged to Sophie Grahame. There was an icy insolence in her tone. These were her terms. She was, as if, his superior. The General felt a disconcerting throb in his temple, the return of a familiar headache (challenged authority) he'd thought he'd escaped. Sophie had expected an apology. Instead, she got an ultimatum.

Who was this Alice Burns, the General later demanded of Caleb Croker, she was just a brown woman slave, chattel. If Sophie would let him, he'd buy ten Alice Burns for her. Those days Caleb was often at the Retreat House, taking dictation, listening to the General cite his grievances.

Sophie played her ace card, the threat of her departure. To his own astonishment, the General swept it from the table. Sophie should immediately enjoy a sabbatical on her farm in Alabama or go north to Canada to see what Jack Grahame was up to, the General didn't care. He thought she should be off the premises. Stung by the effrontery of Sophie's calmly stated position, he did not at present require her services. Jed Logan and Jim Pierson could easily run the firm in her temporary absence. Those days Caleb was often at the Retreat House, taking dictation, listening the General rail, how he lost Sophie and gained Lydia, not what he wanted, and he couldn't bear not getting what he wanted. But he had made his decision, not a cool one, a hot one, and he felt he could not revisit that decision. The General evicted Sophie from the Manse. Two days of gathering and packing, then on a train, if she was going to Canada, there was a ship to catch, no time to waste. The Alabama farm was easier to reach and Sister Susan would go with her. Sophie was stunned and deeply wounded. She had saved G&S and rebuilt it, made its operations profitable. She was indispensable and she was banished. Lydia and Lewis would occupy the Manse for a year while their new home in Athens is under construction.

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I put my hand on Caleb's shoulder. He looked at me. "Where is she now?" I asked. "This is the hard part of the story," he said, "the part where she talks directly to you." I

regarded his comical face, the big nose, the bad skin. “We were not lovers,” he said. “We were great friends. If we meet again, we must deal first with that issue. I’d like to hear how you comprehend my crossed eye and my birthmark. My look scares most men, painted face, askew eyeball. In the Middle Ages I was the village witch. It doesn’t seem to matter to you. I do admit to a romantic interest. I think you have similar feelings. You are a strange lovely man. Of course, Jack gave you a glowing report and you’ve been a charming patient. We were close to some kind of consummation. I’m on my way to French Canada, maybe England finally, or dismal boring Alabama. When the war is over, if we survive, we shall surely meet, hopefully not among smoking ruins.”

Caleb Croker delivered a Sophie Grahame, husk in her voice, the short sentences.

Here she vanishes.

First morning I awoke in my sparsely furnished room at the Crokers’s house, I remembered the day I was escorted out of the Widow Douglas’s comfortable little mansion on Hill Street, Hannibal, Mo. Miss Watson’s agent clutched my forearm, I remember that grab and seizure, it hurt, and then I was on the porch. Now the General came at me with a physician of his hire, a suave elderly gentleman who prodded and palpated me, all the while beaming and nodding. I was “fine,” in short, ready to return to duty, and the doctor named the near date I should be leaving the Manse. The Widow Douglas dead, Huckleberry Finn had no standing. Sophie Grahame gone; Captain Mark Finn has no standing. In Hannibal Tom Sawyer took me in, got me a neat berth in a comfortable barn. In Athens Caleb Croker took me in and here I was, first day, in this skimpy depressing room, looking around at its walls, at a framed lithograph of Jesus leading a flock of white woolly sheep along a road, at the rear of the flock, a dark ewe, already straying from the flock. I’m looking at a single window outside it a bare branched tree, I’m looking at a cold gray November day in northern Georgia.

Where am I?

The big news in Athens was the abrupt departure of Sophie Grahame from the management of G&S. Lewis Grahame and his ambitious wife were seemingly Sophie’s replacement. I did not figure as the merest footnote. Many careers were fostered by Sophie, many jobs depended on her recognition, and what now? Jed Logan and Jim Pierson, who were they? It was all the parental Crokers could talk about. Caleb was

away. I stood in for Caleb. Yes, mam. No, sir. I'd say two weeks I lived in that skimpy depressing room. Every day I wrote in my journal or my memoir, grateful for the empty space, for the clock ticking time. Monastic freedom, and the daily fare at the Crokers was simple, spare in its outlay, a bowl, a slice. I was hungry all the time. I was a Confederate hero, mentioned in all the Antietam dispatches, I could have found the Athens butcher who supplied the Grahames with their requisite beef, pork, and chicken, and forced a trade, I might have come away with a chicken, but no, I decided to share the privation of "my people," and the Crokers were in that category, interchangeable with "my people" in Hannibal, white and black. Had I magically produced a chicken, the Crokers would have regarded it with suspicion. How did I find a chicken? I'd better have an adequate story.

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I sat at my writing table in that bare comfortless room on the second floor of the Croker's scrawny little frame house and I wrote the story of my life. The Croker parents were constantly about but where and doing what I could not discover. Silence, blessed silence reigned. One afternoon, into my third week in Athens, reading Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, Caleb's choice, seeing the lines he wanted me to see ("Let us have war, I say."), there was suddenly a violent commotion below, a banging on the front door, then loud male voices, Master Croker murmuring, Mistress Croker fluttering, fluting. I reached for my revolver. Then I recognized the guttural growling of Homer Ambrose and the high whiny voice of an excited Jesse Ambrose. My boys! I was instantly elated and went downstairs to soothe the excited Crokers and get the lads upstairs to my room. They had come to fetch me back to the regiment. Homer had a letter from Major Whittington. They liked their winter quarters at Centreville in Virginia. Snug little cabins, cozy shacks, and the food, twice a day, satisfied your hunger. It pleased me to contemplate Homer's big shaggy head and his short stump of a body, to look upon Jesse's thin oblong face, his lipless mouth, his wild manic eyes. Bring Captain Finn back, if he's well, Major Whittington told them, and here they were.

That was one part of their mission. The other was at long last to visit their Grahame relatives and behold the mansion they had heard was almost a castle. They wanted to meet the fabulous Miz Sophie, to stand before their Uncle Gus in their dress gray uniforms, Homer with his sergeant stripes. To eat and sleep perchance in the Grahame castle. They'd been sleeping in barns and eating caught rabbits and fish. I was in residence, they thought, and could introduce them to their "ree-lates," as they put it. Well, they were stopped at the front door, niece Emmeline Jones, standing drawn up on the threshold, holding a stick. Their Uncle Gus refused to see them. Cousin Sophie had moved out. They'd find Captain Finn in Athens staying with the Croker family. They were not to enter the Manse even for a drink of water. General's orders. That was their first day in Athens. This was their third day in Athens. They were sleeping in a barn on the outskirts of town thanks to a patriotic citizen who came upon them confused and aimless in the railroad station. Homer shot some birds and a rabbit in a nearby woodlot. Jesse cooked them over an open fire in the meadow adjoining the barn.

I knew what I had to do. While they sat and watched, I quickly packed my trunk. I would leave it with the Crokers and come get it when I was ready. Then we returned to their barn where I made my bed in the hayloft, next to them. That night we ate roasted doves and a corn mush Jesse prepared, having lifted a few ears from a nearby corn crib. Sitting around the fire wrapped in our blankets, I got all the news of the company. Big doings at Fredericksburg this early December, but the Third Arkansas wasn't directly in the battle, so the Stars were still intact. I could smell the smoke and hear the rattle of musketry. I had almost forgotten about the war. Mixed feelings about Lee's victory. We settled finally in the hayloft, blanketed, deep in the hay, sipping the corn liquor Homer had brought with him from winter camp. Tom Whittington wanted me back. 1863 was upon us and he fully expected the Third Arkansas to be marching down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D. C. by the start of spring. Bobby Lee was our Alexander the Conqueror, et cetera, et cetera. Third Arkansas was going to have a brilliant Christmas party. Jesse Ambrose and other camp musicians would play their hearts out in the general jubilation. It was mostly Jesse's telling, high pitched, but Homer also had his say. Third Arkansas had been reassigned to the Texas Brigade. Homer already had three fistfights with insolent Texans and won them all.

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I was back in this male world, the lads needed bathing, but I didn't mind. It was worse back in Arkansas when they were swineherds and sour pig shit was the predominant odor. Now I smelled sweat, campfire smoke, tinged with touches and tastes of gunpowder. I closed my eyes. Below cows mooed, horses stamped, above bats flapped in the rafters. I was home, which was a borrowed hayloft in some stranger's barn. In the morning as we got ready to set off for the winter camp at Centreville, or was it Manassas, I placed my luggage with Ma and Pa Croker. I would need to hand carry my *Home Geography.* On the crowded train returning me to the Civil War, I would find the space and light to once again peruse the lessons I did not get when I was five. "Lay your hands upon your desk, side by side," the woman teacher says. "Which side shall we call the right side? The left side?" In the army, training, I still hesitate.

It was a long stretch of unmitigated misery, January and February, cold and colder rains pelting our winter camp. I insisted we drill, but not every day. Some days we just huddled around our camp fires, glumly chewed our biscuit and sipped weak tea, crabby, morose, hating the war. Jesse Ambrose would get out his mouth organ, get a few licks in, and then was pelted with shoes and sticks. We didn't want to feel better. We wanted to hang on to our suffering, to its grim unending unhappiness, to that reality. Mid-February I woke up one morning, coughing, hoarse, scared. I couldn't suffer pneumonia. I had used up my survival quota. This time I'd die. I went to headquarters, told Colonel Manning I was going to cash out if he couldn't grant me a medical furlough, and he gave me one, signed the orders that very day. "You need to see a good Richmond doctor," Colonel Manning said. "Let him knock on your chest. There are some presentable boarding houses in Richmond, small rooms, two or three Confederate heroes bunking with you, but secure and comfortable. I've done some

time in these rooms. I can recommend one or two. You need to get out of this muck and slop. You can talk to the people at Chimborazo. They already have your medical records." He gave me a train schedule. I chose to return to Athens.

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Well, Athens was familiar, Athens had three available doctors, and I might even engage Sister Susan Feldkamp, wherever she was. At the moment that spare room in the Croker's house looked like a little paradise. I saw *Home Geography,* the Bible, and Shakespeare, spread out on my writing table. Near at hand books from Caleb's small library, a Ralph Waldo Emerson, an Edgar Allan Poe. In a blessed solitude I was reading, I was writing, nibbling on something, sipping my own tea. Wherever I went, I had with me a certain bank provided handful of silver. Thanks to Sophie Grahame I had an account at the Grahame bank in Athens. I would tactfully increase the food and fuel expenditure at the Croker house. Caleb would not be involved in these negotiations, but he would be there, necessary Caleb, reliable Caleb, Shakespearean Caleb, Biblical Caleb, Caleb who adored his dashing Jack, Caleb who brought me blank notebooks, pencils, pens, who kept everything I had written on scruffy make-do paper sheets, on stationery paper, bound up in wrapped packets and put away in a trunk.

I was back in Athens, once again, to convalesce, to stay in bed, to read and write. I could see the domestic problems. The elder Crokers, I reasoned, would be anxious about their neighbors who would soberly observe the sudden luxury of our establishment. Our house is warm and we eat meat once a week. I would take over the household economy. The elder Crokers must suffer their good fortune. I was a Confederate hero and I intended to pull rank and have it my way. I was taking leave of my military life. I did not miss any part of its daily existence. In fact, I was feeling semi-literary. I wanted a comfortable room and fair rations, a book and writing paper, and to be left alone. Bombs bursting in air, cannon balls bouncing along the ground, musket fire knocking down fellow soldiers all around me, there was a wild insanity about it, I would be taken up by it, roar like predator animal, I must admit that, but now I wanted the writer's life, solitude, to read Emerson's "Self-Reliance." The Crokers would be paid

and must yield to my rule in their house. I found myself quite suddenly a changed person.

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I was reading Emerson. What was my higher meaning? Cousin Isaac and Sophie Grahame thought I might be a postwar politician. I could see the appeal, realize the perquisites, but I did not want it. What is Huck Finn's higher meaning, Captain Mark Finn asks, putting down his Emerson. Huck Finn vividly remembers each disgusting scene, each degrading event, of his outcast childhood. Was Pap, abominable Pap, actually his father, or just an opportunist falsely claiming the rights and benefits of child custody? A dead question. What did it mean, after all, to be able to say to Pap and the world, this man is not my father. Nothing. I am who I am. I could, to some extent, escape the physical revulsion of seeing myself, feeling myself, of that body, from that body. A cold comfort, yet relevant information for curious descendants. This Finn is not necessarily a blood relative. We are not inevitably of that Finn lineage.

Here begins the chronicle of my fake Finns and on the first line a father with no first name and an unnamed mother. These are the forebears, a question mark and a blank. Outside carriages are rattling by, people are in the street, everybody, pretty much, works for Cook and Brother's Armory turning out muskets and mortars. Meantime, snug in my room, I'm sucking a pickle as I peacefully consider the first outlay of my life, which ends with my sexual wound, with my slug prick on a platter, the Sunshine brothers, notebooks out, scribbling. Clyde Bristow looked with humorous disdain at the stories of my miserable childhood in Hannibal. His stories of life in Jamaica, in Kingston town, were worse. I didn't eat, but I wasn't sexually used. I wasn't buggered, and that was the marker that made Bristow's disgusting childhood far worse than mine, which was merely miserable.

End of the first week I went downtown to the Grahame bank to talk to Jim Pierson about my money and to find out what was happening at the Manse. What news of Sophie and Jack, the exiled Grahames? Caleb only knew that Sophie was established

in her Alabama farm, that Jack was in Montreal, part of a Confederate diplomatic mission. If there was news, a communication, senior people at the bank would know it. Neither Jim Pierson nor Jed Logan who were now effectively running G&S had anything to do with Caleb Croker. He was Sophie's pet. They saw him as an incomprehensible freak and a danger as Caleb was closely involved with Jack Grahame, himself a danger, bank money involved. Jed and Jim were Sophie's chosen lieutenants, no doubt still loyal to her wherever she was, but not to Caleb. What did they make of me, I wondered, who was living in the Croker house, who went on long walks with exotic Caleb, who treated Caleb as if he were a regular human being? Well, what could they do or say to me? I was Captain Mark Finn and I went about in my gold starred gray uniform. On the street, in the bank, I was saluted.

G&S had one letter from Sophie Grahame. She was not happy in Alabama. She sent instructions, what to sell, what to trade, and a listing of trusted G&S agents whose salaries had to be maintained. Also, there was a letter to the General in a separate packet. Jed Logan brought it out to the Manse hoping to deliver it personally to the General. Since Sophie's departure the General had no contact with his principal managers. Orders and complaints came from Lewis, under his signature, what to sell, what to buy, and they were invariably ignorant and impulsive. Logan and Pierson paid them no mind, went on running the firm as Sophie had done. Lewis never followed up on any of his instructions to see if they were carried out. Apparently, he believed he was simply obeyed. He didn't study the results. Lewis would not let Jed Logan carry the packet to the General, as Sophie requested. "He can't be disturbed," Lewis said. "Leave the packet with me and I'll see it gets to him at the right time."

"I have it here in my safe," said Jed Logan. "If ever you get a chance to see the old man, take this packet along and deliver it right in the General's lap."

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It was said the General was ailing, showing signs of dementia, that a fight had broken out between Lydia Putnam Cole Grahame and Lewis as to how they should handle the issue of succession, how to protect their interest, Lydia wanting Lewis to

confront the General, to ask for clarity, prepared to negotiate, Lewis refusing to confront his scary father, something like that. He well knew the General did not love him. He was not emotionally positioned to inquire about the General's will, to bring up the matter of his father's impending death. Jed Logan and Jim Pierson hired and paid the household staff at the Grahame Manse. Jacob, Philip, the head cook, and Rafe, the barber, had interesting stories to tell. Cook heard angry voices in the parlor, its door closed. Local gossip knew that the delinquent junior twin brother, Leicester, absent, had hired a lawyer in town who was already filing papers in the court house. Jacob said Lydia was sure Leicester could be bought off. It was sister Sophie and little brother Jack; they were the enemy.

Local lawyers, Jed Logan said, were eagerly anticipating the General's demise and all the inevitable litigation that would follow. Jed understood Lydia's plight. She saw how precarious her situation was, tied to the hoarse breathing of the General in and out every morning, every evening, a sound both Lydia and Lewis knew very well. In his chair, wheeled about, parked, the General was as impassive and immobile as a big sitting toad, but his eyes glittered and darted. His mind was full of snakes. He could bite and sting. Jed Logan had several fraught meetings with the General, giving legal and business opinions. Toad and snake; he agreed with Lydia's characterization. Sophie Grahame was the only person who was fearless dealing with the General, who disagreed with him, corrected him as to a fact. What kind of protective paper did Sophie have in her business files, in her bank vaults, what testaments and promises, what contracts and mortgages? She owned shares, Jed knew that.

Here's how Jed had it. Lydia urged her husband to study the case. "We are hanging by a thread," she said, "depending on the General's sudden revulsion for his birthmarked cross-eyed daughter, your clever canny sister Sophie, and that bad feeling is our only hope. Also, the General can abruptly change his mind about people and situations. He explodes. He just exploded on Sophie. Sophie has a pile of money in every major city in the South. She can defy the General. We can't." As Jed had it, Lewis Grahame sat stolid and silent, head bowed. He agreed with Lydia, but not with her command. "You must confront the General with your understanding of our situation. If there is a final will, what is your share in Grahame & Sons? We want something on

paper and signed." Every day of Lewis's life now was a day in which he did not confront his father, Lydia criticizing his delay, harping. He was always trying to figure out what he would say introducing the subject of the will, an explicit statement of the General's impending demise.

Everyone in Athens was interested in the succession drama beginning to stage itself at the Manse. Sophie Grahame, it was felt, was severely disadvantaged because of her legal status as a woman, yet formidable in her deployment of male agents, pawns, bishops, knights. Logan and Pierson were happy to say they were indeed pieces moved on Sophie's board, but not as pawns. They were knights and bishops. They could do damage. It was chess they were talking about. Checkers was the challenging game for people in Hannibal. Logan and Pierson trusted me, Sophie's close friend, maybe lover, and sought advice from me. What was Sophie Grahame's next move?

***

I had a week. What was I to do in my memoir? What to say about white people and black people in the postwar South, my specialty, so Cousin Isaac had it. I could only think of Jim, of Clyde, and when I got lost in that gloomy meditation, I forgot about the Grahames, the oblivious Grahames who would not free the talented Alice Burns, who enjoyed their ownership. Distant slavery, that was one thing, you could talk about it. Close slavery, physical proximities, that was another thing. At the end of the week, I had come to a hard decision. I would resign my commission, accept a medical discharge, and go somewhere to complete the Life and Times, now with a serious interest in anti-slavery speeches.

Mrs. Croker explains Caleb's absence. He is on a mission or an errand, she wasn't sure which, usually gone for several days, now and then gone for a month or more. He left a letter with her, one written to me, in this envelope, and then I had it, thanking Mrs. Croker who was fading away as she spoke. I read it in my room looking out the window at the street traffic. It was a Tom Sawyer letter, super-secret, giving me a date and time to be at Morgan's farm, its big hay barn, to meet a secret messenger with a new communication from Sophie Grahame. I groaned, reading the letter. I was turning from

the Grahames and here was Caleb reinvolving me in the Grahame family drama. The Morgans were an old country couple who no longer worked their farm, who had only a hen house to tend and eggs to sell, the sliding door on their big barn hanging ajar. Sophie gave them a stipend, Caleb delivered the money, the Morgan farm was a secret Sophie Grahame preserve.

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I rented a horse from Keegan's Stable, rode over the Middle Oconee Bridge, got to the outside of Athens, found the lane that took me to Morgan's farm. There was candle lit in the silent dark barn. Off to the side, in their shed, poultry stirred and talked about my intrusion. Very Tom Sawyer, I thought, dismounting, this spooky rendezvous. Inside Caleb Croker, woolen cap, plaid cape, sat on a small keg before a barrel on which he had placed a large candle. There was a second keg arranged for me.

I sat. I was cold, not happy.

Caleb said: "Jack is here."

Surprised, I stood and looked around at the barn's dark interior. No Jack.

Caleb said: "He's in the house in the back room with the turnips and potatoes. We've fixed up a bunk for him. Jack's been here two days already, just calming down, but he wants to see you now."

I stood looking at Caleb.

"Sit," he said.

I sat. I was going to learn about the nasty business at the Manse. Jack was here. I suspected he would be. Clandestine meeting, dead of night, secret message. It was Tom Sawyer. It was also Jack Grahame. I was no longer Hannibal's innocent Huckleberry Finn. I was now Captain Mark Finn, about to be retired, looking to write a serious book. I had put the Grahame family drama behind me. I was on my way to Atlanta. I was going to think about the big question of emancipation. I had to reconnect with Cousin Isaac, locate Jim and Clyde, recall my boyhood knowledge of southern black people. Well, so much for all my plans. Jack would have his plight; he would challenge me. He was wrecked if I did not help him. Sophie helped him. I helped him.

He had a fairly large cohort of helpers. He was always wrecked, demanding rescues. That was his story, as Caleb told it. I sat, thinking.

"First," said Caleb, "you have to know that Jack is profoundly ashamed of his Foreign Service posting to Montreal. You were put in the front line at Antietam. He got a free pass to civilian life. You got five bullets at Antietam. That wasn't how it was supposed to be. Jack didn't solicit that assignment. They just came and got him and then he was on a train and he was enjoying civilian comforts. As you might have guessed, Jack was at first very happy in Montreal, almost immediately in romantic love. Then not so, the love forbidden, the person sent away, at which point, his heart broken, Jack longed for the warmer pleasures of northern Georgia. And then this crisis came alone. Sophie was banished, Jack, too, as her sympathizing brother. G&S wealth would go to the wrong people, to the evil twin brothers, to Lewis." That was the apt connection Caleb laid out for me. Lewis Grahame, who had a modest success with the shoe factory, is the new king of the Grahame castle. He was sending orders to Jed Logan and Jim Pierson, which they took and threw away. Get ready to meet Jack at the Morgan farmhouse.

"Also," said Caleb, "there is this problem. Lewis Grahame has somehow replaced Sophie Grahame as the principal agent of the General's privy desires. He has shut the door at the General's retreat house. Rare visitors are scrutinized. Abram Greene gets in. On occasion Jim Pierson had admittance, needing the General's signature. No one else. Sophie sent the General a packet of very important documents, with an eloquent personal letter, and Lewis refused to accept it. She desperately needed this last attempt to reason with her father. She built a strong case. Her return to G&S is in the General's self-interest and she has new proofs of her competence." I rested my hand on Caleb's shoulder and let it linger. He was such an adept servant of Sophie's wants and needs.

"I'm not going to carry this message to General Grahame," I said softly.

"Talk to Jack," said Caleb.

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A kitchen was next door, its stove warming the wall of Jack's room. Barrels, sacks, bags, were all about, the thick smell earthy, the odor of mud. Wedged up against that warming wall, a living space, I saw a trunk, a valise, a pail, a bowl, toiletries. Jack was sitting, with some pillows, on his floor mattress. An oil lamp put him in a soft orange glow. He was dressed like a French-Canadian country priest, black beret, clerical cape, soutane, stout brown brogans. "Sorry for my outfit," Jack said, observing my curious stare. "It actually keeps me warm. This is how I traveled from Montreal, as Father Baloney, right across New York, right through Pennsylvania, into surprised Maryland. I should have been captured several times, exposed as a Confederate spy, my papers and letters obvious fakes, and promptly hung outside the jail, but no, my French is too good, too freely flowing when I'm excited, so I walked through the fire three times and here I am, Jack Grahame, reporting for duty." Kneeling beside Jack, Caleb was fetching articles from his knapsack, a morsel of cheese, a handful of raisins, Jack blandly taking, munching. He was older, bearded, his hair shaggy, a sober person, but wild Jack Grahame was still there in his face, his alert eyes locked in on yours, a sardonic grin flickering on his mouth.

"I'm off duty, Jack," I said. "I'm resigning my commission."

"My God, Huckleberry Finn," Jack said, "Captain Mark Finn, silver bars, a Confederate Hero, battle citations, the war has flung us different places, yet here we are. Providence has again brought you into my life. It did once before, in Hannibal, and now, right here, in my hometown, Providence again puts you before me. Just as I need your help in my gravest emergency. Caleb may have filled you in on the issue."

"You want me to serve as a courier," I said.

"If only, dear Huck, if only," Jack said. "Sophie said the General distrusted you. How could you be my friend and benefactor and not be another fellow of my sort? Not even worth the effort of trying to gain admittance. Lewis wouldn't have to say no. The General would certainly not admit Captain Finn who tolerated Jack's propensity and who had probably used his only daughter all these months of Captain Finn's convalescence, so the General must have thought."

I put my hand up protesting the language.

Jack regarded me.

"I've got it all right here with me," he said. It was Sophie's undelivered packet taken from Jed Logan's safe, also a court order for visitation rights, which I briefly studied, and a personal service contract with impressive numbers. I marveled at Sophie's operational reach, her mastery of the detailed plan. She was her father's daughter. At the same time Sophie was politically, legally, socially, a nonperson, and she had to do all this managing complexities through male agents, using instruments. I would be deputized by her judge in Athens, serve as an officer of the court, have powers and privileges, so we could gain peaceful entrance at the main gate and at the red door of the Retreat House. Jed Logan explained it to me, Sophie keeping her distance on the Alabama farm. I would be effectively Jack's bodyguard. Lewis Grahame, certainly Mrs. Lewis Grahame, would anticipate Jack's probable return, understand that a legal challenge was impending, consult with Abram Greene, have plans of their own. Sophie thought the court paper her judge in Athens had issued would withstand any challenge.

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So said Jack. He was being honest. He had to invade the sanctity of my new scholarly life with this old business. He had, at least, to state his need. We were brothers. Sophie knew slim Jack didn't have the physical presence to confront his broad-shouldered older brother, who bullied him when he was a child, so she needed to put a resolute strong soul beside him. I was to go along not as a friend or associate, but as a hired bodyguard, a temporary bailiff, working on a personal contract both Sophie and Jack insisted I accept, the payment very generous, my title and warrant giving their approach official authority. Jack had a rehearsed speech to deliver when he stood before the General. I would be outside but at the ready. Sophie did not anticipate any difficulty. She knew Lewis as a bluff coward. The only person who might stop Sophie and Jack was Abram Greene. But he didn't have the paper, I would have the paper, I would be the paper. Let us in. We would go in. And then, who knows, the General could throw us out on the spot, that was likely, Sophie counting on the curiosity of the packet and on Jack for once putting his poetry to work, giving his Shakespearean speech, Caleb editing, a targeted speech, addressing the General's pet hatreds, the old

man's vicious jealousies, weaving them into a glorious tapestry of dynastic branching, all of which depended on continuation, on extension, if that still mattered to the General, continuation. Jack would show the packet, describe its contents, but first he had to deliver his speech. The packet was thick and juicy. He would hold it to his chest with both hands, as if it were warming him.

The packet said Lewis had three blackmailers, not just one, that he still had serious gambling debts unacknowledged in the financial statement the General had just previously perused. Also not known, Lewis had charges pending in several communities, sexual crimes, two in Georgia, one in Tennessee. He was, in effect, still, all expenditure, no income. For his part, Jack proposed that he would do foreign service for G&S. The American South, he said, had a great future in crusty conservative French Canada. This was the General's last chance for a profitable reconciliation. Sophie, of course, had many lawsuits primed and cocked, ready to go off if her venture failed. Jack had no response to its failure, if it happened. Sad acceptance, that would be his lot in life. "If I'm disinherited," Jack said, "I will not have revenge, that is the worst thing. Lewis and Leicester pummeled me as a boy, bloodied my nose, bloodied my lip, gave me purple bruises, cheek, bicep, lower body, humiliated me in public sticking cruel nicknames on me, and now they will have again the power to give me great pain and the liberty to do that. They will take my share of the family fortune and leave me naked on the howling plain. Huck, there aint no justice."

Also, there was this angle. Jack would be facing Lewis Grahame, the very one, my Lewis Grahame, I could observe him, regard the clean-shaven face, that thick forehead and blunt nose, the cold blue eyes. If it came to blows, I could hit that face with my fist, one, two, three, maybe four, solid shots, before Lewis could organize his first move. There would be that pleasure. Ample pay. A day's service.

***

I saw that Jack was packing a derringer pistol. "No need for that," I said. "I am an officer of the court, a deputy, I'm the one who has the pistol, leave your pistol here." Jack was putting his little pistol into a satchel. "My brother will be armed," he said,

“probably his Navy revolver, if dueling is the fact we face, and I will have to do something, get the jump on him, if that is possible.” I should have forcibly disarmed him. Did Jack even know how to use that derringer? I should have taken the pistol from him, but I didn’t. Here begins the strangest episode in my life. A confrontation was looming. Sophie counted on Lawyer Greene to persuade Lydia and Lewis to comply with the court order, to permit a brief supervised visit, the delivery of mail, to allow Jack to make a short statement, all this with the expectation that the General would reject Jack once Jack was through the door. I would be present, visibly armed, as Jack’s security, also as intimidation. If Lydia and Lewis did not comply, we should withdraw, the next move a later force of constables, Lewis under arrest. I was anxious for this crisis to pass. I offered no opinion in the plan set forth. I hired Jim Pierson. He was a semi-neutral witness, sub-deputy, not recognizably of Sophie’s party, privately thrilled to be part of the Grahame family drama, and he would be a restraint, always somewhere in the range of Lewis’s vision, a G&S onlooker. Both Lydia and Lewis knew Jim Pierson as an official of the firm, their firm.

So, Jack and I left the Croker house and there was Jim with our horses. He was already mounted. Off we went, dread beginning to crystallize in my thought. Jack rode beside me, silent, looking forward, his shaved face drawn and gray. Inside his woolly sheepskin, he was dressed like a young minister, black suit, white shirt, black tie. Jim Pierson, trotting behind, tried to make conversation.

As we came up the Retreat House Road, we saw that the Lewis Grahame party was drawn up on the porch. Remember, I had never seen Lewis Grahame in the flesh and here he was, once a Viking, Sophie said, tall, blond, piercing blue eyes, now slightly gone to seed, slumped posture, sag and fade, and Lewis was taking me in, the wild boy who had rescued Jack out west in Missouri, the Civil War hero, shot five times at Antietam, who kept on fighting, an ugly wound, that scar. Lawyer Greene was talking at me, Jack quietly composed beside me. I repeat my instructions, I show Lawyer Greene the court order, and tell him, and Mr. Grahame, to step aside and permit our entrance. We had yet to come up on the porch. On the porch, two steps up, first Abram Greene, just behind him, at the red door, Lewis Grahame, off to his side, their guard and witness, a convalescent officer, like me, in uniform, Lieutenant Asa Briggs, and at the end of the

porch, witness to this challenge, Lydia Grahame, wrapped up in blankets, fur hatted, her breath steaming.

Midmorning, the sun was shining. The icebound world everywhere sparkled and glistened; first water drops forming. Dr. Robert Jeffers, a reputable Athens physician, had posted a medical ban on visitors to the Retreat House. The General was ailing, a blood disease, and thus in strictest quarantine. Lawyer Greene was explaining this to me, words and more words, when Lewis interrupted, thrusting Lawyer Greene aside, rearing up in front of Jack, saying hot furious things to him, herding him back with his forearm, a step or two. I am about to enter this fight, to withdraw Jack ever so quietly from the combat zone, to warn Lewis off any further move, when something was said, I think Jack said it, Lewis roared, clutched poor Jack by his ministerial cravat, lifted him off his feet, shook him, flung him to the floor.

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Asa Briggs was the other guy. Like me, astonished, petrified, standing there, lips parted, as if to speak. Like me, hesitating for a long moment, even as Jack picked himself up, stood and once again confronted Lewis, hot words again exchanged in low voices, Lewis lifting his arm as if to strike with his elbow, Jack stepping back one step, reaching into his coat, pulling out the derringer, shooting an astonished Lewis Grahame in the region of his heart, all this without any interference by the bodyguards. I, too, was astonished, watching Lewis stumble backward and collapse to a sitting position, his look of total surprise fading to that of excruciating pain. To this day I do not know what happened to my skill as a bodyguard. I should be in action. People were shouting, the pistol banging twice (Jack's derringer was a double shooter) yet I felt I was underwater, moving against a current, slowly, slowly, stepping up one porch step, my hand reaching for my pistol. Next a scream and here was Lydia, Abram Greene trying to restrain her, thrust aside, Lydia coming to her groaning bleeding husband, mopping his brow, bending low to hear him speak.

Asa Briggs was shouting at me but I heard him as someone under water. Jack had simply dematerialized, vanished. Abram Greene told us to get out and go back to our

residence, there to await the visit of Sheriff White. Let Lawyer Greene handle the details. We would be at home, ready to serve as primary witnesses. Jim Pierson brought our horses out, saddled, ready to go, if needed. I was at my horse adjusting the bridle, talking quietly to the horse, when I heard Asa shout, this time clearly, as if in my ear, and there's a pistol crack. The pommel of my saddle is gone, the bullet that close to my barely healed arm, and as I turn to face my assailant, I see Lydia Grahame on the porch holding Lewis's Navy revolver, her unpinned hair a crazy woman's tangle. Lewis has just died. That's how it happened. She thought I was Jack, called out: "you devil, Jack," and then she fired a second time.

I dodged the bullet. It whistled past my left hip. She was screaming curses at Jack Grahame who had brought this disaster of death and destruction to the very door of General Grahame's hospital chamber, who had snatched away her happy future. She was furious to see me still standing. I was Jack and I was not Jack. She had tried to murder me twice. I had unlimbered my weapon and was waiting for Lydia to clear her mind. She lifted the pistol again, with both hands, leveled it at me, and I shot her right between the eyes.

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Lawyer Greene was the best witness, standing next to Lewis Grahame when he assaulted Jack Grahame, when Jack drew his pistol, arguably in self-defense, and two bullets flew. He tried to grab a distraught Lydia Grahame who now perfectly understood that her best laid plan was instantly destroyed. She needed Lewis. She was nothing without Lewis. Her only standing in the Grahame world was as Lewis's wife. He died in her arms, his hemorrhage dark on her coat, smudging her cheek. In the midst of her mad grief, she hated Lewis. He had stupidly played right into Jack's script of provocation and homicide. If shooting were to happen, Lewis should do the shooting. As Lydia had it, I was a secret full partner in the Sophie and Jack enterprise, maybe its evil genius, forcing the confrontation on the porch, encouraging Jack in his defiance. What was said between the brothers didn't matter. She was going to a social hell and she didn't want Jack Grahame alive to witness it. She would take Jack Grahame with

her, the last of the Grahames, Lester so far outside these doings he didn't count as a Grahame son.

The General lost two sons in that single shootout. I doubt he mourned them. As it was, he had not lost his scheming mind. Lydia and Lewis were no longer of any use to him. He had been plotting their removal. As servants were carrying Lewis's body off the porch, Jacob said, the General abruptly emerged from his malaise, wanted all the details reported, wanted the packet with its damning material. Lewis's death cleared the field and gave him permission to return Sophie to the management of his business. That was the sum of the General's response. He had not a tick of sympathy of Lewis and Lydia, just that morning his primary caregivers. Jack was a fugitive in the turmoil of civil war, easily lost in its throngs. Lawyer Greene lost his sizable income, especially his present fee. Later, standing in the box, he told the truth. Self-defense, justifiable homicide. Asa Briggs was a credible witness. House servants also spoke. Jed Logan defended me.

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I took threats and menaces from strangers who said they were members of the Grahame family, snubs and aspersions from Lydia Grahame's newly made friends in Athens society, everyone obliged to suppose the worst, and, curiously, outright anger from the people of Athens who now saw me as the insidious outsider who threatened to wreck the economy of northern Georgia, and who was I, really, no one knew. It was said a distant Grahame cousin, some fellow named Herlihy, outraged that a close relative had been shot on her own porch by a furloughed officer in the Confederate Army, this angry fellow was on his way to Athens to get satisfaction. He never arrived so I relapsed into my stupor. Some Athenians argued that I was derelict in my duty as a bodyguard; Asa Briggs, too. Our slow reaction was suspect. We were military heroes. We dodged bullets and ducked cannonballs. Why didn't we anticipate the outbreak of violence? I knew Jack was armed. Lewis was never without some kind of weapon. Why were we surprised? Jed Logan had the answers, all of them speaking to Lewis's fierce temper.

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I was soon back unencumbered in my room at the Croker's, Caleb explaining to the public in Athens the immediate consequences of the Grahame family crisis, addressing me as a hired hand not directly involved in that family crisis, not the man who shot Lewis's ambitious wife, Lydia, on the porch of the Retreat House. Caleb had a notion of where this all should end. If I could get around Miz Sophie's crossed eye and her birthmark, marry her, immediately produce a child, offer it as tribute to the old General who was now enthused with life's last passion, family history, and in so doing lock in the total inheritance, the spacious will Sophie years ago had written, the General dictating, interrupted, argued with, conditions removed, clauses added, the bitter old warrior emancipating slaves, endowing hospitals, funding colleges. It was all about that. Sophie had extracted a decent will from the mean spirited General, but, said Caleb, what had Lydia Grahame managed to change in the short run of her rule at the Manse? Nothing that now couldn't be undone.

I didn't need Caleb to tell me Jack Grahame had come home to assassinate his brother. Not necessarily, but probably, and when Lewis picked Jack up and threw him to the floor, that act sealed Lewis's fate. It was Jack's feet leaving the ground, shoes dangling, crushed in a bear hug, hurtfully, I saw that whole event, you're like a baby, you have to endure his hot sour breath, his sweaty musky body odor, you're pressed, hurtfully, against chesty brawn, and then flung. It is the sensation of impotence, of infantile weakness, and you are, by God, a man. I see it again, vividly, Jack a pile of clothes on the floor, safely unconscious, I assume, and I'm saying: "stay down, Jack, stay down," and as I put one foot forward, then another, Jack springs up, bright as can be, his look is wild, and he pulls out his derringer and shoots his brother, twice, right above the heart. Next, I see Lewis sitting on the porch floor, gazing at Jack, stupefied.

Cook pretty much had the whole story. Lydia first aghast, then furious. She had worked so hard around the inert unhelpful mass of her husband, so hard to interest the

General, maybe even please him, cleaning him up every night, towel and basin, organizing the maids to give the General his pleasant bath, reading Bible stories to him. Winning the estate, this was her story, she was to be the new Lady of the Manse, and characters were now abruptly leaving her script, the plot swerving from her direction, new ominous characters entering, and here was Lewis, dying Lewis, stupid, useless Lewis, principal heir to the Grahame fortune, seated in his bloody puddle, lips bubbling, and here was Enigma in a gold starred uniform, captain's bars, Sophie's Confederate hero, who had lived very comfortably at the Manse. Lydia's Manse, soon to be. Now, not ever. And I was just standing there down from the porch with my horse, innocent.

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"Sophie is in Alabama," I said. "The United States are at war. I'm honored by the indirect proposal but I don't think the killer of a sister-in-law can join the family circle. I'm sure, Caleb, you'll find the law that allows it. Look, dear friend, my teacher, the spoon goes there, the fork here, Athens will very likely be a battlefield soon and the first big private building they'll burn will be the Manse. We forge cannon and make muskets for the Confederate Army. Bobby Lee depends on Athens for his shot and shell. First chance they get, the Federals will march on Athens. You should be thinking about where you're going to go when the war comes to Athens. Think about that little Dutch town up north in the hills. Sister will tell you how to get there."

I was feeling sad. I was in fact the killer of Sophie's sister-in-law. With her first shot Lydia Grahame was just aiming in the general direction. I can't actually dodge bullets. The gold stars are faded yellow cloth. First shot might have shattered my arm or killed the horse. Second shot I did a hip flinch and the ball struck a tree. It would have taken out some very useful internal organs. I was observing all this in the moment of trial, alert to the emergency, strangely confident, my heart beating, my breathing regular. In that long moment, truly, I had time to reason with her, silently, asking her to postpone her satisfaction, another day, another time, but I didn't, I stood silent watching her as she laboriously lifted the heavy revolver with both hands and tried to cock it.

A catastrophe had just happened, brother killed brother, if only we knew what they said to each other. Lewis was sitting on the porch floor, head leaning forward, Jack gone, maybe already on his way to Mexico. That was the ending. In a way, I thought, justice. Then this screaming and shouting, Mrs. Grahame, all disheveled and bloody, comes thrusting herself upon the scene, ready to kill an innocent person. I'm not a Grahame. She's not a Grahame. Yet here she is, executing a Grahame revenge, pretending to be a Grahame. She will kill me, deny me the enjoyment of her deserved fortune. She will pull me into her depleted story and that is where she wants me to end my days, in her story, a punished villain. I was just then massively tired of the Grahame family drama. I could have talked her down, talked her out of it, distracted her, disarmed her, I could see her arms waver--trigger on a Navy revolver is a hard pull--she hadn't yet drawn that deep let it go breath. As she started to draw it, finger tightening on the trigger, I shot her.

***

Caleb quietly watched me pack, sorting and distributing. It was hard work. I was going back to camp this time without my trunk and bags. I was going light. I would read, not write, notes maybe. I took a New Testament and a Shakespeare, Three Plays, a little book, Caleb's gift. My winter gear was still stored in the regimental supply barn. Mother Croker gave me a small sack of dried apples and a long loaf of brown bread. Father Croker gave me a twist of hard black tobacco. They were grateful for the heat and food I'd brought into their house during my residence. My trunk was going into Sophie's private vault under the main floor of the ramshackle barn at the Morgan farm where, said Caleb, we would lie side by side, my modest little trunk with its several scraps of personal narrative, her several sacks of gold and silver coin, her writings, letters, meditations, in wrapped packets. I gave the black beret to Caleb. I kept the black cape, thickly woven wool, I looked smart in it, and it was also a blanket. What about the packet Jack was to deliver to the General? Jack had carried it off. It no longer mattered.

I had previously scanned its contents, the facts, Sophie's case. Lewis's submitted financial statement omitted serious debt to dangerous persons and powerful institutions. Lewis was treated at a notorious hospital for men with sexual diseases, twice. I immediately recognized the Sunshine Clinic stationery, saw the bare three lines: yes, treatment, dates. Did Mrs. Grahame know about her husband's several visits to the Sunshine Clinic? Sophie did not think so. If I were to get the estate, she said, I would put Lewis and Leicester on a respectable salary. Sophie. I had opened the packet, read some pages, then closed it up again, and gave it to Caleb. He would put it with Sophie's gold and silver in her barn vault.

Into my strapped iron trunk went *Home Geography*, my several manuscript bundles, letters, a tablet containing the several basic addresses of Cousin Isaac, a man of diverse affairs, a list of the banks where I had money, some in curious places, Kingston, Jamaica, Montreal, Canada, a sad list of hapless soldiers who owed me often considerable sums, a virtual history of my camp life, many of the debtors dead on fields of honor.

***

Major Tom Whittington came to see if Captain Mark Finn, tough fellow, sufficiently healed, might consider a return to arms, military orders justifying my abrupt departure from the Grahame affair in Athens. Jim Pierson had hired a lawyer to look after me. Law suits were flying, threats of law suits, Leicester had actually appeared in town, was seen walking in the street. He of course had a major grievance with the man who shot his sister-in-law smack in the forehead on her own porch. It was hard to think of my own resumed life, where I would live, how I would live. Like a monk, I supposed. Clyde was in a monastery where the monks did not speak. I only needed a simple bed, a chair, and a table.

Third Arkansas wanted me back. It brushed aside the scandal in Athens. Major Tom was soon going to be Lieutenant Colonel Whittington. I was certain to become Major Mark Finn. Third Arkansas understood that I had resigned my commission, with honor, having suffered multiple battle wounds, and was free to find some pleasant place far

from the war. But where was that pleasant place far from the war, Major Whittington wanted to know, sadly smiling, and shaking his head when I told him about my plan to move to some hamlet outside Atlanta.

"After the war," Caleb said, "after the war, that's all we can say." I said: "If we lose the war and I get to rule Georgia, you'll be my prime minister." He said: "Remember, your treasure is in the vault at the Morgan farm." I said: "Tell me again how you came to be such a smart pert fellow, Miz Sophie's right-hand man?" "I was born bizarre," he said. "Jack was born outrageous. We grew up together. Sophie mothered Jack and fostered me, protected both of us from the taunts and malice of the Grahame twins. Sophie, of course, considers herself a born bizarre person. She was happy to see me prosper. I had free access to the Grahame library. As a lonely ostracized boy, I spent weeks in that library, every day, morning to night. I had a study corner in one of those big bay windows, I brought my lunch there, a blanket and a pillow. I'd have, now and then, a long doze, dinner bells outside rousing me."

"I wanted to be an actor," Caleb said. "I still want to be actor, to deliver lines, to walk about on a stage, stopping to speak a soliloquy." Ah, those soliloquies, he could do them on the spot, Richard the Second, Macbeth. He was still a kid, easily despicable, his blotched and scarred complexion, his hair a tangle, big teeth, no chin.

I was getting emotional. I grabbed his arm, nothing there, just bone, and brought him in close to me. "When I do rule Georgia after the war, I will make you my prime minister, but first you have to gain a hundred and fifty pounds." I gently shook him. "On the rare potato and occasional turnip," Caleb said, "that won't be easy." Mr. Croker already had the name of the G&S farmer who secretly supplied me with meat and vegetables during my stay in Athens. Caleb would not starve. I continued to shake him, gently.

"Goodbye, Caleb," I said.

"Goodbye, Captain Finn," he said.

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At the railroad station, my troop: Homer Ambrose, shaggy lion's head atop a brawny short body, short bent legs, next to him, his brother Jesse Ambrose, thin face, straggly locks, glittery eyes, always that sinister leer on his lips, and, to my surprise, both in clean trim uniforms, Homer fairly resplendent with his three big chevrons, Sergeant Homer Ambrose. "Up from the pigsty," he'd say, barely intelligible.

As we approached the new quarters, my heart sank. I just recently lived a very comfortable life in Athens, the Crokers cooking my food, cleaning my room, and before that, like a prince at the Grahame manse, the bed linen amazing, stiff and yet smooth, tasting luxuries I did not know existed, and yes, especially pleased to be comfortably served by a staff of talented slaves. First time in camp I was in a small two-person cabin, smoky, no conveniences. Now I was in a bigger black and brown cabin with Captain Heseltine and Major Wilson, and we had furniture, so Homer told me, fourth hovel down on Desolation Road. Indeed, as our wagon rattled along, we did pass what were undeniably hovels, tattered soldiers coming out to gaze at us in wonderment. Who was coming into winter camp and for what reason?

I knew the rule. Not enough food, water suspect, fuel severely rationed, don't catch a cold, cough and sneeze, do not get a fever, and above all refuse to get the shits, do not get the shits, in northern Virginia in February and March, in winter camp, 1863. Each visit to the pit and the plank an ordeal, could be snow or icy rain pelting your pitiful red ass bared and bent to discharge a full load, hopefully, luckily, into the dark abyss of a foul latrine ditch. Maybe a second and third time, trotting to the latrine, to the plank. Let this not be your fate. Officers' latrine had two attendants, one each shift, a big fellow and a little one, compliments of Major Wilson, shovelers, their faces wrapped in rags, only their eyes showing. Shovelers always had a little fire going.

I woke up, immediately on my elbows, looking around. Captain Heseltine had the stove going, a kettle steaming. It was still dark. He was an early riser, every morning on his knees, hands clasped, head bowed, the monotony of his repetitious Catholic praying almost music, I didn't mind it at all, but it irked Major Wilson, who was a bishop in his Protestant church. We were not a cozy trio. I lay back, warm in my regular blanket and now my Canadian priest cape, only my toes sticking out to feel how miserably cold it was in northern Virginia.

What was I doing here? I shot a woman in the face on her porch (she thought it was her porch, almost her porch). She took two shots at me, missing, was aiming the third at me, then I shot her. At the time I felt no guilt and still I feel no guilt. I should be reading Emerson in a little village somewhere, secure in my medical discharge. I was not. I was in this camp, stoically suffering, and it felt like punishment. It was not my intention to suffer. I was out of Athens and away from all the lacerating attention I daily received in the town, but I wasn't in that peaceful village I tried to envisage. I was in winter camp outside Centreville, not far from Manasses, in the same muck and mire we endured in the Peninsula at Seven Pines and Malvern Hill.

We had a fireplace in this cabin, but we did not use it. Too dangerous, Captain Heseltine said. He had a stove that would serve our purposes, cook and keep us warm, and it did. A pot of water was constantly on the boil. We drank from that pot. We filled our canteens from that pot. Everyone in the company drank tea made from pine needles, a medicine Homer Ambrose brought from Arkansas. In Company C harvesting pine needles, hunting white pine, was a regular duty assignment. I had a cup of pine needle tea every day. It was a rule in our section of the camp.

I couldn't just walk away free and easy from what was truly, as I had to confess it, a murder. She fired twice at me, missing, and wasn't regretting her decision to kill me as she regained control of her weapon, as she unsteadily re-aimed it, grimacing, sobbing, I had seemingly forever to dissuade her, disarm her, a long minute, and I didn't. I was stepping away from Grahame family drama, Shakespearean, Caleb said. Jack disappeared, Lewis sitting on the porch floor, his head hanging, two round holes in his vest still leaking, I was free to resume my personal pre-Jack Grahame life. Here was Lydia Grahame insisting I was a major figure in the Grahame family drama, wanting to bring me inside that drama as a killed character, her revolver in my face, and I was at the end of my patience. I despised her for the stupidity of her desire. All this for the keys to the Manse.

So, I was back in the Third Arkansas, expiating, sort of. Soon enough I'd be freely dodging shot and shell, if the shits and pneumonia didn't get me first. I was making a payment of pain to Luck who otherwise continued to bless my skinny ass. I promptly had the "Stars" in my rhythm: light drill in the morning, weapon care and sanitation in the

afternoon, picket duty for some in the evening, Jesse on the mouth organ, soldiers singing. Alas, no feasting. I felt a strange brotherhood with the German soldiers in the camp, men who were butchers and cooks, and on visits I often came away with articles of food, a cut of meat, a roasted vegetable, and once, just as I was recovering from the bloody flux, a Hans from Trier on the Mosel gave me the stub of a licorice root. The taste was so outlandish, so extreme, it filled my mouth and throat, it rushed to my brain. I was almost inebriated. I was not like Bobby Lee. Folks in Richmond and Atlanta sent him smoked hams, the best bacon, luscious pastries made with scarce ingredients, all sort of delicacies, and he nobly refused them, sending all this rich food on to hospitals. I did not share the extra food I found in the German camps. I ate it in private. Nor did I mind eating the occasional meat and potatoes in the Croker household while neighbors chewed on hard bread. I had taken many hits this past year so I thought I deserved the special sustenance that came my way.

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Then, one night in early March, as Jesse and I returned from an inspection, we heard clamor and tumult in the camp. Angry voices, torches, a crowd of soldiers, breath steaming in the night air, in their midst, roughly held by two soldiers (not from Company C), one of Major Wilson's shovelers, the big one. I approached, spotted a lurking sheepish sergeant, and called out to him to bring the men to attention. The two handlers continued to grip the shoveler. "Throw him to the ground," I said, "and come to attention." They did so and the shoveler just lay there, not moving. A quick glance and I saw the bloody bruise on the side of his head, saw serious cuts on his arm, and he was this cold night just in ragged pantaloons and a ripped shirt. No shoes. The sergeant explained that a recently recaptured slave had confessed that the shoveler, whose name was Mayhew, was a secret agent who encouraged our people to desert. Mayhew knew when and where to cross the river, knew how to get the immediate protection of the Army of the Potomac.

The soldiers stood at attention, reluctantly. They wanted to make the black sumbitch on the ground suffer grievously for this betrayal. There was a steady attrition in the

camp. You'd see Captain Chambers walking to the latrine with his pisspot not pleased with the chore. Where was his jolly lad, Josie, the boy who every day flung the Captain's piss into the black ditch under the impassive surveillance of the shoveler? Josie was just gone. Captain Chambers did not explain. No one asked. It was a constant simmering dread: genial Josie, loyal servant, was gone, others had tried, some succeeding. The idea was to hang Mayhew on a tree near the hidden trail to the ford and let him hang there, getting ripe, as a statement made by the Army of Northern Virginia to any further travelers. Something like that, the sergeant and a lieutenant from Company E, who'd edged their way into the deliberation, also thought this was a good idea. I could see the soldiers shuffling their feet, looking about, anyone else want to bust out and grab this black sumbitch, get it over with, too goddam cold just to stand here, hating this interrupting weird officer.

I let them stand there, shivering, wondering what I was up to. I was intently gazing at the space above their heads. Other soldiers, with lanterns, were coming up behind my barely commanded group. I was remembering nights in Kansas back in the fifties, a caught and tied Jayhawker, might be a bearded old man or a young kid, thrust stumbling into the firelight of our camp. Day before we'd buried two assassinated comrades, shot dead at the spring where they'd gone to fetch water. Captain Billy said do whatever you want and walked away into the night. It was the old man, his feet kicking in the air, someone's grandpa. So, looking fierce, I made these bloodthirsty guys wait while I tried to figure out what to do.

"This Mayhew belongs to Major Wilson," I said, "and the Major is not going to appreciate that you've damaged his property. Look how banged up he is, all this based on the testimony of a single runaway slave. I know Major Wilson. He'll do a proper inquiry. Then he'll sue each one of you, for actual damages, and the insult to his honor." I was looking at ten or twelve soldiers, others in the rear had drifted away. They wanted a spectacle, wanted to hear Mayhew squeal and sing, the problem in the first case Mayhew's arrogant refusal to speak, to say anything. When evidence was presented, the cringing runaway pointing a crooked black finger, Mayhew looked away. The sergeant who was my interlocutor and explainer, had, as I recall it, one tooth and bristly chops, a little guy, bent over, and he was actually holding the hanging rope.

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"Dismissed," I said. "Go back to your companies. I haven't yet recognized any one of you and I don't want to." The two lines immediately broke up, fragmented, one soldier asking what I was going to do with that sumbitch Mayhew, others lingering to hear my response. "Chain him to a stake behind Major Wilson's cabin," I said, and turned away, turned to Jesse. "See if he can get up and walk. If he can, loosely tie this rope around his wrists. He's our prisoner now." I took the rope, the hanging rope, first thing, from the sergeant and now I confiscated it, tied poor Mayhew's wrists with it. I was shaken to my core by what had happened; Mayhew's luck, my misfortune, to come upon him. I now owned him, if only for the next few days. He was my property. I had to repair him. I had to see to his welfare. Just for that moment as I was tying the knot that bound him, we looked into each other eyes, his left eye slitted by a swollen cheek, his right bloody, yet both still purposively signifying, as we say in the Army of Northern Virginia, saying: I know who you are, Captain Finn. I consign myself to your care. And then his eyes went dark and his head drooped.

It was a stab, a sharp pain. I was going to my cabin, to my book and a drop or two of my bone medicine, sweet regularity, and here it was, the War Between the States, in my face, Mayhew looking at me, man to man, I now belong to you. Whatever happens to me is on your conscience and honor. He of course didn't say that. I'm saying he must have said it, used those two words, so large in my mind at all times. What, in this extreme case, did conscience and honor decree? We led Mayhew down the road, Jesse on the hanging rope, giving Mayhew some distance, Mayhew stumbling and staggering.

Jesse bandaged Mayhew's head wound and washed the grit from the other wounds. I brought, with true heartache, Jack's priest robe, and wrapped it around Mayhew's wet ice cold bent and bulging body. Then we put him and a pail of water into a small supply shed that adjoined our cabin in the back. I said to Mayhew, who was prostrate on the

dirt floor, seemingly unconscious, I said: Be patient. Major Wilson is back into two days. Be patient. As if this was a consolation. Mayhew groaned and breathed. We locked him in the shed using an old rusty padlock, rehanging the key outside on the side wall. No risk of escape.

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Captain Heseltine had thoughtfully lit the stove and warmed the room when I came in. He had also stripped Major Wilson's bed of its blankets and furs, shared them out between us. "I admire you," he said. "You saved the lives of all those soldiers. They were out of order, a mob, and you stopped them, by God, you had them standing at attention." So, he fussed over me. I got out of my clothes and hung them up to dry. I sat naked inside Major Wilson's lustrous woolen blanket. Captain Heseltine brewed a weak herb tea, which I had to sip. He thought my action merited a commendation. I stood for the inflexible military rule of discipline. He knew Mayhew as the shoveler, everyone knew Mayhew the shoveler, when you saw his face, the rag mask set aside, it was solemn, impassive, chiseled. "Ridiculous," Captain Heseltine said, "this charge that Mayhew was an Abolitionist agent who had the time to travel about the country luring servants from their masters. If you shat or pissed in the night, Mayhew was about, the latrine's dark guardian angel." This was true, and as I got myself ready to sleep, I was comforted. I had rescued an innocent person. That was not, I must say, my first idea. I knew for certain that almost all the black people in the camp wanted their freedom. I remembered an earlier single sighting of Mayhew without his face rag, a somber face, big lips, and didn't we then exchange a look of recognition. He wasn't a slave born to shovel. He was a captive. The memory of that brief encounter was in his look as I just now bound his wrists.

I took Heseltine's confidence to bed with me. The farmer who supplied the Manse with meat and vegetables had three sons to work his farm and lost them to the Army of Northern Virginia, one already gone forever, and now he reluctantly relied on hired slave labor. He needed a foreman. He needed Mayhew. I had a quick sale to offer Major Wilson, a good solution for everyone, Major Wilson making a profit, selling a disabled

slave, Mayhew going off to a big farm outside Athens, helping Ed Martin manage that sprawling enterprise. I knew Ed Martin. He was a good man. I snuggled into Major Wilson's blanket and furs, I was prepared to sleep, thinking: Luck, you're still with me. I'm still drawing good cards from your pack. And God bless Captain Heseltine for his wise opinion. How could Mayhew be the night keeper of the Officers latrine, always present, shovel ready, and also an Abolitionist agent in the dark night leading runaway slaves across the river?

***

My watch said four o'clock. As I lay in my bed, a bare foot feeling the sharp cold of the morning, my nose sniffing because cold pinched, a great wave of sadness washed over me. When we wrapped Mayhew in my cape and covered him with an old sheet of canvas, the absolute best we could do, we knew everything depended on the weather. It had to get warmer, the wind stop whistling in the wall and ceiling crevices, if Mayhew was to survive the night. "He's lost too much blood," Jesse said. We had got the canvas sheet so positioned it made a small tent over Mayhew to stop the wind. He was wrapped in the Canadian cloak, clothing designed to withstand Quebec's arctic winter. "We'll see," I said. Jesse put an old rusty cup of water next to Mayhew's head and with his kerchief wet Mayhew's lips. I stood watching. Outside Jesse gave me a funny German salute to mock the duty he'd just done, the bare minimum of charity. Back in the cabin, I'm undressing, blessed Captain Heseltine gives me his calming review of the situation. Mayhew has been unjustly accused. I seized that statement to my chest, wrapped my entire tired body around it, and went to sleep.

It had gotten colder. I rose, with difficulty. I was heavy, hard to lift my stone leg over the side of my bed. I had to work with my chest and back shoulder muscles to hold up the iron ball of my head. Captain Heseltine had the stove going and a kettle set to boil. He was so decent, so charitable. Please God, do not shoot him or blow him up. He's got three daughters. Let him alone. Give him noncombatant service in the rear. I, on the other hand, weighed four hundred pounds, I was massive, I deserved to die, walking to the door was difficult. "Wait," said Captain Heseltine, "I'll go with you." "No," I said,

“he’s my prisoner. I’ll call for you if I need you.” Outside I felt like I was walking in deep snow, step after step carried me along to the fetched key and the padlock, to the door creaking open.

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Mayhew had thrown off my cape and set the canvas sheet aside. He was just in his torn shirt and ragged pantaloons, coiled into a ball, knees against his chest, arms around his bent legs, head turned to the side. He had composed himself, resumed his infant posture. Surely at that point he had ceased to shiver and shake, the cold was inside him, frost on his heart, and he just sank into it. As I knelt beside him, I put my hand on his brawny forearm, which was cut and bruised, and it was stone cold, that hard. A heaviness was on me. It took instruction to get my arm and hand to do things. I might have lost consciousness, gone into a trance, said things. Then the Ambrose boys were around me, Homer and Jesse, dumping sawdust on the spilled blood, and I was out of the shed breathing in the crisp morning camp air. I had just gone out of the world for a moment. I said things. I don’t remember. “Get my cape,” I said to Jesse. To Homer: “Burial detail. Take him to the hill. If you can, bury him facing north.” We had done our best, then it was up to God’s weather, let a melting breeze blow, and it did not. I touched Mayhew and he was cold stone. I had dragged and thrown many dead bodies these two years in the Army of Northern Virginia, but this was different, black skin, ripped and bloodied musculature, the intimacy of it, poor Mayhew. I didn’t faint, didn’t totter and tumble, but I was not in control of my body, nor did I know what I was saying. I might have been calling someone.

Mayhew’s body was like a single block of ice, legs up and locked, arms around legs and locked, head to the side. It was placed on the canvas sheet and dragged out to the trash cart. Then, rattling on its two wheels, pulled by two black men, the cart woke everyone up and everyone came to see what was going on. It was that nigger Mayhew, on the chain, froze his ass. The word spread through the camp and soldiers lost interest, the cart rattling on. Corporal Jesse Ambrose was the volunteer guard, musket slung, orders were to bury Mayhew, not give his body up to vile desecrations.

I stood looking after them. Mayhew was an abolitionist agent, I was certain at that moment, the trash cart turning, out of sight. Mayhew had a substitute, a lookalike. He trusted our visual stupidity. It was the shoveling we noted, not the shoveler. Those two encounters I'd had with Mayhew, eyeball to eyeball, brief glances at best, they were like ones I had with Jim on the raft, a thousand years ago, and how was that partnering done in slaveholding Missouri: Jim's skills, his knowledge, my gifts, my juvenile blather, the blessing of my white skin, the way we managed the unsaid, we were clinging to a twig, a scrap of bark, afloat on that immense river. These are some of the truths I learned afloat on that raft: Jim does not have a father and he can't remember his mother. He has a wife and a deaf daughter. Life in the Hannibal quarter was hard.

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Conversation with my brother officers was difficult. I had to pretend interest, pretend agreement and disagreement, could not introduce my opinion, so I was the principal listener in our little company and cherished for my patience and reserve. Major Tom Whittington, a fine fellow, an excellent soldier, a perfect commander, was a bore, utterly given over to hero worship, to long explanations of General Lee's military genius. I hated Lee's misspent genius but I couldn't say so. Circumspection was my game, not to betray a crack. Captain Heseltine and Major Wilson were religious, always looking to interest me in their God, competing for my attention, both, I must say, amiable idiots. Both men owned slaves. Mayhew belonged to Major Wilson. We did not discuss Mayhew. I was the principal actor in the Mayhew drama. Major Wilson did not ask what happened, what did I think, not once. He had his own informant. He did his own business. Nor did I ask about his response to Mayhew's fate. My report of the incident, terse, factual, went up to Major Whittington, was read, and filed. When lieutenants Fish and Malone were about, I listened to them talk about comical characters in their platoon, country people. I wasn't always comfortable with what they were saying as I was myself, ever so recently, illiterate, ignorant, a clodpole, a word Lieutenant Fish actually used, which I have put in my word bank for future use.

In fact, I bore a load. I needed to talk to someone who was decent and reasonable and antislavery. Hard to locate such a person in the Army of Northern Virginia. I was still heavy with what I can only call hopelessness. Mayhew gave me that look, *you have to do something*, and there was almost nothing I could do. I kept him from the tree. He would not hang that night. Instead, he froze in our supply shed. He was stone when I touched him. I am a Confederate military hero, remember that, struck five times at Antietam, highly regarded in my regiment, Third Arkansas, its Company C, the 'Stars,' dedicated to my fame as a commander, and I am far, far, from the help Mayhew needs and deserves.

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I wanted to talk to Cousin Isaac.

"Lay low, no political stand, avoid the front line, get promoted to the rear, survive, with honor, and then, dear Huckleberry, Missouri is yours. Think about your first speech to the legislature. What do you intend to do as governor? Lay out your program. Don't argue with these present Rebel morons. Just lay low and let the bullets fly."

That's what he spoke into my ear as I lay bandaged face, arms, legs, in that Richmond hospital. He had whiskey breath. When he left, I worried about my money. I had pesos in Mexico, pounds in Montreal and Kingston, dollars in Philadelphia and Baltimore, and sufficient Confederate money. It was a curse. I didn't care for it, needing very little to get along in my life, and money came to me, is still coming to me. First thing Tom and I dug up that chest of loot, had our lavish reward, and got Cousin Isaac's attention. In the border war, riding with Captain Billy, it was understood that you could rescue valuables from necessarily burning houses. I came away, I'm ashamed to say, with a good share of such valuables, sent on to Tom Sawyer who turned the share over to Cousin Isaac. My guard duty at the Clinic was amply rewarded. Sophie deposited my fat fee for bodyguard service in the Athens bank. It was there waiting for me, before the shootout on the porch, a neat little stack of Confederate dollars.

"Spend it all quickly," Jim Pierson said. He wasn't a patriot either. He had already lost an uncle, a first cousin, and three good friends, to the war. I wanted to talk to

Cousin Isaac and to Tom Sawyer about Cousin Isaac, what was Tom's present opinion, but Tom was in a different universe, in a different army. I had no word of him. I assumed he was simply in the same fix I was in, not a patriot, not really, nonetheless probably in a winter camp somewhere in miserable Mississippi, a starving raggedy Rebel soldier. We were in the same winter camp. Hello, Thomas. Are we still riding high with money in different banks? Are we still going to do a grand tour of Europe? We were in it together all or nothing, Cousin Isaac a free hand at investing our money, at managing our affairs in general. We're like a corporation, Cousin Isaac said, you can leave it any time you want and take your share.

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I had indeed done some recent damage to our corporation. I shot a Southern lady of the manor in her face on her porch, with sufficient cause, of course, and in that moment lost my future in public life. I did not feel a shiver of remorse. It was a mercy killing, that is how I finally judged it, she was committing suicide, and I obliged her. She had her success, she punished me, she did bring me forever into her story. I would not become Governor Mark "Huckleberry" Finn. I would always be the man who murdered Mrs. Lewis Grahame. Worse, paid assassin. Sophie at last gets everything, minus the living brother Leicester. No need to shoot him.

Cousin Isaac would grimly know everything, getting reports from his several minions in the newspaper trade. How did I let myself get so involved with these crazy Grahames? It was an interruption, a distraction, this mess in Athens. Pay attention to your future. It was a Cousin Isaac maxim. Once the South deservedly lost the war, who would rule Missouri? That was the question he kept before me. Radicals will impose a governor; Conservatives will never accept him. I am in the happy middle, a Southern boy, a Confederate hero, and a reasonable abolitionist. Missouri Democrats looked askance at Cousin Isaac. They saw him as a lukewarm secessionist. If, after the war, Missouri Democrats wanted Colonel "Huckleberry Finn," they would have to deal with Cousin Isaac. Pay attention to your future. I could not imagine my future. I was impaired, not having a proper childhood, unable to see a future, always finding myself at

work in someone else's life story. Cousin Isaac thought the War for Southern Independence would give him power and glory. What he got was a minor post in an almost shuttered agency, coastal commerce pretty much shut down by the Federal blockade. I was the only horse Cousin Isaac had in that postwar race to determine Missouri's future.

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It was a pleasant distraction to think of Cousin Isaac's life, its fundamental duplicity, his respectable Christian family, decent loyal wife, handsome children, his standing in the St. Louis business community, which I saw and never doubted its sincerity, and his life as a corsair cruising the steamboat world up and down river, doing cutthroat business, enjoying the pleasures of his success. How did he do it? In St. Louis he went to church almost every Sunday, sang hymns, shook hands. He liked the comfort of this life, two days a week. He might be gone for weeks, doing business. Of course, early on, he was doing business with G&S, meeting Sophie, managing her investments. He was managing my little fortune. Cousin Isaac despised Tom Sawyer, hated his brag and strut. "He doesn't listen to me," he said to solemn silent Huck. "He ignores good advice." This, when we were still Missouri boys, Isaac wondering whether he might have a theatrical act using the two of us, doing what he didn't at that moment know. Already Cousin Isaac had a watchful eye on Mr. Thomas Sawyer. Now, seemingly, Isaac Phelps's popular "Huckleberry Finn" was out of the race, not in play, in hiding, probably, and what next, Cousin Isaac might be wondering.

I sent several fairly urgent messages to Cousin Isaac, wherever he was. Wiley Puckett's daddy was some kind of a senior official in Richmond, not a cabinet post, but close, and he knew exactly where Cousin Isaac should be. Messages were sent. Cousin Isaac did not command from a desk, said Wiley Puckett's daddy. Cousin Isaac was always in the field, these days mostly at some remote hidden port, unloading contraband medical supplies, drugs, instruments, and no doubt other sacks and packages, color coded, for special delivery. Messages were sent, wherever, and I was left to think about all the political speeches I would never deliver. I was again walking

the line at night, checking the vigilance of the posted pickets, thinking about the speech I'd give to the black people of Missouri. I bungled Jim's escape back in Arkansas. I let Tom Sawyer take over and he put Jim and me through these painful dangerous antics, we're sweating it out, he's gaily devising, because he has Jim's manumission papers in his back pocket. I'm a runaway, Jim's a fugitive slave. We might have been shot while Tom was struggling to come up with the manumission papers. Where are they? Here they are in my pocket. I'll never forgive him for that, yet he is, strangely, still my best (white) friend.

I didn't even get close to rescuing Jim's wife, Sadie, one of the major difficulties, I didn't know her, couldn't identify her. Then she was brutally murdered. I was a poor Southern white boy, what sort of rescue could I achieve in 1852? Tom Sawyer, escape artist, was stymied. Sadie was in the prison of slavery, this one with walls, trenches, dogs, the worst kind. I was of no use to Sadie Watson. I did not light out for the Caribbean with Clyde Bristow, so I couldn't protect him, couldn't check his insolence, which meant he was on his own in New Orleans and soon there was a pistol to his head, so he ends up hewing wood and drawing water in a tough Tennessee monastery where talking is forbidden, God bless Cousin Isaac for that lifesaving intervention. Then Atlanta. As I slept in Major Wilson's furs and blankets, happily fooled by Captain Heseltine's exoneration of Mayhew, just outside, locked in the supply shed, Mayhew was freezing to death. Step by step, what was to be done? I saved Mayhew from immediate death by hanging, saved him from likely dismemberment, but I could not give him warm shelter on that frigid night. It was not possible. I lent him my Canadian cloak.

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I liked military life in the Confederate Army. I liked the sacrosanct regulations, how to salute, how to stand at attention, the bugles telling you when to retire and when to get up. What next, that daunting question, the bane of my life, does not exist in the Army of Northern Virginia. What next is on the northern side of this slip of a river and at night you can hear it moving and talking, tins clinking, scattered music, that close and certain it is, that which is next. I can sleep on the ground. I've slept on the ground a good part

of my young life. I was raised on short rations. Starting off, back in ’61, I had a step or two on my mates, I’d been in battles, I’d shot at people, I had that advantage. They were all boys and I was early man, still fairly stupid. It didn’t matter that I was not a superlative trooper in Captain Billy’s Band, my enlistment brief. I was in the Band. Well, there are many vacancies in a wartime army, so promotion is frequent. I was Captain Finn, too soon, perhaps. Company C was the best company in the Third Arkansas regiment, Army of Northern Virginia, and it galls me now, irks me, that I must say how much I loved those lads, still mostly Arkansas folk, small town, farmer, backwoods people, damned decent souls every one of them, hating to see them take the strike, the hit, because of course we were fighting to protect the institution of slavery.

That wasn’t how Major Whittington saw it. We were resisting an invasion. Northern states wanted to come into Southern states and control their political and social life. Arkansas, under the good guidance of its enlightened leaders, could solve its own pressing issues. Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, stay home, tend to your issues and problems. In the camp slavery was not to be discussed, certainly not with the men. In our time of war, said Major Whittington, slavery has to be treated as a settled issue. After we win our independence, our new nation will certainly want to reexamine our social contract. First, we must drive the invader from our country. He said something like that at the meeting where Lieutenant Fish, to everyone’s astonishment, brought it up, slavery, mentioning the hated Abraham Lincoln and his Emancipation Proclamation. What was our official answer to the Proclamation? If a soldier should ask.

I saw the body servants of the various officers who could afford such maintenance; I knew some by name. I saw the pick and shovel laborers; I saw the cooks and cleaners. I never saw brutal treatment, a whipping or struck blows, but I knew, all along, that happened. Growing up among the respectable Christian people of Hannibal, I saw a deal of brutal treatment. In our camp everyone was busy doing their job, whites and blacks, that’s how it seemed to me. Keeping warm, getting enough to eat, that was the primary job in winter camp. The attack on Mayhew did not shatter the truce that seemed to exist between master and slave. Life went on in the camp. Get the boys the best breakfast possible, turnip mush, hard black bread, and bacon. Then, best thing, after the breakfast pause, brisk happy drill. Sing, lads! Count cadence. I was an

excellent commander, I feel I can easily say that, I don't know how that competence came to me, but it did. Every 'Star' in the company wanted my respect, an acknowledgment. Every 'Star' in the company could load and fire his musket in twenty seconds, or less, no spilling, no stumbling. We never got Jack Grahame to that point. He was happy when they took away his musket and gave him a shovel.

I lived a life in the ranks. I knew what the 'Stars' were thinking. I was careful, I didn't make wrong decisions, they knew that I would put them in the right place, given the circumstances, and I was cool under fire. Everyone knew about the five hits at Antietam, four times shot, still standing, then shot in the jaw and taken from the field. I liked my little fame as a Confederate hero, liked the admiration and envy of my peers. They saw me as a very reserved silent fellow, an odd duck, not in any of the available fraternities, one who inexplicably turned away journalists who wanted to write stories about the stand at Antietam. They were eager for promotion, would dearly love a journalist to come and report their service, and here is Mark Finn, inexplicably not interested in promotion, not seeking notice, and then getting it doubled, Captain Mystery from Missouri.

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In Athens, after the shooting, reporters followed me to the bank, waited outside the gate at the Croker house, each wanting an exclusive interview, cash payment available. I distrusted reporters. I knew they would bring me to a question I could not answer, not answering itself an answer. Cousin Isaac had important friends in the newspaper trade. He read every newspaper he could lay his hand on. Certain journalists were on his payroll. He distrusted reporters. "You tell your story, he'd say. I was a story," I could see that. Bullets and balls did seem to miss me. The gold starred coat seemed to protect me, to redirect incoming missiles, sometimes at point blank. Mrs. Grahame shot twice at short range. The bullets whizzed past me wanting to smack into me, to shatter bones and organs, instead first getting only the pommel of a saddle then a plank, or was it a tree. The bullets missed me. On Cheat Mountain, they missed me. At Seven Pines they missed me. At Antietam they caught me at last. Now they were missing me again,

of course fired by an incompetent, but close up, and maybe it meant I was again bullet proof, the gold stars, Tom's tooth, whatever. Luck is the soldier's best friend.

I stand before you, black people of Missouri, I was saying to myself, practicing a speech, I am a genuine Confederate hero, disfigured, disabled, who fought for the success of his regiment and his company, whose loyalty went no further. I was a Confederate hero, but I was not a Confederate patriot. Something like that. And then I might turn to Jim, to Mr. James Watson, nattily attired, pearl buttons, first secretary, senior associate, in the Provost Marshal's Office, and Jim gives me his endorsement. What would he say? Simplify, I'd say to him, don't complicate.

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Third Arkansas was sent south to aid Longstreet in the siege of Suffolk. We missed Lee's big victory at Chancellorsville. We got a miserable draw at Suffolk, counting casualties. Before we left for Suffolk, I had five free days in Richmond, official business, coastal commerce, consultation, I was a river expert, so the letter said, and I had to smile to see Cousin Isaac in that sentence.

Richmond in early April, what a blessing, the air relatively fresh and clear, not smelling of latrine gas, the odor of which was in my coat, in my hair, in my mouth. All the soldiers on the train smelled of the same unpleasant odor. Fresh shit and piss on stale shit and piss, that was the mixture that made the odor. In Richmond I took an immediate bath and put my clothes out in the fresh air. I had a modest room in Mrs. Moffat's Shady Lawn Retreat House, an elegant suburban establishment that catered to visiting dignitaries. Mrs. Moffat was having a difficult Civil War. The Federal blockade severely reduced the number of visiting dignitaries in Richmond. She was left with local customers who paid lower rates and were not as interesting as her Russian prince and her Ottoman diplomat. I learned all this first night smoking on the veranda, talking with a fellow guest, the Right Reverend Hugh Henry McDowell, an English fellow high up in some church administration. He, too, missed the exotics who once resided at Shady Lawn, the fur hat, the fez, their extravagant tastes, which they shared with fellow guests, with the Right Reverend, who couldn't get back to Liverpool, who was stuck in the

Confederate South, advising, assisting, local pastors, in many places where no wine was to be found, also no tobacco. The Ottoman diplomat gave him a plug of black tobacco grown and prepared somewhere in the Caucasus, and wasn't that marvelous, the Right Reverend asked, this load of black tobacco carried by camels and oxen over mountains through desert to this very spot in Richmond, Virginia, a pinch of it, for his enjoyment.

I had several plugs myself, a cinnamon, a dark green, Bristow's gifts. I smoked a cheap cigar fixed and rolled in the Richmond quarter, which was actually pretty good, aromatic, mild, almost cool. We stood or sat there, Hugh Henry ("Call me Hugh," he said) and me, Captain Finn, (I didn't say: "Call me Mark."), our plumes of smoke creating an almost private zone on the veranda. At some point, we were talking about prayer and I said I thought prayer as incantation, kept to yourself, was no doubt helpful to many soldiers in the shock of combat, and then as I was starting my next sentence, the Right Reverend leaned over, coming close, and I was instantly surprised to discover that he was fragrant, perfumed, and his big blue eyes were fastened on me. His hand clasped (or was it gripped) that part of my thigh directly above the knee, the hand exerting a pressure, as he said: "Captain Finn, God did not intend us to live without pleasures." I had to take it in for a moment, that I was being propositioned by Sir Hugh Henry McDowell, the hand remaining where it was, signifying. In our mutual introduction I declared myself a loyal son of Missouri and he said--I couldn't get all of it, his accent interfering, that he was a loyal son of Galloway, of noble Scottish birth, third son of a bankrupt baronet. "May I say, Captain Finn," Hugh said, throatily, "you are a beautiful man." I stood up. "Off to my prayers," I said. "Big day tomorrow. I'm meeting Isaac Phelps. I think you know him." I stubbed out my cigar and put its carcass back in my case. Hugh was ruminating, his removed hand knuckling his brow. "Isaac Phelps," he said.

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A cab came at noon and took me out into the countryside, the driver, a portly black man in his middle years, who was full of chatty information about the Farm, our destination in the countryside. As soon as I was seated, he said hiyah to the horse and off we went at a good clip, the driver telling me how blessed I was to be going to the Farm. It was the only place in Virginia where you could eat eggs in the morning and beefsteak in the evening. Used to be a big plantation owned by the Vickers family. Now it was owned by a group of rich Southern gentlemen who had refurbished the big house for their pleasure, put in a first-rate saloon and plush residential rooms where they relaxed after they did their business in Richmond. It was indeed a large mansion and as we drew up to its entrance, I saw a man in livery waiting for me on the steps who did me the honor of a fairly good military salute.

"Secretary Phelps will see you in his room," the man said.

I was dining with the Secretary in the late afternoon, but not spending the night. At nine my cab would be waiting for me and back I would go to Mrs. Moffat's Shady Lawn Retreat House. Only club members slept in the magnificent beds on the second floor. We went up a wide winding staircase down a corridor so thickly carpeted I felt I was walking on a cloud. The man's name was Houston, so he said, and I was to call for him if I needed anything. He knocked on a door and a bespectacled young man named Shea, the Secretary's secretary, opened it and ushered me in. A spacious excellent room, Shea getting me seated in a comfortably cushioned chair, and I was thinking Secretary of what, Cousin Isaac?

On the table next to my chair, a glass decanter containing a red brown liquid that immediately spoke to me. Sip, it said, you won't be disappointed. Shea disappeared into an adjoining room. Here at last, my guardian angel, my mentor, Sub-Secretary Phelps, Cousin Isaac, entered the room. He was still every inch a fashionable prosperous gentleman, the corsair who prowled the better steamboats on the Mississippi, now a sub-secretary to the chief of Confederate naval operations, Stephen Mallory, who was a friend and former business associate. Mallory did his best but Cousin Isaac had political enemies in Missouri who wanted to keep him far from the Mississippi. Cousin Isaac didn't get rivers. He never saw an ironclad. He got a coast. His compensation was a lucrative trade in smuggled specialties.

I took him in from head to toe. A neatly trimmed brief beard, rosy cheeked, the meticulously combed hair grayer, the stomach rounder. He wore a brocaded smoking cap with a tassel and a fur lined dressing gown, and he stood in plush slippers. A tad early in the day to be in bedtime clothes, I thought, and also, to go on, shouldn't he be in a more fitting outfit for this important meeting/reunion? As always, he was reading my thoughts just as I spoke them. His life was so exciting he suffered from insomnia. If, at any time, slumber should knock on his door, he would leave immediately for his bed, Shea would see me out. Apologies, explanations, of course.

I stood and got it all out at once. "Cousin Isaac," I said, "it is true I shot Mrs. Grahame. It was self-defense, but I'm sure it knocks me out of your plans. I'm sorry about that." I had nothing further to say.

"Sit," said Cousin Isaac.

I sat.

He came near, decanted two glasses of the red brown liquid, gave one to me. "This," he said, "is dark rum, a gift from Dr. Sunshine. He sends his dear Huckleberry his best wishes." He drank his glass in a single swallow. I sipped mine. It was my first encounter with rum. What wonderful things came out of Jamaica. I was thinking of Clyde Bristow and the old crone cook who lived in the mountains and prepared tinctures and smoke sticks. "It's sweet," I said, tasting sugar in the burn of the alcohol. Cousin Isaac poured a second glass for himself and lifted the glass. "To the Sunshine Clinic," he said, "dispenser of lifesaving medicines." I took another sip. "I take it," said Cousin Isaac, "you've had no recurrence of your former malady." I took another sip. "No," I said, "I can piss with the best man jack in my company, straight and clear, thanks to you, Cousin Isaac." "Not me, the Sunshines," he said. Here was Shea with a pitcher of cool spring water. I needed a drink of water to rinse away the taste of rum. Cousin Isaac sat comfortably in the easy chair opposite mine. He pointed a finger at me, squinting, as down a length of barrel. "When this war over," he said, aiming the finger at my forehead, "family murder before the war will be so trivial, so irrelevant, it will be obscene to talk about it." He pulled the trigger and shot me, puff, between the eyes.

***

Tom Whittington says, Stonewall and Bobby Lee, Stonewall and Bobby Lee, end of discussion. Alexander shock battled his way through an immense Persian Empire, Julius Caesar, with small disciplined forces, controlled vast territories in ancient France and Germany, Napoleon shock battled his way into central Europe and then kept going until he was inside Russia, Moscow sighted. Stonewall and Bobby Lee, he would say, , might very well end up in Washington, D.C., standing on the steps of the White House.

"Shock," said Cousin Isaac, "is good, truly, it gives you the advantage, but its victories are dangerous."

We were sitting in his parlor, shoes off, feet up on cushioned stools, smoking cigars of tightly rolled black Caucasian tobacco. The hit and flavor of the smoke took the burn off the rum. Was this my third or fourth glass? "The laird of Galloway, the Right Reverend Hugh Henry McDowell," said Cousin Isaac, "has wonders in his luggage." I was relaxed. It was steamboat days, feet up, smoking, also a rafting pleasure, the current carrying you along, and for the moment you don't have a care in the world. He told me about the Sunshines, their clinic somewhat reconstructed in Kingston, how they wanted him to get Bristow out of North America, sent back to the Sunshines in Jamaica where Bristow would prevail and prosper. "Could be a happy ending for our friend, Clyde," said Cousin Isaac.

Slumber had yet to knock on his door. What about his present relation to the blasted reeling Grahame empire? He had no trustworthy news. He adored Sophie Grahame. They understood each other, shared the thrill of investing in high-risk ventures, the pleasure of finding and fostering bright young persons, trusted each other with privileged information, they were that close. "Logan and Pierson will run things in Athens well enough, don't worry about that," Cousin Isaac said. Slumber at last was knocking on his door.

As I returned to Mrs. Moffat's, the cab lamplit, the horse knowing its way, driver pretty much asleep at the reins, I recalled the three things Cousin Isaac had to say to me, face to face, summoning me from the good life in winter camp. I had to extricate them from a rambling discourse on Missouri politics, at times a rant naming who should matter in Missouri after the war, in the decades following. He drew a breath, pondered.

It was a long pause. I waited to see where he was going next. He came in close, confidential. “Don’t worry,” he said, “we’re going to lose the war.” Many of his sentences began “Don’t worry,” but this one was special. It was our passport to future vindication. We could honorably serve a wrong cause, for all sorts of fair reasons, local, personal, if, at the same time, we were certain our wrong cause could not prevail. It was the first article of belief in our constitution. We were going lose the war. Actually, at the moment, we were winning the war, though I knew what Cousin Isaac meant and I agreed with him.

Also, he said: “Don’t get shot again.”

At some point Slumber arrived, Cousin Isaac was aware, sitting upright, eyes large, Shea was in the room, doing tasks, I was up collecting myself. “Huck,” he shouted out to me as Shea ushered him into the bedroom, “Huckleberry Finn, write that speech.”

***

It was first lieutenant Titus Hepburn, the fellow who just sat down beside me on the bench, who eyed me curiously, and then I just looked at him. He hadn’t said anything polite when he plumped down next to me, making me move somewhat. Something so familiar, I thought, and then, subtract the beard and mustache, it was Titus Hepburn, still the merest boy. In our long-ago boyhood Titus Hepburn and Clarke Peavey were Anglay brats at the Battle of Big Ditch, scrambling all over Tom, hooting and hollering, pulling his ears, pinching his cheeks, Tom who had stumbled in the mock fray and fallen to his knees, seriously scraping a shin, baying like a downed bull moose, and then I, little Huck, forgot we were at play, and I went into action. Titus remembered the ferocity of my attack. He had a bruised left forearm and a welt on his back. Clarke’s nose was bloody. At one point I picked Sammy Wheeler up, his entire squirming body, legs kicking, and I threw him into a nearby trash pile. I don’t remember throwing Sammy in the trash pile. I do remember the humiliation of losing self-control, Tom restraining me, cooling me down. Thereafter, Titus said, “the guys were careful around you, and frankly, I still am, what is it with this puss, what a slashed scar that is, you should be home sitting before a fire, get yourself a medical discharge, Huck.” Not our train came noisily

into the station, a lot of hissing steam, a tumult of passengers. It gave us time to think, April 1863, about our dead comrades whose names we would now share. We were both bound south to Suffolk, same place, same siege, detached duty. What was his mission? He couldn't say. I was almost afraid to ask about those long-ago lads in our band of robbers.

"Clarke Peavey is gone, shot in his pilot house steering an ironclad on the Mississippi."

"Reuben Foster is gone, camp fever in Arkansas."

"Tom Sawyer, your Tom Sawyer, captured at Shiloh, third day, is in a miserable camp just outside Chicago, Camp Douglas, so I learned from a St. Louis doctor, smoking and sipping whiskey with him outside a butcher tent, taking a respite, passing the little brown bottle back and forth. We do fight some battles out west, you know," Titus said to me. This doctor knew Tom Sawyer well enough not to be surprised that Tom bungled two promising endeavors by senior Missouri judges to get him paroled, that he was often in the camp stockade, behind bars, eating slop, and why, because he is, surprise, a terrible prisoner, an obnoxious resister, a protesting idiot, the very boy we knew back in the day.

A new train had entered the station.

First Lieutenant Hepburn, I was thinking, whistles sounding all around us, Titus's outfit going into a formation to board its cars. We shook hands. I would never see him again. He did not come back from the siege of Suffolk.

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Colonel Manning called all the officers in the regiment to a special meeting. We knew what he was going to say. Lieutenant General Thomas Jonathan Jackson, our "Stonewall," struck down on the battlefield at Chancellorsville, was dead. That very day the Stonewall Brigade gave us our biggest victory in the war. Though I was sitting apart from Tom Whittington, I could sense his profound distress, I knew he would be reaching into his big bag of historical comparisons. We sat there, heads bowed, a chaplain giving us appropriate Bible verses. General Richard Stoddert Ewell, one-legged Dick,

now commanded the brigade. It would remain fairly intact, some units reassigned. Later, walking back from the meeting, Major Whittington said, “Achilles, he was our Achilles, the spear point, the smaller force must shock and shatter the larger force, its only desperate hope, the surprise thrust.” Tom Whittington was looking for the proper historical similarity. You could lose Achilles and still take Troy. I was thinking, who is Achilles?

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Well, up to a point, I agreed with Tom’s statement of Confederate strategy. Lee had to surprise a disorganized Army of the Potomac in the field, shatter its poorly aligned formations with precisely delivered attacks, then send it off in a wild retreat, no longer a recognizable military force. Something like that. We almost got that decisive victory in the first battle at Manassas way back in ’61. Now, in mid-May 1863, such a final battle seemed possible again. Bobby Lee was knocking out Union generals one after the other. Where would Lee’s momentum take us? Our camp was stirring with many different preparations. I watched black men hard at work, lifting and carrying, and I thought how bitter this toil, helping the oppressor nation, turning Confederate wheels, pushing Confederate wagons, each night around the fire listening in silence to the brag and boast of their masters.

History was screwing my conscience to the board. We were not losing the war. We were winning the war. We would get our secession recognized. We would, for a time, keep our slaves. So how could I go on justifying my contribution to the Confederate cause by saying to Conscience I’m in the Army of Northern Virginia to defend my people in Missouri and my country of Missouri from federal invasion and occupation, Tom Sawyer talk, but I did feel the tug of that tie. Remember, brother, in the fifties I rode with Captain Billy’s Band and slew antislavery Kansans right and left, but I was not a patriotic Missourian. I had my own reasons for riding with Captain Billy. In ’61, everything falling apart, sides being taken, I believed in the omnipotence of Sophie Grahame. She got Jack and me transferred from the Mississippi mudflats to the cool plateaus of civilization in the Northeast, there to be given safe postings in obscure places. Jack was not a

patriot. I wasn't a patriot. We were both content to sit out the war in some remote place.

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But what happened to those prime assignments? Sophie's reach and power seemed to stop the instant we got off the train, each of us in our still strange (to us) gray uniform, ill fitting, standing there, a furious sergeant in our face, spitting and cursing. And why? Jack is grinning. He finds this sergeant, who is a tad short, comical in his noisy rage. Where is the G&S agent who will remove these present difficulties? Jack expected to be rescued. I was in his Grahame story. When he was rescued, I'd be rescued. Time passed. We were not rescued. Alas, I was in, and all the way in, finding military discipline and duties not at all punishing, enjoyable even, liking the challenges of drill. First time in combat as a commander, I was, throughout the action, clear headed, calm. I saw the terrain, I knew where to place our "Stars," I saw where the Yankee line could be broken, I was disciplined with supply, my carriers and runners were athletes nimbly dodging balls and bullets, Company C was never out of ammunition. I didn't try to be an excellent combat officer, I didn't study the practice, I just had it, off and running.

After Antietam I was Captain Mark Finn, a fellow mentioned in one of Lee's battle dispatches, and I would be Major Mark Finn early in the new year, so it was said, and then Mrs. Lewis Grahame intruded and vengefully sought to ruin me, to bring me to her justice in her story, so, as you know, I shot her in the face. Anywhere else would not have been appropriate. I am still freeing myself from Grahame family drama. I was quickly exonerated, but my promotion papers were on hold. I was good at this bloody business, Captain Cool, they said, and it did smart, did touch me, the single word that Bobby Lee laid on me in his Antietam dispatch, "gallant." Me, dear reader, and I now stand forth in my original name, Huckleberry Finn, it was Huckleberry Finn at Antietam holding the line at the Sunken Road, how good I was, bullets and balls then finding me, I'm still standing, Huckleberry Finn, once an orphan wretch in Hannibal, Missouri, now

stretched out in his gold starred brocaded grey Confederate coat, a fighting captain in a crack regiment, surely soon dead, drowning in his own blood. I was good at this.

I didn't at any point say to myself, I am fighting to protect the institution of slavery. I was fighting with a Confederate army, not fighting for its mission. I found myself trapped tight in the service of my new country, in lock step with my slaveholding soldier comrades.

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We're going to lose the war, do your job, but lay low. Such was the advice of Cousin Isaac Phelps. Tom Whittington was certain we would invade Pennsylvania, that Lee was looking to confront the Army of the Potomac in a decisive battle. We had the best infantry, the best cavalry, a matchless artillery. Now, after all our glorious victories, think of Chancellorsville, why not catch rattled Hooker on his own ground, too many men, too much supply, why not shatter their front with our two stellar brigades, the Stonewall Brigade and the Texas Brigade? Third Arkansas served inside the Texas Brigade. We might easily be the critical factor at the forthcoming battle. I had to consider this, if Lee prevails with these two brigades, with me, slavery is preserved.

Jim Watson, Clyde Bristow, Alice Burns, where is their army? Jim would say, or Clyde, or Alice, our army is the Union army. All power to the fighting legions of the Army of the Potomac, of course this is what they say. Our army, brothers and sisters, and it is just over there on the other side of the Rappahannock, immensely stirring in its sea of tents. I could freely act to serve my first allegiance, just at this moment in American history, I could cross the Rappahannock, I could renounce my Confederate nationality, and of course instantly become the sworn enemy of the "Stars," Third Arkansas, their Captain Cool, their Missouri Mystery, suddenly a traitor dedicated to the defeat and humiliation of their betrayed home country. What did conscience require? What did honor demand?

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We marched into paradise, southern Pennsylvania, green and golden fields, woods and meadows, healthy livestock in pasture soberly regarding us we trudged up the road, barns and houses well kept, evidently prosperous, and no one out to welcome us with a wave of sympathy and a drink of water, no one. It was hot. Tom Whittington wanted some drum and fife. So, sweating, thirsty, we rattled and tootled along. On occasion, no generous tenders of water having been made, water was requisitioned, so we pumped water into gathered troughs and tubs, filled our canteens and bottles, washed our faces, got water into our matted locks, soaked our feet, officers using the family privy in the back field, our tendered payment for the grudged water.

This is how I came north into this strangely beautiful place, with a torn twisted heart, as one of Bobby Lee's best, and at the same time, secretly, a dedicated fighter in the Enlightenment Army, Cousin Isaac's party, Thomas Jefferson's party, Jim Watson's party, whose main action was now postwar, as Cousin Isaac said. Our present work, he said, was "positioning," being in the right place, ready, when the war was over, then standing for office, doing the good work of liberation, even if it now meant giving military service to the Confederate Army. I had worked out private treaties with conscience, makeshift devices mostly, and these treaties so far held me fast in the uniform I was now wearing, kept me on the march, swallowing my qualms. Someone said we might conquer a shoe factory in the next Pennsylvania town. I could turn to think about that. If we found that shoe factory there was sure to be nearby a merchant who dealt in leather, and what were my leather needs.

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It was Homer Ambrose, permission to speak, and what it was Homer believed he had a child way back in darkest Arkansas, it lived with a preacher's family in Holden Hollow, and he had here a handwritten will deeding all his possessions and money to this child. Homer found southern Pennsylvania too tranquil, too neatly fenced,

something was off in this invasion, he would do his duty, he knew I would do my duty, but, for the first time, Homer had shaky leg, he admitted it to me.

I took the envelope and put it in my briefcase. We sat before the campfire, silent for a long time, then I said, how's Jesse? Homer spoke in his personal language, which used grunting and croaking, noun and verb, holding forth in long sentences, in paragraphs, any passerby overhearing Homer would think him a lunatic, but I was now fairly fluent in Homer's language and this is what he said. "Folks say this one will be the biggest yet."

A two humped summit, Big Round Top, Little Round Top, one access slope a rock spill, the other tightly forested. We're disadvantaged in either ascent, hard to reload scrambling up through rock spill, hard to retain formation in the woods, hard to communicate your orders. Major Whittington was there to explain our attack. Up. We were going up, not to linger. Once we gain the summit, we effectively outflank the entire Union army spread out on Cemetery Ridge. They were pointed that way. We were coming this way.

Third Arkansas would make the telling charge at the critical moment, near the summit, break through the Union line, scatter its defenders. Third Arkansas would lead a victorious surge of Confederate military power down the far slopes of the two Round Tops, and I would be in it, clumping along on my stiff leg, or maybe riding somebody's horse, once again a hero in the war for Southern Independence. That was coming, tomorrow's work, geography work, where is my left, where is my right, where is the center?

First night on the march, campfires winking everywhere, I sat before our campfire with several brother officers, the lieutenants Malone and Fish, prayerful Captain Heseltine, Tom Whittington, who did all the talking, and now was done, and we were silent, lost in thought. We were going to take the capital of Pennsylvania and then march east on Washington, D. C. and the only force standing in our way would be a disorganized Army of the Potomac.

I was thinking about fate and luck. Fate was long range. Luck was immediate. Look to Luck. Luck was the grand undoer. Keep your eye on Luck. Respect Luck. I was in my gold starred coat, its several bullet holes gloriously mended, a spray of faded yellow

cloth stars across my upper body. I had some other things about me, charms, you could call them, this little tightly wrapped bundle, variously fragrant, always with me, Sister Susan Feldkamp's gift, here in my knapsack. Yankees couldn't get a proper bead on the Ambrose boys, one too thin, the other too short. That was Fate. I had my "Stars" ingeniously placed, I could direct a fierce concentrated fire, no misfires, expert reloads, because every lad in the company was in the right place, had proper training. "Ho" said Major Heseltine, coming out of his prayer trance.

Seeing the elephant. It was what they said going into battle, farm boys, office clerks. I did see, as a Hannibal, Mo. boy, I was nine or ten, the fabulous elephant every farm and town boy in America longs to see close up, in the gray thick flesh, trunk and tusk. One early evening, down at the lesser piers, small steamers, flatboats, rafts, moored, rocking in the river waves, the place pretty much deserted, good pickings for scavenging wharf rats, I was there with some other rats, our beady eyes scanning the crates and boxes. On the last pier, the river going dark, at the far end of this pier, we all saw our first elephant. She was not the fabulous creature we'd seen in books. She did not threaten us with her size, that bludgeon trunk, those two saber teeth, those huge uplifted trampling feet. I say she because I did not see anything dangling from the elephant's underside. Of course, I had no training in sexing animals. Her small size, her nervous manner, I guessed she was somebody's young daughter elephant chained to the floor of a canopied flatboat. As we first approached, she was turning her domed head this way, that way, moaning, almost crooning. This was her life, manure straw to eat, dead water in the trough. We fixed that, if only this night, fresh water, river greens. Mandy, our big sister nurse, cleaned the elephant's sores, plucked disgusting blood suckers from inside the elephant's flappy ears, spoke to the elephant in her low Missouri drawl, saying, I'm sure, something like other good people down river will come to your aid. Twilight into dusk, we worked on this elephant. We gave her a bath, splashing her with buckets of cold Mississippi river water. We couldn't do anything about the shackle.

Then, around nightfall, some boat people returned to their moored property, spotted a pack of wharf rats loitering around the elephant and came at us, bristling, swearing, at one point pelting us with stones. Which we returned. Older people, potbellied, bald, they fled the accuracy of Mandy's pellets, thrown at their legs. It was the end of the

elephant rescue. Early next morning we went to the pier to look after our adopted elephant and she was gone. Somehow, we learned that she was not an African elephant, she was an Indian elephant, and my guess was right, she was a girl elephant, somebody's daughter. She was going to St. Louis, to some rich man's private zoo.

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Third Arkansas is standing at ease. The afternoon sun is hot. We're waiting for the word to go into action. We can hear the rumble of Union artillery firing from the heights we would soon assault and hopefully carry. We had to silence and capture these guns. Just down the road a battle is already going on, we can hear the noise, the outcry, the wicked thump of field cannon. I remember this with great clarity, the different battle sounds all around us, yet we stood in a solemn quietude, talk brief and low voiced. We could hear Jesse Ambrose, seated on a water can, softly playing a tune on his mouth organ. 3 PM. I'm chewing on a sliver of licorice. I see our Colonel Manning consulting with other senior field officers at a folding table put up under a clump of trees. Messengers ride up and depart.

My mind went click, I skipped a conscious beat or two or three, I was there, but not in control. I bent forward slightly, looking down, and the grassy ground below said to me: come, collapse on me. The sun was trying Third Arkansas. Not enough trees to offer cooling shade. Captain Heseltine to the rescue: "You need a drink, old man," his canteen lifted to my parched lips, and as soon as I drank everyone in the company broke out his canteen. "Whoa," roared First Sergeant Homer Ambrose, stepping out to confront the company. "Whoa, zlbntyw, hua jony, hua jony." Everyone in the company understood: goddam, two swallows, two swallows." It straightened my spine, their perfect silent obedience.

But I was not well. A certain dread had got itself lodged in my thought. I am a limber wiry soul, remember that, I did not want to feel again that strange sensation of heaviness I had dealing with Mayhew's luck and fate, not so long ago. I had a dream. I'm standing in weighted shoes, I'm all girth, fat cheek and chin, I can barely walk, I'm incapacitated. I can't help you, I must say to Mayhew, and this was the hopelessness

that briefly swept over me as I stood before Company C, my “Stars,” their hero commander. It seemed I was two hundred and fifty pounds, that I’d lost my boots, that, going into battle, I was barefoot.

Bugles began to blow.

I came back to myself.

Rose’s Woods. That was its name. There was a Rose farm. Here was the opening into the woods, a dark maw, looked like, and of course C Company went in first, savoring the immediate relief of shade, feeling also the rush of expectation. Waiting for us in the woods farther on was the awful elephant, reared up, tusks menacing, biggest goddam animal you’ve ever seen. Union skirmishers were already firing on us, their bullets smacking into trees, crackling in the foliage. We went into our fighting lines, muskets loaded, bayonets fixed, and we advanced. Up, that was Major Whittington’s order.

Just as I dreaded, it began to happen. Weight disabled me. My thighs were thick, I couldn’t stride or walk normally, I was waddling forward, stumbling at times, once to my knees. The ground here, root gnarled, rocky, no longer invited my fall. I was scrambling to keep my place in the battle line, and then I had another mind click. Blitz. Next, I was on the painful ground looking into the concerned face of Jesse Ambrose, his thin starved face. Several battles were roaring above my little nest of thorny roots: explosions, musket fire, shouts and outcries, the tramping of feet. I couldn’t connect Jesse with the battle and the battle with me on this stony ground. I’m not shot, I said. I couldn’t hear what Jesse was saying. I was to withdraw from the field and seek medical treatment. Lieutenant Malone, Danny Boy, was my replacement.

I wasn’t really heavy, mind you, I just felt the weight, and then I could see that weight on me, shirt and trousers torn at the seams, I’d somehow lost my boots, I was barefoot, I was hoarsely breathing, the exertion was tremendous, I wanted to fall. In the midst of a battle, I was at work on basic procedures, staying erect, moving forward. Well, and of course the next thing was oblivion. I went there, I was in it, and then I came back. I can’t tell you a single thing about oblivion, except that when I came out of it, I was again my old skinny self.

We were beginning to go up, to charge the rampart, I could see blue uniforms in the trees and brush ahead, and then they saw us. They were first to fire. Smack, Corporal Wolsey, advancing beside me, using the trees, as I taught the "Stars," took a minie ball right to the heart and fell down like a dropped stone, which astonished me. Next, oblivion. Next, I saw Jesse's shocked sad face, saw his lips and mouth move, he was saying urgent things, next he was helping me out of the woods to an ambulance station in the field below.

Every dragged step I took to the station put me in a new direction. I wasn't lurching off to a bloody death, I was unsteady, needing Jesse's wiry strong arm for support, but I was whole, in one piece, and I was going, changed, with all my limbs, into a new life.

Crowded in the ambulance, jammed in the wagon, packed in the train, amid all the bandaged and the amputated, I sat and stood straight, I was strangely free. I wouldn't answer questions. I'd point to an ear, feigning deafness. It didn't matter who I was. I was no longer in the service of the Confederacy. The surgeon at the first field hospital wrote me a note sending me back to Chimborazo Hospital in Richmond, to Dr. Charles A. Sykes. Jesse had explained at the transfer who I was, a Confederate hero, the five wounds, and still fighting, so I got all along special treatment. Chimborazo had no room for ambulatory patients. We bunked outside under canvas, which was lucky, Richmond heat sizzling in July. Well, I had Confederate money in a Richmond bank, so it was a short stay. I got me a fair room at a high-class boarding house just outside downtown Richmond.

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I did seek out Dr. Sykes and he gave me ten minutes. "Tell me what happened?" he said, looking at my eyes with some optical device. I did. There was constant interruption, papers to be signed, yes or no questions. We were in his crowded unbearably hot office. He was still in his bloodstained smock, having a brief recess. I was a Confederate hero, so I briefly had his attention. He thought I'd had a concussion and with rest would soon recover. In effect I was small potatoes on his plate. "With luck," he said, "you'll never have another one." He came up close, again with the optical

instrument, this time closely studying my scar, his whiskey breath enveloping my face. “Marlowe’s work,” he said, “a goddam little masterpiece. He saved your face, Captain Finn. That’s a beautiful scar.” I stepped back. “I’ll have my adjutant look to the paper work,” Dr. Sykes said. “Come back in a year and we’ll see if you’re battle fit. Not now, can’t be trusted in command, your days on active duty are over.” And that was how it happened, easy as pie, I was out on the street, medically discharged.

I went straight to Mrs. Moffat’s Shady Lawn Retreat House. The Right Reverend Hugh Henry McDowell, alas, was not there. He was indeed missing, gone two weeks, his clothes hanging in the closet, life going on. Mrs. Moffat put me in the Right Reverend’s room. I was alone in there with his boxed possessions and hanging clothes. Rooms were often doubled, even tripled, but not this one, which was a sanctuary, Mrs. Moffat secretly in love with Reverend McDowell and dedicated to her belief in his imminent return. He had gone missing twice before, she said, always came back, church business. I stood guard. I had the Right Reverend’s bed, table, and chair. I was just settling in, trying to slow the speed of my changing life, folks at the Retreat House told about my partial deafness, almost true, so I sat in blissful solitude among them, stone faced, smiling, faintly nodding.

Military and civil service officers, some residing, others visiting, stood about sharing gossip, news, and opinion. On the veranda, in the parlor, I had a good chair in both places. I was Major Finn with that scar, deaf as a post, ignored. I’d get my ear in close when they spoke in low voices about certain contested promotions, about desertion, about outlaw bands in the countryside, about hanging or firing squad. They didn’t have much to say about Gettysburg. It was Vicksburg they grieved over, that embattled fortress city, and then someone mentioned Isaac Phelps. Why was he stuck in the coastal Carolinas when he knew the central and eastern Mississippi river valley like the back of his hand, knew the terrain, knew the important cities? Why wasn’t he a senior advisor to General Pemberton? Had Phelps been in the deciding council, Pemberton would not have given up Vicksburg so promptly, before sundown, surrendering to a joke ultimatum, said a major, an engineer, and I was edged out of this inner circle of opinion. This happened several times. Once, literally picked up by my shoulder blades, I was put over there, out of earshot, the burly mustachioed perpetrator smiling blandly,

nodding, as surely, he understood that I kindly accepted my new placement in the scheme of things.

“He said what?”

In the scuffle of small talk, someone again returned to the topic, Isaac Phelps. He said: “Too bad about the accident,” and I was trapped in my feigned deafness outside the inner circle.

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Major Simon Rush was taken aback by my quick approach as the assembly on the veranda was breaking up. He probably thought he had a quick escape and here is the hero with the saber slash across his face, and he looks troubled, something I said, goodbye to exit right. I thrust a note into his hand and stood back as he scanned it. He glanced up at me. He knew who I was. I, too, was a major, a shot and survived major, a rare breed in 1863. He took a notebook from his breast pocket, went over to a writing table, used its pen, scratched out a quick response. He thrust it at me. “Best,” he said, and Major Rush was off. I unfolded it. “The Farm,” he’d written, “broke leg.”

I wrote to Cousin Isaac that I was coming up to see him and sent the message by special post, a nimble boy on a fleet pony doing the daily Richmond round. Mrs. Moffat’s, I wrote. As I awaited Cousin Isaac’s response, I had finally to confront the Gettysburg casualties. Major Edmunds who worked in the Richmond counting house had the weekly numbers and names. I’d hear him reading the names, people crowding around, and I never paid attention to him. The blitz had severed me from that big hill in Gettysburg where my brothers were shot to pieces, where they bled to death, and placed me on a new ground. I paid in full measure my duty to Confederate military service. I fought bravely in all the engagements of the Third Arkansas. A sundering blitz thrust me outside their ranks. It was Jesse’s German word, blitz,”lightning bolt,” I was struck by a lightning bolt inside my head, and it cancelled all my debts, so to speak, I was now free to act on my own, to go and do as I pleased. I just had this realization. I didn’t think it through. I was free. The names Major Edmunds read belonged to persons caught in a destiny I had just escaped. At a distance, I heard: Heseltine, Fish,

Bigelow, Lapham, Wolsey, Ambrose. I stopped there, though the recitation of the names continued. I knew Jesse, my savior and nurse, would not survive the day. I steeled my heart to hear that name, Ambrose. No more soldiering. My wandering mind seized on that. It was a pillar of a phrase, cling to it.

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"We were unloading a shipment of medical supplies from Jamaica, big boat in a small harbor, dark night, our wagons drawn up at water's edge. I have to be there, supervising, making sure the bundles haven't been opened, a dangerous place, dear Huckleberry, this secret harbor for the Sunshine's Jamaican boat, and they always send along a special package for me that must be hand delivered. I'm there, too old for the adventure, but I've got my package, also an additional smaller package from Clyde Bristow, I've handed them off to my assistant, Mr. Webster, and I'm ready to depart, to leave the rest of the unloading to my workers, when suddenly, so suddenly, our boat is boarded, our three wagons commandeered. Robbers materialize, poof, in your face, you're looking into the face of an angry adolescent boy, then at the flintlock pistol he is pointing at you. How it hurts to give up Grandpa's watch, then my wallet thick with emergency cash, next my two rings, one almost impossible to remove, and I'm thinking this is a cruel boy not long for this life because, dear Huckleberry, I'm carrying Double Delly, you know where, strapped tight, ready for action. The angry boy's not even thought to look for a weapon, seeing only a fat turkey. Next, he wants my boots and when I bend to remove them, I come up with Delly, one shot."

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Shea is Cousin Isaac's man servant at the Farm. I think he is a spy. Has Webster, Uncle Isaac's loyal adjutant, scrutinized Shea? Cousin Isaac lifts an eyebrow. Hot in midsummer, for all the shade trees, windows thrown open, everyone fanning, Cousin Isaac sits inside by his big window, his bandaged leg propped on a pillow. He shot the foe, probably a deserter, the other outlaws, panicked by the explosive shot and the

gurgling shouts of their shot comrade, evaporated, disappeared. Deserters, child soldiers. Shea is pouring some kind of rum cocktail for Cousin Isaac. I'll have one, too, thank you very much. We silently toasted. "I expected to lift the flag of victory when I jumped from the plank to the dock. Instead, I stumbled, pitched forward, struck hard luggage, cracked this shinbone. As you see it, I'm laid up for a month at least, and then maybe I'll have an attractive limp." Cousin Isaac was quick to the refill, Shea silently, suavely, pouring. Cousin Isaac said. "I shot the foe. I was wounded. I've got my passport, same as you, Huckleberry. After the war we can march in the same parade." Later, on a walk, Webster said: These people remember the Isaac Phelps who opposed secession in 1861, who was antislavery in his political opinion, so what, they wanted to know, is he doing in Jefferson Davis's administration? Friends in business. Friends in politics. Five years, St. Louis to New Orleans, back and forth, a steamboat bon vivant, married to the daughter of Judge James J. Whitworth, the Whitworths an important family in Missouri. Isaac Phelps was an expert in maritime commerce. He knew the geography. He knew the bank presidents. Blockade runners preferred to unload on his docks. These people, let us say, very conservative people in the Democratic Party of Missouri, its elders, perfectly understood that charming Isaac Phelps was, behind his several clever facades, an abolitionist, and worse, an immediatist, opposed to any gradual emancipation. They also knew that he was an atheist libertine who led an outrageous double life, the lurid details of which they would expose in their good time. Certain young people in the party were attracted to Phelps's insidious proposals, to his satiric verses published in all the major newspapers. He was, in short, a cancer in their body politic, to be excised. The elders did not want to be dealing with Isaac Phelps as they devised their postwar strategy. No one volunteered to shoot him, but the thought was in their minds. Their minions in Richmond got Isaac Phelps restricted to the Atlantic coast, to a new and difficult geography, and left him there hopefully to expire on some cold Carolinian strand.

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When Webster spoke, I listened. First night at the Farm, Cousin Isaac dining alone, by choice, on a cold supper, Webster and I walked the grounds and sat on swings in the way back of the Farm's great lawn, swung and smoked cigars, Webster saying Shea probably was just an excellent body servant. Hovering was their trade. Reading the master's mood, that was their art. He didn't think those people in Missouri, the Apostles, wasn't that their name, were sufficiently organized to employ spies. Where in Alabama or Arkansas would they find someone like Shea? We fell silent, swinging, smoking. "I'm not actually a Webster," Webster said, reading my mind. "My father died on a bear hunt when I was five. I was raised by my Whitworth mother within the Whitworth family enterprise. I'm here to assist Mr. Phelps, also to keep an eye on him. He understands perfectly that I am not in his employ. The Whitworth family has a lot invested in Isaac Phelps, a cherished daughter, first off, and shares in almost all of Isaac Phelps's ventures. My little pile of personal wealth depends on his management. We want him to go on doing what he is doing. We ignore his steamboat life: gambling is what he does with our money, he has freely to mingle with powerful carefree gentlemen, to join them in their games. We appreciate that he is often in church on Sunday singing in the choir, reading aloud a Gospel verse to the congregation. His annual contribution is prompt and sizable, so I'm told."

I came off my swing and stood in the thick hot evening air, bugs buzzing, mosquitoes biting, bats swooping to and fro earning their keep. When I was struck down on the Gettysburg battlefield and then came to, good as gold, I said to myself: "I'm free," and now I said it again, not strictly to Webster, to myself. Free, and entangled in Isaac Phelps's affairs and schemes. Free, and bound by honor, if that alone, to rescue and liberate Clyde Bristow, free, as a citizen of this doomed crazed country, free. I stubbed out my cigar and put it back in its tin. "He drinks too much," Webster quietly said.

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"Establish yourself in St. Louis, read law with Justice Barry, or someone, we'll have you licensed soon enough, ready to stand for a seat at the constitutional convention as soon as we get one. Join our faction in the party, good fellows, maybe give some speeches at private meetings. Publish your memoir, not the confessional one I've seen, but the public account of your documented exploits. Struck first at Antietam, then again at Gettysburg, twice miraculously healed, obviously ordained to lead a fractured Missouri after the war, you know the importance of reconciling bitterly opposed sides, et cetera. Huckleberry, remember we are the moving center, flexible in all our principles, except one, immediate abolition of slavery, full citizen rights to freed people. Hell, Huckleberry, I'm already writing slogans. If we don't get that firmly set forth in our new constitution, we'll just have our old South again, which I know you hate as I do. I can see you at some meeting facing the old guard in the state, secessionist, proslavery, with that famous mug of yours, a Confederate hero, and what is he saying? You'll have good arguments."

I spent the morning with Cousin Isaac's accountant and soon knew where everything was, almost none of it in Confederate currency, and how to get at it. London, Montreal, Mexico City, Kingston, Cousin Isaac came into the room reciting the locations of my wealth. I was prospering while my Southern homeland was invaded and conquered. Cousin Isaac waggled his finger. "Just to do good," he said, "just to do good." He married an unmarriageable Whitworth daughter, an amiable soul with a cast eye, and was immediately connected to the affairs of the Whitworth enterprise. "You need money to do good," he said.

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Three thick envelopes were on the table. Letters of introduction to important men in St. Louis. "As soon as possible, leave Richmond, get out of Virginia," said Cousin Isaac. "Can't say how long this war is going to last. You'll get sucked back into the army or into some office. Athens is too close. Forget about Sophie Grahame. She is, as we

used to say in Paris, hors de combat. I know where Jack is and won't tell you. Go back to St. Louis. I hear the Federals are running a loose and lenient occupation. Lead a quiet life. Study law. Write your war memoir. Talk to people." I studied the envelopes at a distance. I was trying to remember when Cousin Isaac became my commanding officer and when it was I enlisted in his refigured Republican party. At this moment in my life, I considered myself officially adrift, at liberty to be adrift, still trying to collect my scattered thoughts, and enjoying the experience, reclaiming a scattered thought. The first envelope I picked up meant my acceptance of the command.

"I shot a woman in the face, at close range," I said.

"Self-defense," Cousin Isaac said. "You were exonerated and it makes a good story if you want it, counting the bullets fired."

We'd had this exchange before. I truly was an enlisted foot soldier in the Enlightenment Army, a vast intercontinental organization, mostly imaginary. Cousin Isaac was a captain, but I was under my own direction, my own command. I was aware that the woman I'd murdered was now my excuse to stay out of politics, a freedom key. I had come to the conclusion that I did, to some extent, murder Lydia Grahame, though she was aiming her third shot at me. I could have done something, a distraction, a deflection, I might even have reached out and taken the pistol from her hand, but she was, that bloody day, arguably just pure evil wanting to take me, not a major player in her drama, a mere factotum, down with her. I do drag her around with me, a ghost, a ghastly corpse in one dream, so why not use her? I murdered Lydia Grahame. I can't seek political office.

I could see the logic of Cousin Isaac's plan, this step and that step. It was perfect for Tom Sawyer, if only he were right minded. He would love to talk to people, to give speeches, to want passionately exactly what Cousin Isaac wanted, election. As for me, however righteous it was, Cousin Isaac's plan put me in irons. I would have to attend political dinners. Thanks to Caleb Croker, I was fairly proficient handling knife and fork, thereafter, other glasses and table ware, shaky and uncertain. Small portions, small portions, chew with your mouth closed. I would have to learn toasting. I would have to learn polite conversation. All the while I'm reading Missouri law in some judge's office. It gave me a headache, the immensity of that task before me. We both hated slavery.

Everybody hated slavery, mostly, but they sat and went about their business, hating slavery. We both knew we had to do something about it. We were in the Enlightenment Army, we were radical Republicans, but I thought of myself as an independent in that Army, not under command, not receiving specific orders.

Cousin Isaac was waiting for me to tell him what I intended to do in my immediate future. "Might you slip out of the country and sail to Kingston, Jamaica, maybe share a Jamaican plantation with Mr. Clyde Bristow, if you can wrench him free from the clutches of those silent monks in Kentucky? If Sophie isn't already back from her exile, she'll soon be, reinstalled, full powers. Old Gus can't do without her. G&S is falling apart. The Ambrose clan has pretty much lost the trans-Mississippi empire, all that pork and cotton, Federal officers and clerks now running the store, and that, let me tell you, is a huge chunk of income. She'll require your services. "We're in endgame," she'll say, "what is our play?" She might even offer you a position in one of her nearby banks. Don't accept it. We think you need to go to St. Louis." Shea was bringing him his leg medicine, a beaker of bubbling champagne. I was offered one. I shook my head. I was studying the envelopes.

I didn't like it that I was presented with this situation. Choosing an organized future, or not. Cousin Isaac knew my weak spot. I couldn't command my story. The moment I was challenged, I would fail my story, or the story failed me. I would repeat the awful mistake I made as a boy in darkest Arkansas. At the Phelps farm I've located Jim. He's shackled in that hot shed, suffering the dripping wet heat of Arkansas in late summer. We had come all this way, Jim and me, to this final misery. "What are you going to do?" Tom Sawyer quietly asked, in that voice, with that tone. I said, just sneak Jim out through that loose plank and run for raft and river. I immediately saw all the difficulties in executing that particular escape. I didn't have a destination. I didn't know the territory. Would the raft still be where we hid it? Soon we'd hear the hounds barking and baying.

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"Too hot"

First night back in Athens at the Crokers, a long perspiring twilight, everyone's fan in action, dinner a meager repast, slice of hard cheese, slice of hard brown bread, two slices of black sausage, three slices of dried apple, and a glass of water cool from the well, Caleb pushed back from the table. "Too hot," he said, "I'm going to take the Major up to the cliff and catch a breeze." Mrs. Croker was laboriously explaining why she and Father Croker could not take advantage of the Major's kindness in supplying them with extra rations. The neighbors, the ladies at church, would sniff the fried bacon on their breath.

We went into a small stand of trees, climbed up on a bluff over a curling creek and indeed found a cool breeze coming up from the creek's run, a breeze thinking it might stay and cool everything down. My heart was strangely pounding with dread. The loss of Jesse, unlucky in combat, goddam, will never cease to hurt, there's no healing there, just endurance. When I first arrived from Richmond, Caleb said nothing important, just here was my bed, everything as before, we would talk later when there was comfortable time. And now here it is, the cooling breeze, sufficient to blow away insects, a godsend really, here is the news. I was prepared, I had one of Bristow's little cigars, sweet tobacco, and I puffed on it while I stood waiting, Caleb, for his part, bringing out a flask of corn whiskey. I passed him my cigar. He passed me his flask.

"Alice Burns" he said, "is somewhere in New York, I think around Buffalo, getting ready to cross into Canada. Last we heard." I was happy and sad at the same time. My heart continued to thump. "Sophie," Caleb said, his voice suddenly scratchy and adolescent, "is either in Richmond or Atlanta tending to business. She's not long back from Alabama." I was still registering the shock of this news as he went on, his voice flat and low, "She left you some letters and other material." I was nodding. A raft load of futures had just moved beyond my reach. I was disappointed and I was relieved. I was free, if only for this interval. I would stay awhile at the Crokers, work on my memoir, read some Shakespeare with Caleb, not caring to pay any attention to the war. As for the hotly contested Alice Burns, she was free, so to speak. Sophie first hired her out as

a dressmaker. On assignment, in a residence, outfitting a family of daughters, of an afternoon, she disappears. She had assistance.

Once exiled Sophie was in rural Alabama, communication difficult, expensive, her principals, Jed Logan and Jim Pierson, promptly removed Caleb Croker from family service. He retained his stipend and certain domestic privileges. He could read in the Manse's library and snack in its kitchen. Jed and Jim were never comfortable with Caleb's physical appearance and manner. They thought Caleb gave Sophie Grahame bad advice. They thought he was a bad moral influence. They thought crimsoned Sophie was sufficiently striking in her own right and didn't need a startling orange Caleb Croker beside her. Here he was, G&S no longer sent him on missions, he was patient, he had his studies; when Sophie got back, he would be back, and the world could go on.

At night, out at the farm, inside the barn, we took up my treasure box. I made a deposit and a withdrawal. "When the Yankees come through here," Caleb said, "they'll burn this place to the ground." "Let them," I said. I was in my Confederate uniform. I wore it every day. It was like a turtle's shell. Ask me no questions. Caleb thoroughly dusted the barn floor. You wouldn't think that the "Life and Times of Major Mark 'Huck' Finn' lay beneath the floor, underground, sleeping next to a sizable pile of money. We made our way back to the house. When I reached the door to my room, I turned and said to Caleb, standing there with his lit lamp, "I know where I'm going," Caleb merely nodding.

Home Geography. I didn't really know where I was going. I thought at that moment, home, as in my little holy book primer, *Home Geography,* home as in Hannibal, Mo., home as in my bed at the Widow's on her bed sheets, heavy, freshly washed, always with a spread of fragrant dried flowers. I thought, too, of Amy Lawrence and Becky Thatcher, who suddenly, surprisingly, slipped into my reverie, and I was curious to know what became of them. Tom Sawyer kissed Amy Lawrence and got Becky Thatcher to flip her apron, this was generally known in the schoolyard. Both girls stood out from the other girls in school. Becky was dark and volatile, Amy blonde and serene. In advance of her peers, Amy had bosom, always covered, but pressing a soft rounding outline upon the world. Tom Sawyer wrested favors from both, and then preferred Becky. This

astonished the members of Tom Sawyer's Gang who had eyes only for cool quiet Amy and her bosom. Tom Sawyer not only set Amy aside, he disabled her, turned her into a gloomy sourpuss who hated stupid boys. Yes, Amy Lawrence was also "home," in whatever shape she was in. I was now a prosperous retired gentleman. Amy Lawrence might need a loan.

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A letter in the packet Caleb provided: Dear Major Finn, Caleb Croker has brought me up to date concerning your present state of affairs. So has Isaac Phelps. It is important to many people that you do not die in this stupid war. I have a retreat cottage just off the big pond behind the Manse. When they were around, Lewis and his bride stayed there. All their things are gone. You could comfortably winter there, food and fuel provided, study and write, be our hermit. I'll be at the Manse now and then. Sometime soon, can't say when, we'll have our promised meeting. I'm hiring you. Local hoodlums are beginning to nibble at our periphery, breaking windows, stealing tools, defecating in the orchard, not afraid of our boys on patrol, but once they see you on a midnight tramp, they'll stay away. If you need to break a nose, break it. We would have a fair exchange, something for something. When you publish your book, I'd like to be in your dedication. I can't claim muse status, but I did provide firewood and victuals. Sophie.

Also in the packet, a box, in it a wad of Confederate dollars, two different maps of the estate grounds, and witchcraft articles, I guess, feathered bracelets, amulets on a thong, bone slivers, a pouch packed with sweet grass. She was intending on a ceremony. In my room at the Crokers, holding the box and these articles in my hands, I felt I was already in the ceremony.

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I spent winter 1863 at the cottage, scribble, scribble, both sides of the precious sheets of first-rate writing paper Caleb had liberated from a bankrupt academy some years before and hidden in the cottage. He had over the years skillfully constructed his

own storehouse of rare niceties from General Grahame's private vaults: cigars, liquors, drugs. Also, composition materials, reams of writing paper, cartons of black ink. Caleb was like an industrious house mouse. He took by the nibble and ended up with piles of delicious things. It is November. We're reading Richard the Third, sipping firewater, cooking a pancake on the stove, blizzard howling outside, rattling the windows, whistling through every crack it can find. It was a goddam paradise. How great it is to be rich, rich for a long time, family rich. You could easily support a wounded Major Finn and a bizarre boy genius, Caleb Croker, and we gave as good as we got, Caleb providing Sophie Grahame with secretarial service and additions, as she called them, diplomacy, intelligence, medical supplies, and I, a much simpler soul, was Sophie's muscle, her protection.

After the shooting on the porch, after the trial, I tried to step away from the politics and the drama of the Grahame family and its Ambrose relation and then discovered I couldn't do it. If I was on Cousin Isaac's track, becoming a lawyer in St. Louis, becoming the governor of Missouri, I was still somewhere doing business with G&S, on several different retainers, always the man with the pistol on the grand porch of the Grahame manse. I have also to admit I was, to some extent, corrupted by the pleasures of the Manse as I had them during my upstairs convalescence. During that time someone shaved me, someone pulled comfortable stockings onto my feet, someone brought me a clean shirt and then helped me into it, someone brought me wild turkey soup and bread. Women were around me, ministering, brushing my teeth, changing my bandages, taking away covered bowls and bottles. We were served by servants, or, as Sophie sometimes had them, members of the household staff, everyone skilled in his or her practice, called by name, Miss Effie, Sister Chloe, Gardener Anthony, such like. The suave service of the staff at the Manse was so comforting, so soothing, you soon grew accustomed to it, you floated in pre-ordained care, you ceased to see the faces of the providers, to register a look in their eyes, and, ah yes, here is my cognac and cake. Slaveholding at Sophie Grahame's Manse. Slaves were held with velvet gloves.

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I was never for a moment at ease with the faultless service I received from staff members. I knew slaveholding was personal only inside the perimeter of the Manse where it had its decencies and proprieties, that outside the gate it was slavery, impersonal, anonymous, another thing completely. I saw the pork factories in Arkansas. I picked cotton in Missouri right outside Hannibal. I could do several weeks and then, thank God, I could choose to leave the field and go elsewhere. Sophie Grahame, Isaac Phelps, Mark Finn, all our wealth came from that impossibly hard farm labor, we knew it, came from the unpaid work of enslaved black people. Thing is, we talked about it, we tried to think of solutions. No one else we knew did talk sensibly about the disaster confronting the Confederacy, about the inevitable loss of its slave property.

Suddenly Mr. James Watson now came into my mind, smiling at my Hannibal innocence, suffering it. How old was Jim on the raft? Jim couldn't decisively say how old he was. I think 17. He was a dancer, always showing us a new step at the town pump, and he was also a serious conjurer, a bone shaker. Jim's best audience was Tom Sawyer's gang hanging out on the docks, white boys. Slave children would come around to see Jim do comic impersonations of different animals, but we were his best audience, lounging on cotton bales in the cooler evening, laughing with glee at Jim's jokes. 'Home' and here he was, Hannibal's Jim Watson, his Hannibal, like my Hannibal, not at all homey, and yet we curiously loved it, the woods and cricks, the steamboat life, the school, Aunt Polly's house with its picket fence, such a pretty place. When he could, as a Yankee soldier, Jim would return to Hannibal, I was certain of that. He had a daughter to find, many relatives to look after, a number of scores to settle.

All this while my country, the Confederate States of America, was steadily losing its war for independence. It could not abolish. It could not emancipate. The drag of slavery got heavier by the day. Gettysburg, Vicksburg, many people in the CSA gave up in July, 1863, mentally, spiritually, yet still waved the flag and sent their sons and fathers into hopeless battle. How they suffered, those Confederate people, on short rations, without pen and paper, without cigars and whiskey, without the assistance of slave labor. Caleb added a swirl of sweet smoky molasses to our hot pancake. We did not

feel any patriotic unity with the dedicated Confederate populace. Then, late December, the G&S mail pouch arrived with Richmond and Atlanta news and letters. Caleb promptly announced that Sophie Grahame would be spending Christmas at the Manse. There would other guests, among them Isaac Phelps.

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Caleb took me aside. He said I should know that Sophie, at the manse, in her private life, now wore men's clothing, leather breeches, tunics, blouses, cavalry boots. She liked braid. She liked insignia. She liked the visor on the tall cap, the one encrusted with braid. When occasion required, Sophie was instantly and easily in gowns and bodices, but expect to see her in trousers, Major Finn, dressed as you are. I knew I could handle this. I had seen her once before in riding breeches, she mounting her horse leg over, her buttock perfectly framed, just that moment. I knew there was a propensity, which is what Tom Whittington called it, we had at times several soldiers in the regiment who were big tough women and we tolerated them. Someone said women in Boston and New York wore pants in the street, in public gatherings, for comfort and health. Wear what you want, I don't care. I grew up raggedy. I know I look good in my gold starred uniform. I do prefer women in their regular clothes.

I turned to go; Caleb held my sleeve. I won't be around, he said, but I'll be on call. I had a certain fright. Caleb knew where he was going, the Croker house in Athens. Christmas coming on, I didn't know where I was supposed to be. At the cottage, at the Manse, and who was I at the Manse? Just bodyguard or consort? Cousin Isaac coming with his principal secretaries complicated the situation. I didn't want to plot and scheme this particular Christmas. Unfortunately, that was Cousin Isaac's life. Even when he was relaxing, jovial, anecdotal, the life of the party, he was plotting and scheming. My old relation to the Grahame family came back to me, how it somehow forced me into being a family retainer, paid to serve their interests, even to shooting Mrs. Lewis Grahame, pretender queen, in the face, shooting her dead, therefore always secondary, a resource, an embarrassment. I didn't know what to do. I would live alone

in my cottage. I was waiting for instructions. I was trying to remember the extent and hue of Sophie Grahame's birthmark.

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The Christmas party was small, the feast modest. At first Sister Susan Feldkamp played her little concertina, sang several Dutch Christmas songs, then told us about the Dutch Christmas characters, Sinter Klaas and Black Pete. The notion of painting one's face black was privately repulsive to everyone at the table. Zwart Piet. I dragged my foot under the table. We were all at table, sipping soup, wielding the bread slice, delicately partaking of a slim portion of wine. We were having a patriotic Christmas dinner. Some guests came prepared, drank from a flask, remained merry throughout Sister Susan's musical presentation. These jokers might have thought, at one point, how would I look as Zwart Piet? Then Cousin Isaac rose to propose a toast. "To the brave men fighting in the field." We all said "hey" to that. Jim Pierson, Jed Logan, Simon Webster, were present with their wives, each wife taught to accept Sophie Grahame's eccentric ways and opinions. Mrs. Webster, I discovered, was much younger than solemn Simon Webster, and very pretty. I will always remember Irene Webster who said, on meeting me: "Are you the famous rafter man of the Mississippi people (her husband) talk about? I have never met a living legend. I'm Irene Webster, how d'ye do."

Sophie presided sitting in the General's big chair, deep purple blouse, open at the neck, long leather jerkin, leather breeches, that's all I remember of her Christmas outfit, she looked like a huntress, she looked like a pirate, I thought she was beautifully dressed, sitting attentive to Sister Susan's performance. I sat at the end of the table with the gentlemen and their wives. Good company. Jim had stories about the General in the early days, about the Grahame gold mine in the desert Southwest, how the General bought up most of northern Georgia during the Panic of '57. Jed remembered the General's duel with an insulted Captain Corcoran. A young fellow with a wayward wife, he was doomed and he knew it, still he stood his ground, and General Grahame very precisely put a bullet in his heart.

Throughout this talk, Webster kept his eye on Cousin Isaac. After he made that cryptic toast, Cousin Isaac sat quietly beside Sophie Grahame. Sister Susan, opposite him, thin lips pursed, was doing needlework. At some point Cousin Isaac raised his hand to speak, looking at us, as if exasperated. Why so long in assembling? Why so long in composing yourself as a proper audience? "1864 is going to be ghastly," he said. "Judgment is coming to Georgia." That was his preface. He went further: "Is there anyone in Georgia who will rid us of Jefferson Davis? Pitch a bomb into the presidential carriage? Cut the head off, the body is too slippery and strong to grasp." Jim Pierson stood up, brevet Lieutenant Colonel, a reserve officer in the Army of Northern Virginia, "treason," he calmly said. Jed Logan was on his feet. "Hang him, hang Isaac Phelps," he said, also calmly. Webster intervened: "Gentlemen, ladies present. Can we discuss the murder of our president in the next room?" No one moved or spoke. Webster went on: "Judge Phelps just being metaphorical, not meaning actual bomb or actual sword." Cousin Isaac was glaring at us. We were not going to assassinate Jefferson Davis.

Then, startling us all, Irene Webster, speaking out of line with her lady companions, their junior, speaking without being asked by the gentlemen, Webster's face a mask of bland detachment, his young wife said something like this, these wives knew exactly what their husbands thought and spoke. These trustworthy wives were themselves committed to the cause. Furthermore, she, Irene Bogart Webster, admired the political program Sophie Grahame set forth in her Grahame Seminary address two years ago, the rights and prerogatives of the new Southern woman, Irene's eyes sparkling, cheeks flushed. Her second audacity. Sophie Grahame presided, beaming and nodding as Irene Webster made her speech and retook her place at the table. In his chair Judge Isaac was beginning to slump and veer, he who was as much a real Judge as General Grahame was a real general. Sophie lightly rested her hand on Cousin Isaac's arm. He was close to sleep. Such was their friendship. He had given himself over to Sophie's caretaking. She would put him to bed.

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1864 arrived.

“Let me see it,” Sophie said.

As duty and honor required, I had just reported my medical history. Part One, I’m an urchin on the docks, naked in the river, with other urchins white and black, splashing, tumbling, purest play, then drying ourselves on the bank, and here is String, black boy almost too old to be in our juvenile gang, and he says “Goddam, white boy, who whacked off yo fo’skin? Gal see that ugly shaved cock and she’ll run for her mama.” Everyone on the bank is examining his cock, saying “foreskin,” new word, exercising the foreskin’s pliability. String is on parade, demonstrating his foreskin, which can be widely stretched, become a pouch, the cock totally withdrawn inside it. I’m looking horrified at my naked cock, at the same time seeing for the first time that all the little cocks around me are chastely hooded, maybe the merest hint of a snout showing. Well, no gal, nobody, no way, would ever again behold the stark ugliness of the exposed bulb of my mutilated cock.

“Can I touch it?” she asked.

It was sleeping, but now, attention drawn to it, the head lifted.

“Mm,” Sophie said, quietly.

Next my cock stood up, as if to vaunt its ugly face.

“There’s two more parts to the medical history,” I said. “Might be wise to wait for the full report.” She said: “I already know the second part. I read your file, thanks to Isaac Phelps. You lost your virginity to a farmer’s wife, old old story, then found yourself at the Sunshine Clinic, more of that old old story, and now you’re probably cured. Sister Susan thinks so. Yes, Sister Susan, I share everything with her. She’s put teeth in your mouth. You peed in a cup for her. She thinks you’re handsome, even with the scar. Hey, where are you going?” No hood, no cowl, to retreat into, the soft piece, formerly a boner, upright, resisting her ministration, now simply dangled. Herr Doktor Sunshine and Sister Susan Feldkamp, two swallows of ice-cold water.

“Don’t ever bring Sister Susan into our love talk again,” I said. “I admire Sister. She just recently adjusted the almost perfect false teeth she put in my mouth. What can I

say? Sophie, you are the first naked woman I've ever seen, in a friendly way, that is, I just want to look at you, with my mind clear, and imagine the names of the parts of your body. What are the parts called and how do they work? I really don't know. I don't want Sister Susan to give me their scientific names. In lovers' language, what are they called?

We were both naked lying apart on the big bed in my former convalescent room, the quilt thrown back, a coal fire blazing in the stove, the Manse in all its floors and rooms otherwise cold and dark. I'd placed the dogs, posted the several night guards, visited Sister Susan who was living in a small apartment on the third floor, I'd checked her derringer, set the trigger, put it back in the fake book, made sure her musket was cocked and ready for long distance shooting, left her a cracker and a thin slice of Gouda, her favorite cheese. She had a fair view of the front approach and she hardly ever slept, her attention darting birdlike to any change in that front approach. A bugle was slung at her bedpost and she could play it. I sat with her one ice cold evening at her window, I'm wrapped in a quilt, she in a blanket, and on our watch, we saw at different times three carefully stepping does, two and then five raccoons, a trotting fox, several turkey hens, two boys from the quarters, bags on their shoulders, skulking, scurrying, going no doubt to the hen house. It was almost a performance, except I was wondering what my watchdogs were watching, this fox gaily sauntering across our front lawn.

The guests were gone, Christmas Day or the day after, Judge Phelps a shaky shadow of himself, the Websters loading his baggage, then loading the Judge, into the carriage. He had taken too much of a certain medicine for his leg pain. In the carriage looking out at me, he gave me a somber face and a finger grasp. "Get to St. Louis, Huckleberry, and see Judge Poe." It was Judge Poe who'd made Cousin Isaac an auxiliary judge in Judge Poe's jurisdiction. Now it was back to Richmond, to the wearying challenge of playing a double game: Confederate official, purveyor of delicacies for rulers in Richmond, also abolitionist revolutionary, beginning now to consider assassination as the necessary act to bring the war to a close.

After the Christmas Eve dinner and its closing recital, Sophie on the piano, Sister Susan on the flute, surprise, Irene Bogart Webster on a stringed instrument, can't say

what it was, not a guitar, people were amiably prepared to retire. The Logans and the Piersons had home fires to tend. The night was crisp and clear, the sky star spangled, as they set off, each Mrs. no doubt having much to say, Jed and Jim clucking to their horses, thinking about the new topic Judge Phelps had brought to the conversation. As Sophie and I stood on the steps of the grand porch (not too far from the place where I shot and killed Mrs. Lydia Grahame), I felt a powerful surge of friendly feeling for the homespun family genius standing next to me. It was admiration and appreciation. "Sophie is better than General Lee at managing forces (you go there, you stay here)," so said Cousin Isaac, "and she is bicoastal, Atlantic, Mississippi, always checking and using the Ambroses, ambitious in-laws, fairly evil people, I think you'll agree, who are always looking to break free from their original contract with G&S. Tough people, slave drivers, hard on their convict laborers, Ambrose Brothers puts a steady flow of profit cash into G&S coffers, Sophie at the same time loathing all the brothers at Ambrose Brothers. Cousin Isaac admired the plotting and scheming that went on at Ambrose Brothers. Sophie simply had the veto power of the General's signature. Respect the signature. Fear the signature. The General is a punisher, an avenger, everyone knows that.

Christmas week I lived at the cottage, Sophie did business at the Manse. The Mayor of Athens, his police chief, and Jim Pierson, came out to see the General, to present him with petitions, to ask what they should do about the bandits roaming the countryside, also just to see the General in person, and there he was, wheeled out in his chair, uncombed hair blazing white, the same crazed look in his crazed blue eyes, the Mayor flinching as the General angrily denounced him, where was the goddam militia, et cetera, insulting language freely used. The General was not dead. He was alive, the same old General they had long detested for his arrogance, his dreaded interferences in civic affairs, for notes called and foreclosures, so they could rest easy. He was still a headache for them.

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Midweek Sophie was at my cottage door with Caleb Croker beside her, holding a steaming pot. It was a surprise. I hadn't shaved, I was pulling on a shirt, opened books everywhere. She said: "Sit, don't fidget. I'm not staying long. Here's a stew direct from Mamselle, my Cajun cook. And yes, here, too, is Master Croker. He's staying at the Manse for a couple of days and he's come to visit you." She leaned over and planted a warm moist kiss on my forehead. "To New Year's Eve," she said, and then was gone. Caleb noisily put bowl and plate on the table, brought out his ladle, and respectfully served Mamselle's gumbo. He had brought it all the way from the Manse on a shoulder harness, skinny fellow that he was, trotting beside a mounted Sophie, politely refusing her offer of a lift. Caleb did not refer to the kiss. Major Finn and Sophie Grahame were great good friends, affectionately informal in their behavior when together, so why should Caleb remark it? He did, though, silently, and so did I, the kiss crossed a boundary, it was a public demonstration (to Caleb et al and to herself) that we were already intimate.

Then New Year's Eve came, servants were excused, Sophie roasting sausage and potatoes in the kitchen, Sophie in the General's big study starting a glorious fire in the fireplace, Sophie bringing out a small finger box, in it her mix of leaves, Sophie fixing a pipe. We smoked the herbal mixture, which was pleasantly fragrant, nicely elevating. I remembered sharing a similar pipe with Bristow back at the Clinic. He called it Jamaican tobacco. Sophie was in leather and furs, smelling of leather and hay lofts, of horses snorting and steaming in good clean barns, mostly her world when she was living at the Manse. We were close sharing the pipe and I stole glances at her when I could, the color of her hair (which, Caleb informed me at one point, might not be her actual color), her ear, the slope of her throat, her profile, her birthmark the coastline of western Italy, so everyone said, right down to the toe. It came out of her hair at the forehead and finished at the lower jaw. It is blood red and must have been truly scary to other children in her childhood.

"I couldn't go to school with other children," Sophie said. "One little girl in Athens would faint every time she saw me. Stories were told to explain my appearance. The

General knocked Madame about, terrible fights, and I was the sign of God's punishment. The General struck Madame when she was pregnant with me and the color of his rage splashed onto my little baby face. That was one story. I was raised in relative isolation, of course well attended. The General went to England to find the best tutors for me and came back with two Slovenians he found in London, experts in the new sciences, competent in all fields of general education, happy to relocate their fortunes, as the best English tutors were not. Svit Pirc and Nace Zorko were in fact political exiles living meager lives in bustling midcentury London, still harassed and pursued by agents of the Hapsburgian secret police. An American prince said: come to my castle in northern Georgia and I will give you the equipment you need to do your studies. At fifteen I was proficient in geology and I could talk astronomy with mature astronomers. With their stooped shoulders, long hair, unruly beards, thick spectacles, speaking a heavily accented English, Svit Pirc and Nace Zorko were almost as exotic as I was. Growing up in their school, working in the General's big study with its telescope, its several globes, its shelved dictionaries, was mostly pleasant, Pirc and Zorko alike demanding in their courses. I am a disciplined quick reader, not as good as my teachers who could read a page of close text at a glance. Ultimately, I needed a woman to join the faculty, so here is Dutch Susan Feldkamp, nurse and doctor, who can't find a medical job anywhere in the eastern United States. Now she's upstairs on guard duty and we're all anxiously alert to hear her trumpet call."

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My first time with a regular woman, and it was happening so naturally. Sophie was creaking in her leather outfit, bending to reload her pipe. "I'm going to have to get out of these clothes," she said, putting the pipe aside, "but first I want to see your scars, especially the facial scar close up." She had hold of my cheeks, turning my face left and right, then holding it frontal. "Whenever you want, my birthmark is available for your closest scrutiny." Sophie was handsome, what can I say, and she was looking at me straight on. Straight on you might not notice the run of red on the side of her face. "Sister Susan is right," said Sophie, "this is amazing work done next to a battlefield."

Her finger lightly traced the corrugation of my scarred cheek. Her breath was in my face. "Take off your shirt," she said as she unfastened the ties and I was immediately out of my shirt, shivering in the first blast of cold night air. Her fingers touched, caressed, probed my battle wounds, one by one, as I flinched and trembled. Next, at her command, off with my trousers, and I'm naked, dangling, and she says, "leg wound," and handles it.

I found my voice, speechless up to this moment. "I need to look," I simply said, and Sophie obliged, I'm undoing her battle dress (so it seemed), unlacing, she's helping, and then there she is, naked, full breasted, a mature strong woman, and that is all I see. She's standing in the cold night air, hands on her hips, defiant nudity. I reloaded the stove, had it rosy in no time, and this time we climbed into my old bed with our quilts and comforters. Inside our rebuilt cocoon Sophie permitted my fascinated examination. She yielded tenderly to every little adjustment. "Could you move your thigh just a little bit?" I saw muff and cleft; I saw rosy lips and pink opening. I was in the middle of my first time with a woman, face to face, and with Sophie's good-humored compliance, I was thorough in my examination. "That's called the inner thigh," she said. When she said "inner thigh" in her low musical voice, my eyes were instantly blurry and I felt a tad faintish. It was a fantasy, clasping and stroking a woman's bared thigh, with her permission, legs parting, what a big thing that is, to achieve that, it is almost the key that unlocks her body, and now I was actually doing it, the parted leg still reluctant, on the quiver, poised to snap shut with her sister leg if I were to say something stupid. The "inner thigh" itself, so I discovered, had regions and reaches.

"Latin is the language of the learned," Caleb Croker said. "Our bodies are dressed in Latin." He came to mind as Sophie explained *axilla,* her bare arm lifted. All my good friends were much smarter than I was, knew things, knew Latin words, knew *femur interiorem* for example, and why, because luck, my God, threw me to the care of Pap Finn who enslaved me, first ten years of my life. I was his illiterate slave. I know what slavery is, Sophie. I didn't say this. I was blissfully fondling her *femur interiorem* and at the same time a dark mass of grief was slowly expanding in my breast. I had come this far, suffering a soldier's miserable life, at last to enjoy this happiness, and why had it taken so long to reach me? Happiness went promptly to most everyone around me.

Well, at birth I was circumcised, I lost my foreskin, shield and shade, forever, a tribal thing, Dr. Sunshine said. As a grown boy I had gonorrhea. I was always in the clutches of a vile story. An orphan's life. A small sob was building up in my throat. Sophie suddenly came into my arms, kissed me passionately, somehow got me on top of her, inserted my cock, and I was swiftly and smoothly riding deep into the country. All the hazards and impediments I had imagined, gone. No speeches necessary, no love talk needed. Except for soft moans or brief panting, silence.

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Two lieutenants from C company, Third Arkansas, Gordon Barkley and Rufus Simms, stood up, smartly saluting, as I entered the meeting room at the Grahame Bank in Athens. I was of course in uniform, the gold starred frockcoat, the epaulets, I let them for a moment consider my face, regard the scar, locate and count the stars, and then we all sat down. They were here to present the official notice of my honorary promotion, skipping a grade. I was now Colonel Mark Finn, ret., courtesy of a grateful nation. Might I still serve as a consultant at regimental headquarters and help Third Arkansas secure its proper place in General John B. Hood's Texas Brigade, its new location? A short-term appointment, six months.

I acknowledged my promotion with respect and gratitude, responding that I would seek the advice of my doctor (Sister Susan) as to whether I could return to active duty in any kind of limited assignment. Next, official work done, I fetched up some Tennessee whiskey for Barkley and Simms, they brought out cigars, two little, one big, the big one a gift from the lads in C Company. We were at ease. Gordon is seventeen, Rufus, nineteen. They were to spend their night in the city jail, bunks, blankets, best quarters in a crowded city. No, they would spend the night at the Manse, real beds, food and drink, Sophie Grahame out of town, all they had to do was amuse Sister Susan Feldkamp, a Dutch physician in residence. I had messages yet to write they would carry back to C company, a long one to Sergeant Ambrose, to his current translator, both hopefully still existing. We sat quietly for a while in the bank's meeting room. Gordon and Rufus were so beautifully young, the flower of Confederate manhood,

unquestionably brave, always courteous, well spoken, and they had to stand to. If they didn't stand to, if they could no longer be gallant, as they stood to it, hopeless warfare, then all was immediately lost. It was hopeless warfare the Confederate South was fighting. I was suddenly somber, no longer the cordial host, really now their commander, fixing them with the commander's stare.

"What is our situation?"

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Gordon was prompt with his answer. Think of that little city state in Greece, Athens, twice defeating a huge Persian army and a vast Persian navy, and why, superior military leadership, armed forces of like-minded compatriots. Tom Whittington had won them all over to his world of classical reference. Our Confederacy was brilliantly victorious in 490 BC at the Battle of Marathon, if not at Gettysburg in 1863.

Rufus said: "We can still deliver one or two decisive victories and challenge the confidence of Abe Lincoln."

I had no comment.

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Late winter, early spring, cold and wet, much of the talk in miserable Athens is defeatist, but carefully hedged. Athens is a Confederate armory: cannon, rifles, shot and shell, trains are in constant rotation. Thoughtful citizens have heard of a barbarian Yankee general moving about in southeastern Tennessee. He has won shameful victories at Chickamauga and Chattanooga, punched a hole in our western wall, and surely, he has his beady eye on the military riches of Athens. He will blow up the works. Imagine that. Everything will go, your house, the church. I want nothing to do with politics. I'm holed up in the cottage with the books Caleb brings me from the General's library. Thomas Babington Macaulay, Ralph Waldo Emerson. So certain, so cool, their elaborately constructed sentences, which demand I pay attention to them, and these divert me from the war noise going on all around me.

***

I know what April means to the soldier: oil your musket, sharpen your stabbing sword, get your boots mended, cold giving way to cool, mud hardening. April is wagons and mules. That April of 1864, a freshly made colonel in the Confederate Army, I did not lack oil for my lamp, did not lack wood for my stove, I had the magnificence of Caleb's paper and writing utensils, I had cold sausage to gnaw, and black tea straight from the General's basement tub. Caleb would slip into town now and then just to gather the news, just to hear what Athens was thinking, and we'd sit each gnawing a cold sausage, sipping a black tea, and discuss it, the civil war, where was it going. "We got Stonewall Jackson shot," Caleb said. "We need to get Bobby Lee shot." Caleb had come round to Judge Phelps's opinion that the present misery of the several Southern peoples might well be indefinitely extended unless drastic action removed the leaders of this mad proslavery Confederate nation. Someone had first to shoot President Davis.

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As Sherman entered Georgia, 7 May 1864, the door was left wide open. He just marched in, wagons, artillery, regiments, several armies, his white tents and many campfires set up in our fields, our woods chopped down, our chickens and hogs liberated, several armies of detestable Yankees shitting and pissing on our sacred Georgian earth, our private goddam property, and where was our Joe Johnston and our boys in gray? Caleb brought the news from Athens, which was mostly about its relief, Sherman's juggernaut was ponderously rolling directly toward Atlanta, Athens would rock in the big swells left behind, but for the moment it was not in the way of that juggernaut. Things began to fall apart in the state. Militia and home guards, mostly old men and amputated veterans, couldn't challenge the criminal gangs roaming the countryside, couldn't deal with the unrest and crime in their own home neighborhood. I was out most nights with my barking dogs, shooting at someone, just purposefully

missing, intruders wanting to get at our barns and storehouses. Hungry people, but I was earning my keep, Colonel Huck the caretaker.

I thought I might see Sophie in Richmond, but she was no longer there, she was in Charleston, next in Raleigh. Then, one sunny noon, here comes my First Lieutenant Simms, dear old Rufus, still alive, with orders signed by the Secretary of War, ready to escort me to Richmond where I was to meet with important people in the war department to discuss the issue of negro enlistment as front-line troops. In Richmond we don't go to the war department building. Rufus, somewhat awkwardly, delivers me to a neighboring house. I'm standing in the hallway to a spacious parlor, flowers everywhere, thick carpets and plush sofas, ornate mirror over a gas fire. I'm regarding three sober gentlemen in dark suits. They've gotten up from their seats in the parlor and have come to greet me. I decided not to wear my gold starred frock coat. I was no longer a soldier. I was in my civilian black suit. We were all in black suits. I had that thought as I stood there. Springtime at last in Richmond, the parlor strong with the fragrance of the cut and placed flowers, and we're in funeral black, we four Confederate gentlemen in Confederate Richmond,

Part Five: Huck, Tom, and Jim: The Final go-around

"I'm Joseph Henderson," said the middle gentleman, "this is Arthur Nettekoven and this is Peter Smith." Short beards and small mustaches, neatly trimmed. Peter Smith coldly stares at me as we nod and bow ever so slightly. We did the introduction and then they sat in chairs and I sat not comfortably on a sofa. How did they get to the chairs and how did I find myself, a war hero, awkwardly perched on a sofa? I assumed

they were here to prepare me for the ongoing discussion about negro enlistment elsewhere in the house. It was an odd reception for a visiting military expert, this silence, their calmly regarding me.

"Well," I said, "what is our business, then?"

Henderson took an envelope from his coat, meticulously opened it, unfolded sheets and laid them on his lap. He rummaged in the little pile and then he had the page he wanted. He looked up at me. I looked at him. Bad news was coming. "Colonel Finn," Henderson said, "you are under arrest. The charge is high treason." I didn't blink. "Not guilty," I calmly said. I sat back, they sat back. We relaxed, somewhat. I saw it all in a flash. Cousin Isaac, Judge Phelps, had somehow gone from talk to action. Whatever action it was, I was never in it or for it. I'm a lonely traveler. I'm not a plotter. I can't stand executions.

We sat there. No one spoke.

"Who are you," I presently asked. "On whose authority do you arrest me?"

Henderson, and his associates, thought this over.

"You've lost the right to put questions to civil authority," Henderson said. "From now on, you can only speak to answer."

I thought this over.

"We'd like you to make a statement. Explain your relation to Isaac Phelps and your relation to Sophie Grahame. Mr. Nettekoven will take down what you say." Mr. Nettekoven at that moment was producing a small portable writing table, laying out a composition tablet, arranging pens and pencils. Peter Smith was evidently a policeman, an enforcer. As I seemed to ponder their proposal, I was thinking what if I flat out rejected their authority, got up and just walked out of this place. Peter Smith would interpose, would stand to block my way, so be it. I thought I could handle Peter Smith. I would nail him with my famous throat punch. As Peter Smith stumbled about, choking, crying out, Henderson would disappear. I could gain the street.

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I didn't speak. And if I gained the street, then what? It was an ugly repetition of that first fall from grace, my failure to get Jim out of the shed. I get him out, I pry open two rotten planks, we flee into the night, free to find the raft, free again to ride the great current of the Mississippi, and then what? Well, perhaps these guys are not legitimate. I might get to the station and catch the three o'clock to Athens. I'll find authority to question their authority. I sat there, thinking.

I paraphrase what Henderson next had to say. There was a plot to assassinate President Davis, to overthrow our Confederate government, and create a new mongrelized nation. My close friend Isaac Phelps, cabinet sub-secretary in the Davis administration, was the chief conspirator, presumably first president of that new nation. He had co-conspirators, a second in command, General Augustus Grahame's crackpot daughter. She was the bank for Phelps and his gang. She consorted with abolitionists, with negro revolutionaries. She was secretly training negro junior officers for a rebel army Hang her up in the town square, no special mercy for the leaders of this conspiracy, make her an example, this was our first feeling, but she's old General Grahame's daughter. Instead, she's sent off to some island hell in the Caribbean, imprisoned in a convent run by strong nuns. None of this, arrests, convictions, executions, imprisonment, was to come before the public. Special tribunals acted. Justice was prompt. Richmond was actively and reasonably defending the Confederate people. Davis was in charge, commanding our widespread nation, defeating Sherman in the west, checking Grant in the east. Davis had the confidence of his people.

Phelps disappears, without speeches. An attempted coup d'etat at this very moment of great national peril. Led by a hitherto responsible senior politician. President Davis had the confidence of his people. I could not hope to make public appeals. If the special tribunal found me guilty, I would join my friends on the secret scaffold and no one would know where and when I dangled in space. I, too, would disappear. It wouldn't make a stir. People disappeared all the time in our endangered Confederate South. People barely registered absences. Here it is, documents, testimonies, Phelps names me as the commander in chief of the new Commonwealth of the Southern States army.

“Not with my knowledge or consent,” I said. “Of course, I have the great honor to be Sophie Grahame’s good friend and an employee of the family firm, and yes, Isaac Phelps has been, almost lifelong, a greatly admired advisor. Many people in the present government count him as a friend and advisor. We respect him for his knowledge and his generosity and we all know that when he’s had too much to drink, Judge Phelps can be intemperate in his speech, spout misunderstood Shakespeare to bad effect, so we just tolerate his opinions. We listen politely and then put him to bed. In the morning, he is again Judge Phelps, faithful civil servant.” I said something like that, noticing that Mr. Nettekoven was not writing what I said. He just sat there; pencil poised.

“Senior people in the Attorney-General’s office, in his Justice department, respect the famous bullet wounds and the cheek scar,” Henderson said. “Junior people, not so. You are a colonel in the Confederate Army, honorably retired, a public figure. You gave the conspiracy a certain weight, an immediate authority, Colonel Huckleberry Finn. Junior people think you were the most dangerous person in the conspiracy. Junior people think you must not survive the defeat of your plot and still walk around in any Confederate town, testifying, however obscurely.” A pause. “Senior people would like to read a personal statement. What is your relation to Sophie Grahame? What is your relation to Isaac Phelps?”

I thought, I remember looking at maps of St. Louis, Cousin Isaac wanting military opinion. My understanding was that this advice was for use in the emergency that would follow the end of the war. I was like a sleeping seed, timed, germinating, then, the civil war over, sunshine again in the country, I spring into action ready to put things right. These very same three fellows, Henderson, Nettekoven, and Smith, would no doubt be my enemy, as they now are, Democrats, secessionists, slaveholders, sitting there, and I’m on the wrong side of the pistol. The war over, the fight for the future Missouri immediate and fierce, I would no doubt soon be executing the likes of Henderson, Nettekoven, and Smith. The war over, it would be a return to the Captain Billy days in the fifties, summary judgment in the field, no mercy, no witnesses. I was now fully alert to my peril. I was shortly going to die.

“Senior people also want to provide you with a quick honorable settlement of the charges. Upstairs, Mr. Smith will show you the way, there is a room at the end of the hallway. In the room a table with a loaded single shot pistol on it. You will take off your clothes, boots, underwear, everything, and give them to Mr. Smith who will then exit, locking the door behind him.”

It was if I was seeing myself in a play, on a stage, in a set, this actual parlor like the one you’d see on a theatrical stage. As Henderson speaks, I’m thinking the war department, the Attorney-General, senior people, can happily explain Colonel Finn’s suicide, cite the multiple wounds suffered at the Battle at Antietam Creek, his constant pain, his facing corrective surgeries. They would turn my suicide to their uses.

“It is a grant of mercy from the senior people, this pistol in the room upstairs. No one will lay hands on you. You will not leave the building in irons.”

Henderson was delivering his lines, almost suavely, like an actor, “a grant of mercy,” and I couldn’t remember my lines. Luck, my personal God, had turned on me, had abandoned me, as I stood in that parlor. Luck wanted nothing to do with me. I was on my own. I was alone. I was shortly going to die. That was the script we were following, but I couldn’t find my lines, on what page. We were standing there, four gentlemen in black suits, windows open, springtime in Richmond.

“Well,” said Henderson. Upstairs or downstairs?”

“The shackle,” I said.

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I was taken out in my black suit, white shirt, and tie, hat on my head, shackled at the wrists, placed in an open wagon, driven to the dungeon. It was everything a dungeon aspires to be, stone and straw, burning hot or ice cold, latrine rank, in the basement of a partially destroyed warehouse. There I sat, not even middle aged, but already ancient, one entire night, and it was sufficient. I would stay to hear the charges, I would see and hear the tribunal, who were they, how many, and what would they say. Then, first chance, I would take my leave. They would have to shoot me. I wasn’t going to hang.

I have this all from Caleb Croker, the family's chronicler. I owe my escape to the General's hatred of Judah Benjamin, successively U. S. senator from Louisiana, Confederate attorney general, secretary of war, secretary of state. The General hated Benjamin first as a wily Caribbean Jew, nose, curly hair, despicable in his expensive outfits, odious in his oily eloquence, then as an obscurely advantaged rival who somehow took all the positions in government the General wanted for himself. When Davis made Benjamin secretary of war, the General was furious and impotent, in darkest despair, passed over, dismissed. Alone in his manse he was sitting out a poorly led war for independence, not consulted, too abrasive, it was said. An Ambrose boy, which one I can't say, somebody's deputy in Richmond, was working on his uncle to join the Knights of the Golden Circle. Open the southern door to the Caribbean. Rethink our present Empire of Slavery. One had to be ready for the coming future. The Ambrose boy visited the General in Athens, staying the night at the Manse. The General was said to be listening.

Caleb sat long hours with the General, refilling his glass, lighting his cigar, listening to him. The General saw the Phelps conspiracy as a serious attack on his G&S empire, forcing him to deport his valuable daughter, losing her acumen, forcing G&S to make certain restitutions, to suffer all sorts of losses, chiefly those of face. He detested Davis. Go ahead, shoot him. He was just Benjamin's puppet. The vice president, rickety, shrunken, Alexander Stephens, was also Benjamin's puppet. It was Benjamin's will and ambition that drove the General's Confederate nation forward. First, shoot Benjamin.

Well, G&S stood firm in the marketplace. The General had his gold mine and his companies. He was an old-time oligarch, Caleb said, who owned everything and everyone in his region. Cotton, Sugar, Pork, that was the sacred trinity at G&S. With Sophie at the helm, G&S also owned ships and trains and banks and farms. G&S was not involved in the conspiracy. The firm was poised to sue anyone who said it was. Sophie Grahame did not tap into G&S accounts, just her own. Her politics had nothing to do with her holdings in sugar and cotton acreage. G&S was the principal slave owner in northern Georgia, matter of fact, so Sophie was a lunatic to go about arming negroes. She might easily have been, some way, quietly executed. No fame, no notice, just gone. She was sitting in a jail cell in Raleigh, North Carolina, expecting the worst.

Well, the General's lawyers argued, Sophie Grahame had been mesmerized by that scoundrel Isaac Phelps. She was, like her mother, somewhat insane. So, I suppose, Caleb said, dead of night, Sophie Grahame is taken from her cell, put in a carriage, wrist shackled to her guard, then on a train, still shackled, same impassive impersonal guard, and finally on a ship, unshackled, steaming to her new residence in French Martinique. Caleb had it straight from Major Logan who handled French interests at G&S. Thanks to Sophie's earlier advice, the General owned a large island property called the Mount, school or prison, hard to say. The Mount had a hospital, school, factory, residence halls, employed an order of Belgian nuns, Sisters of St. Hyacinth, to staff and manage it, the population primarily the exiled child wreckage of wealthy parents, girls only, from all over the western world. Compassionate Discipline was the Mount's specialty. Also, its small factory was producing chocolate, a new confectionary taste. Sophie had news of that experiment from an abolitionist colleague in Boston who was in the Caribbean trade.

G&S kept the Sisters of St. Hyacinth happily at work. The Mount was beginning to show a tidy annual profit, its patients, students, inmates, in fairly comfortable residence, their families paying sizable tuitions, yet also working long hours stirring the vats, as it were. Chocolate. Major Logan was already addicted to chocolate. It was what he wanted when Cousin Isaac came round taking orders for the next shipment.

The General could recall his daughter whenever he saw fit. Richmond did not have a file on the Sisters of St. Hyacinth, did not know the General was their principal benefactor, as it signed the papers deporting Sophie Grahame to what they were told was this miserable prison colony in the hot Caribbean. Confederate justice missed the opportunity of immediate execution and now had the headache of dealing with lawyers, with procedures, with delay. Confederate justice did not want Sophie Grahame in British exile giving stories to the London press. Perfect, said the General's man in that deliberation. She thinks she is Napoleon raising an army. Send her to our Elba in French Martinique. No lawyers or journalists will reach her there. Done. Senior people in Confederate Justice moved on to more pressing issues.

Meantime, in the General's game, his daughter was safely distant from the supposed clutches of Judah Benjamin and his minions in the War Department. In Benjamin's

game, as the General had it, captive Sophie was a wild card to be played at some opportune moment, a show trial, a public spectacle, if in Benjamin's custody, in his dominion. Sophie's friends at G&S, along with the General's people in Richmond, got a deportation order signed and sealed and soon Sophie was gone, no longer in North America. The General now turned to confront the Benjamin factor on another front, his disturbed partnership with the Ambrose brothers.

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"One last thing," Caleb said, putting away papers, placing the General's bottle and glass on the table, "there are people in Richmond, not your friends, who simply want to remove Colonel Finn from the political scene. He can't figure in their new South. He's a crypto-abolitionist, an atheist radical, and he was the best friend of the notorious Isaac Phelps. He's fatally compromised, it would seem, yet he remains popular, stands tall and singular in the public mind. This chance has fallen right into our laps. Colonel Finn was the General's bodyguard. Hang him, these junior people at Justice say and you've got that entire leadership taken care of, leave no survivors, plus you deal General Grahame these several unanswered blows, you remove his smart daughter, you hang his bodyguard." All this while I'm putting away things, closing drawers, and the General sits, puffing on his cigar.

"Stay a moment," the General said, "you little sneaky sonofabitch. They won't hang Colonel Finn. He might swelter for some time in a tropical jail, but he'll get out." Caleb continued to put things away. "He did shoot that awful woman right between the eyes," the General said. "I'm forever indebted." He didn't say, and my two sons, Finn just stood there, so they say, all in a day's work. When Caleb left that evening, the General wanted Colonel Finn exonerated and released. There wasn't really a case to be made, no hard evidence, just hearsay. It was hot in my dungeon during the day, cold at night, and I never had enough water. I had no idea of the political struggle going on in the Attorney General's office. The General seized the suggested idea that Colonel Finn was urgently needed to command the Home Guard in northern Georgia. The present commander ignored the General's wishes, paid him no courtesies, refused his request

for deputized guards. The tribunal never sat. Richmond had all the charges against me dismissed. I was out with ten dollars and a train ticket to Athens.

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"Everybody knows Old Buster is the commander of the Home Guard," said Caleb, "and no piece of paper from Richmond is going to remove him from command. Not worth the trouble. The General wants you back to protect his personal properties in Athens: mansion, retreat house, cottage." I said I thought so. "But Caleb," I added, "I'm not contractually bound to the General. I've not signed anything like that. I consider I'm legally free to go." Caleb met me at the station with horse and buggy. Ugly as always, with orange hair. "Not free," he said, "not free."

Here it was again, back, big Luck, Augustus Grahame hates Judah Benjamin, I walk free from the dungeon. Not free, Caleb said. I owe the General a service. I stood by while his sons shot each other, I shot his crazy daughter-in-law, I am his disfigured daughter's lover and guardian, I continue to live on his estate and draw a salary. But this is free labor, I said. I can resign my position, pack my things, and move on. I go to Kentucky to see what Bristow is doing in the monastery. I return to Missouri, to St. Louis. I'll have a conversation with Mrs. Isaac Phelps. Then Hannibal and the serious business of reunions. Amy Lawrence, who has she become? I can't bear to think of Tom with all his bright happiness gone, a tragic Tom Sawyer, and what will he think when he sees my slashed cheek and hard look. Jim. He'll be there soon as the war is over to kill somebody, I don't know who, a lot of local villains to consider.

When I leave Georgia, I will say goodbye to Caleb. Caleb will remain at the Manse inside the Grahame fold mostly for Sophie's sake, if such a sake still exists. He was virtually a Grahame. He remains my clerk secretary and my best friend. I studied his selected Shakespeare and he explained it. He taught me how to cut meat, like a surgeon, never to saw or chop it, at table, and how to move your soup spoon in your bowl of soup. Caleb has the key to my treasure.

Our horse, a tired old nag, brought us finally to the entrance road, the big trees, the broad lawn, the pillared portico. In a certain universe of chance, I might be coming

home to this Manse, my palace, the General, former tenant, long gone. Marse Huck. At the moment the Manse was looking ramshackle, front lawn overgrown and weedy, the shutter on the far-right window of the porch, loose, some dangle. The Manse itself needed a face wash, needed paint, needed maintenance.

"First thing you've got to do, Colonel Finn," Caleb said, "send Sister Susan up to that Dutch hamlet in the near mountains, far away from Athens. Thieves, bandits, have figured out who plunked one of their boys in the leg, where the shooting came from, and twice now they've shot out her third-floor window. We put up boards, they continue to bang away at the boards, not a lot, just a little, to let us know they know her shot angle. That's how bold they are. Next, we have to move the General, probably at gunpoint, to one of his farms outside this county, move his whole crew, and then, what next? Who is left in charge of the people? Who sees to the Manse? Major Logan, probably, or Jed the Younger Logan. I don't know. I'm sure Sophie has a plan for just this emergency somewhere written down. Who does what? The Logans show no sign of their interest in the fate of the Grahame Manse."

We were out of the buggy, standing on the porch, waiting for Old Jake to come and show us in, because of course this is what Old Jake did, and best to let him do it. We stood on the porch. It often took Old Jake a while to find the entrance door. We were standing in Missouri weather, hot, humid, inescapable, always better with a drink and a cigar. "This is where you come in, Colonel Finn," Caleb said, "this is where you earn the significant salary I know you receive. Our necessary evacuation will encourage the Dowdy Boys, local marauders, to sack the estate, take hold of its slaves, seize the barns and livestock. Soon as it is known that the General is no longer in residence, that the Manse is effectively abandoned, the Boys and other sundry wildcats will quickly own the property. There goes the piano so beautifully played in days of yore, up and into a muddy wagon." Also, of course, the Dowdy Boys will ransack Caleb Croker's apartment, not much here, Caleb gone with his valuables, and one Dowdy Boy will certainly shit on Caleb's bed.

Where am I, Colonel Finn, in all that disturbance?

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“I’ll send notice to the Retreat House today, soon as we get in,” I said. “Tomorrow, I’ll visit him straight off, tell him he is being moved, ask him to tell me what his plan is for the withdrawal of our forces from the Manse. I will put everything in military language. I’ll confine him to soldier talk, to soldier logic.” Here was old Jake and we were in, salutations, cook coming out of the kitchen. Just as it was when I lived here. There was the piano.

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I explain the evacuation plan to the General. He sits, scowling, in his fireplace chair. “You understand that when retreat is the only option, go to it with purpose and energy. You can always return when circumstances change.” General Grahame: “Jim Pierson is working on a deal with the mayor and the local Provost Marshal. The Grahames generously donate their personal home, the Manse, to the Army of Northern Virginia, as a hospital for its wounded soldiers. I should have come to this idea sooner, but who knew 1864 would be this bloody. It would keep the place intact, both sides need a hospital, and we’ll take it back when the war is over. Might even get the walking patients to work at repainting the Manse. Not enough time to pull this off. Sophie has a plan for this emergency, I know it. Goddam that silly girl, goddam her crazy opinions, and how can Isaac Phelps be so smart and so stupid? Tell me that. You know them. Well, we don’t have them now with their goddam opinions. I’m sure you hold the same opinions. How does it happen, I’m living in a nest of traitors, Caleb the worst?

In three days, Grahame headquarters, commander and personal staff, along with their personal equipage, leave for the Cranberry Hill farm in adjoining Barrow County. Two days later wagons loaded with supplies, food and ammunition, with all the General’s necessary valuables, depart as a train for that farm, under guard, of course. Major Logan will distribute our slaves to different farms in the west and to the north. Then a fair emptying of the Manse, everything useful or attractive removed, taken to farms, buried, hidden. Meantime I’m doing daily nocturnal battle with intruders. I keep the Dowdy Boys at bay. Not what I imagined, stepping free of the dungeon.

Caleb is to go with Sister Susan, both concealed in the big covered wagon, Ma and Pa Croker up front, ostensibly bringing a bequeathed estate to relatives in the north country, the story when asked. Caleb will not go. The young Casey brothers are instead enlisted, one to ride shotgun in front, the other, also armed, inside the wagon to protect Sister Susan. Sid Casey in the back is twelve years old. Sister Susan will also be armed. Caleb will not go. Caleb is a key member of our estate patrol. He can think like a Dowdy Boy, know where they'll turn up and when. I'm also pretty good at guessing what the Boys are up to, but Caleb is better.

Caleb planned to join his parents and Sister Susan in the Dutch hamlet, to hide out in those hills, but only after we'd done our business at the Manse. I was going west back to Missouri, somehow, plotting my transport. Meanwhile the war did not stop, it went on and on, Sherman at the gates of Atlanta, Grant again and again assaulting Lee in Virginia, and where, I wonder, is Third Arkansas in all that fighting, the lads in C Company, what's left of them. I didn't have much time to think about them. I didn't have much time, and inclination, to sit down with Caleb and get his opinion on the fates of Cousin Isaac and Sophie Grahame. I had yet to put my thoughts in order, Isaac Phelps and Sophie Grahame. I was in their army, such as it was, a loyal foot soldier, I thought, but not ever a combat commander. I would have fought in the Commonwealth army Cousin Isaac envisioned. I would have said that to the tribunal had I stood before it, but Luck generously inserted the General's mad suspicion of Secretary Benjamin into my mix of factors, and here I am writing a book.

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Cousin Isaac, no more. Cherished Sophie, imprisoned on an island in the Caribbean. And how was I to get back to Missouri? I had to focus on the present situation, holding bandits at bay, protecting the quarters, the barns and sheds, the livestock, all this with a pack of ten dogs and seven guards, counting Caleb and rickety Cito. Also, auxiliary, five paid men from the quarters, armed with clubs and canes. I had no intention to kill a Dowdy Boy.

Caleb and I had a lot of time to talk. “I realized early in my life that I could never be loved in a romantic fashion, something was wrong with my spine, I have a strange walk, my nose is wrong, also my chin, I have orange hair, so, a mere child, I decided to study literature and history. You can’t love me, I’m just too ungainly, but you might need me if you want to know the preamble to the Federal Constitution or how to fix a cotton gin. Really, it was a freedom, this release from the tribulations and excitements of romantic love, a freedom to pursue my questions, my issues, to know how things work, people pretty much not knowing how things work, needing me. It is a kind of bliss for me, Colonel Finn, knowing how much you need me.”

Caleb and I were in the boot room getting into our boots. Our revolvers, prepared by Tony who handled the armory at the Manse, lay on the bench heavy and grim. The hot sun was setting. Caleb, once again, was remembering Sophie. I liked listening to Caleb’s Sophie stories. I could feel her in my arms. I could hear her speaking. “Pa worked in the bank,” Caleb continued, “and still does, to some extent, so when I was a mere lad, he somehow got me a pass to enter the library at the Grahame Manse and read, unsupervised, any book I chose from the General’s impressive collections, this gleaming shelf, that glowing shelf, titles and names I knew I was mispronouncing. My ignorance was stunning. I immediately recognized it, and I was ten years old maybe. I was in that library mid-morning until early evening tucked away in one of the window nooks. I’d bring along a chunk of hard bread, a slice of cheese, and a bottle of water. The Grahames of course were absent touring or visiting.

One day I’m utterly engrossed in what I’m reading, the outside world hardly exists, I turn the page, and there in real life is a young girl standing before me, a red blight on one side of her pretty face. “You’ve got the very book I want to read,” she said. “Give it to me.” She reached down, shut the book, took it up under her arm, and paused to regard me, I was scrambling to get up, couldn’t unhook one leg. I paused to return her gaze; my foot still hooked. A day later she returned the book, apologized, and gave me an apple.”

My cherished sawed-off shotgun leaned very casually against its wall, waiting to see me pocket the four shotgun shells Tony has loaded with salt. I’m not killing anyone who

comes onto the property looking for food. The revolvers of course have only their single purpose. Caleb and I were getting into our gear. We were the evening patrol.

"Love at first sight," I said.

"True," said Caleb, "she was a beautiful freak and I was a freak who was not beautiful, so we had much in common. Her tutors were Slovenian freaks and then Sister Susan, flat as a board, arrived, and we all sat together and socialized. It turned out the Slovenians knew everything in four different languages, sterling examples for Sophie and me, who wanted the powers that came with their acquired knowledge. I could quietly attend when Sophie was at her lessons." Caleb was in his boots, had holstered his revolver. Sophie was a good shot, he said. He, too, was a good shot.

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The General permitted the locals to gather windfall in his orchard, but not to shake or climb a tree. It was Sophie's doing, of course. After the harvest locals could range over the potato field or the cabbage patch picking up missed or rejected vegetables. At sunset locals had to leave off their gleaning and depart. Our dogs came out at night. As the war went on, seemingly without end, and food shortages became constant, gleaners became adventurous, broke rules, overstepped boundaries. With gleaners came crooks (mostly children) who did not leave at sunset, who stayed on to purloin a chicken, a piglet, a bleating kid, or smoked meat when they could find the storage. These we had to discourage. The adult thieves were a dangerous resentful lot. Sister Susan hit one in the leg from her third-floor window, an admirable shot, and ever since they were frankly trying to kill her, telling everyone that old Dutch bitch was dead bony meat, sure. It was also said, I guess in ruffian circles, that certain Dowdy Boys felt I was a serious obstacle to their free play with the estate, Manse and grounds. I couldn't be bought off or intimidated. Why, asked certain Boys, didn't they just shoot me?

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And then the day came.

Caleb: “Do you think he really meant it when he said burn the manse?”

“Don’t worry,” I said. “I’m not doing anything until I have a written signed order in my hand and maybe a fair witness like Major Logan.”

We were about to set off, he on the lower hidden trail, me on the upper. We’d meet on the opposite side, top of a little hill, then back together to the Manse for a slug of corn whiskey. An ordinary night. We didn’t take dogs, too much breathing noise and thrashing movement, we left them in their pen, first acknowledging their readiness to serve, tails furiously wagging. Yes, yes, old boy, next time.

“General Grahame is executing a military retreat, leaving nothing behind that could aid the enemy’s advance,” I said, surveying Caleb’s hidden forest entrance. Like mine, it was shielded by a thorny shrub, you had to force your way through it, and then there was a steep slope you pretty much fell down past some interesting boulders. At the bottom you found a very skinny path, often disappearing, then reappearing, and that was it. You circled the property on that twisting and turning line and no one could see you. It was hard work this patrol, you got bruised and cut, but it was the perimeter and you often spotted lurkers. One load of hot salt into the canopy would send lurkers flying.

Caleb and I shared a black cigar, reluctant to set off on the patrol, our faces and hands mud caked to withstand the dancing horde of mosquitoes waiting for us on the trail. Also, the steamy heat of the forest floor at night, loathsome creatures emerging and you step on them, everything down here is rotten and decaying, so many different foul odors, and as you gag on a particularly wretched stench you walk into an invisible enveloping spider web, body length, you could be spider meat, but no, you’re on patrol. Climb this forested slope, at the summit, coops, cages, runs, hen houses, General Grahame’s poultry business. We discouraged intruders, hot salt into the canopy, we made our presence known, and sometimes a lower aim, a sizzle of hot salt crystals to a Dowdy Boy’s sknny ass scuttling away on the forest floor.

I passed the cigar back to Caleb.

“He never liked living in the Manse,” Caleb said, blowing smoke at the gnats who had found us. “His wife is insane. He has three useless sons, one brilliant daughter,

but seriously marred, never to be anyone's queen, so he moved out to the Retreat House as soon as he could, Sophie taking over the Manse. He could easily say, burn it, and still get credit for a patriotic sacrifice." Caleb was living in the Manse, not all the books and pictures had been removed, he loved the grandeur of the place, its carpets and draperies, the art work, the library, beautiful things purchased, arranged to be shown, to be envied. It was his spiritual and emotional home. The Croker house in Athens was his postal address.

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Night was coming with some moonlight. "Off we go," I said. I stood watching as Caleb forced his way into the forest through the thorny shrub, clutching and grabbing. His tenacity and his actual strength amazed me. Next, he was gone into the gloom. I stood alone finishing the cigar. Caleb was my battle comrade, my personal secretary, the Shakespeare I had was largely Caleb's Shakespeare, and didn't he teach me table manners, this spoon, that fork. He was interested in everything and when he learned what he needed to know, he retained the knowledge, he had it around for subsequent use. Often on his patrol Caleb would go off trail to investigate strange animal behavior and wouldn't show up at the meeting place. I'd wait and then just go on to my solitary sip of corn whiskey, a rumination before the stove, then to bed.

Before that sunrise I was awake, I was running to the Manse, knowing I would not find Caleb there. Lamps were lit, everyone astir. Tony roused the hands in the stable. Searching the near woods, we found Caleb's mangled naked body. It was in a steep ravine not too far from his hidden trail. Strangled with a rope, stripped of shirt, trousers, shoes, rings, such like, Caleb had suffered still further cruelties while still alive, and there he was, Caleb, face down in the weeds, that crooked spine, the orange hair.

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The Manse was built atop a small hill where it stood by itself, first circled by a moat of lawn and ornamental bushes, next by woods surrounding it on three sides, an orchard on the fourth. Out buildings were on the far side of the west woods: the Retreat House, the cottage, and beyond them, stables and barns.

When the Manse caught fire, nearly the entire population of the city came out, by buggy or wagon, to behold the spectacle. The Mayor, the Sheriff, and the provost marshal, were promptly there to give orders, to command the situation. Water wagons, five bucket boys to each wagon, came up, horns blowing. The gathered onlookers were soon a large restive crowd fascinated by the roar of the inferno, every now and then shouting something political. "Fuck G&S! Fuck General Grahame!" Without any compunction I had earlier taken two of the General's strongest horses, Buck and Speed, and they were ready to go. Speed would carry our supplies. In the trees I sat mounted on Buck's broad back observing the Manse in flames, a melee of people before and around the furiously burning mansion, clouds of fiery smoke in the night air.

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Where and how would I draw my travel money?

We sat in Jed Logan's office just off the square in Athens. I had come in to discuss the General's burn order, what did the principal partners think of it. Major Logan was standing by the window looking out on the busy street. "Colonel Finn," he said quietly, "you are not to fire the Manse, under any circumstances, whatever the General orders. No. No. G&S will handle the fate and future of the Manse." G&S was indeed at a difficult pass, the General mostly incoherent, Sophie in far off exile, Jim Pierson and Jed Logan in charge of the entire operation, largely by default, acting without proper authorization. The Ambrose family lurked in their Louisiana fiefdom, waiting for the General to falter in his command, waiting to break free of their service in the firm. They struck profitable deals with the Federal chieftains in conquered Louisiana, first General Benjamin Butler, then General Nathaniel Banks, who were soon happily eating Ambrose pork and Ambrose rice.

I also settled my personal affairs with Jed, Major Logan coming in at one moment to join the conversation. “Why do you want to go back to Missouri? The future isn’t in steamboats. It is in railroads. Capital money is in the east. Out west it is shovels and hammers. Stay here. G&S can use you in many different ways. G&S might send you to Europe. General is going to wear out pretty soon. Sophie will return first chance. It could be a very sweet situation for you.”

“Judge Phelps had a political career planned for Colonel Finn in Missouri,” Jed said. “His people are no doubt still in Missouri rearranging their futures. They’re going to look to Colonel Finn for leadership.”

Major Logan regarded his son, then me, looking for my response. I said nothing. I knew Jed was not completely happy living his family life in Athens, Georgia. The General was peremptory in his commands, would cut him off mid-sentence, would ignore him, and then there was Jed’s father, the famously suave senior partner, always leaning in to look over Jed’s decisions. I could up and go. Jed could not.

“Well,” said Major Logan, “we see what a genius kingmaker Isaac Phelps turned out to be. I suspect his people in Missouri are rearranging themselves north to Illinois or Indiana.”

Jed and I were silent. Major Logan scrutinized our silence and then politely left. Jed got out a bottle of brown Tennessee whiskey sure to be the cause of his ultimate doom, bottle in the drawer. Many of my fellow officers in Third Arkansas kept a bottle in the drawer. Jed poured me a stiff drink. I started right in: “When Caleb thought about my possible departure, he said, spend Confederate money, spend a lot of Confederate money, going west. Hire Patrick and Sid Casey, the whole trip, Pat will protect, Sid will cook, and you can let go of them in St. Louis. Be up to them whether to come back to Athens, back to the war, or find work in St. Louis and start a new life outside Georgia. Do Ma Casey that big favor. She’s lost her brother, two cousins, a son in law, and she’s no Confederate lady, I can tell you that. Pat is her oldest, and her prize. He has a letter from the sheriff affirming his age. Makes no difference to the conscription police. Pat could be a six-footer. Hire Pat. Pat will fetch the rabbit; Sid will dress and cook it. Take them away from Georgia, away from our benighted South, this is Ma’s plea.”

Without any hesitation Jed said that G&S would provide the Casey lads with a strong set of mules, good for the journey. “Damn that Caleb Croker,” he said, “wicked clever like Sophie at these solutions, always working the quid pro quo. You want to go. They need to go. If you go alone, you’ll be dead before you get to Chattanooga. I don’t care how scary you look. You’ve got horse, clothes, weapons, and at some point, you’ll want to sleep. Desperate people are in the countryside, homeless folk, burned or bombed out of their homestead. Roads are clogged, wagons on the crawl. Go with Pat and Sid Casey, be their uncle returning them to their dying mother in St. Louis, and sleep wherever, your saddle bags safe, Pat and Sid on the watch.”

I knew the dangers. “Um,” I said.

“I know you know the dangers,” Jed said. “You’ve some kind of plan.”

“I do,” I said.

“Can’t be as good as Caleb’s,” Jed said.

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Pat and Sid were in the back country working on a relative’s farm and they were also in hiding. Pat was almost a six-footer and I can tell you he would look mighty good in Confederate gray. I’d want him for C Company. He’d be another “Star” in my front line. I was fleeing the war. They were fleeing the war. I sat with Ma Casey and worked out the transaction. How much would I pay the lads in addition to their daily maintenance and how much would I pay Ma Casey for suffering their loss. Also, I said to Ma Casey, I will buy Pat and Sid new suits when they reach Memphis, and I mean new suits, shirt and tie, vest and brass buttoned coat. Of course, new boots. They’ll be proper young gentlemen on the steamboat going north to St. Louis.”

Tears were rolling down Ma Casey’s wrinkled cheeks as she promptly signed the contract papers. She also said: “God bless Colonel Finn,” which I took as absolutely profound, as her personal blessing, an emanation sent my way to tickle my sixth sense, such a good sensation for believers in Luck.

So that was how I gained my new troop, replacements for the lost Ambrose brothers, Homer and Jesse. My name was still “sir.” Every morning after breakfast I laid out the map for the boys and showed them where we were going and what the problems were,

and they said “Yes, sir.” We made our traverse, were twice embattled, forced to chastise certain arrogant intruders. We bought our food when we could, bought an amazing apple pie at one farm, otherwise foraged, Pat always bringing something back to camp, a squirrel, a meadow bird. We traveled mostly at night, often with other parties headed west to Memphis, wagon wheels rumbling and creaking, two of us sleeping in the saddle, one of us awake, vigilant, leading.

Next, lights of Memphis, Pat and Sid in their new suits.

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In St. Louis, Mrs. Phelps wouldn’t see me.

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I sat in a stupor staring at the dark window. Night had come on.

Knock on the door. Who do you think it was? It was the Enlightenment Army. I considered myself probably a non-person in the Army, my very survival suspicious, the failed so-called conspiracy seemingly taking everyone down except me. I could not call upon any of the important persons Cousin Isaac told me to call upon when immediate help was needed. They certainly did not call upon me. Living in Athens, I was inside Confederate life. In St. Louis, once again a free city, Mrs. Phelps would not see me. Her husband and the father of her children was missing, probably hung for treason, people said, and his best friend, his close associate, was alive and free.

Here, several days later, at Mrs. Granger’s Colonial Inn, was Mr. Clive Higgins, clerk in a not named Judge’s city chamber, telling me that the Enlightenment Army in Missouri was already back in business, tactically fading into the Republican Party to support their Governor Tom Fletcher’s excellent program, at the same time organizing a secret military unit, a sort of flying column, that would operate in all the counties, confronting and challenging Democrat murder squads, hooded night riders, at loose in the countryside, shooting white and black Republican voters.

Click, went the manacle on my wrist. I forgot I was in the Army. It was such a vague Army. You never saw anyone, or knew anyone, and yet intense communication could start up at any moment. Knock, knock. Here was Clive Higgins, and we were, I immediately understood, co-conspirators of some kind. He was a blunt fellow. I didn't have political value. I was unelectable. I was the wrong kind of war hero, Confederate. Cousin Isaac had answers to all that, but I forgot what they were. You're not going to be the governor, Higgins said, but you can still contribute to the cause.

We sat in semi-darkness; the lamp lit low. I had nothing to offer him, whiskey, cigar, mineral water. I was feeling black, not at all hospitable, but I would listen. "Well," said Higgins, "you rode with Captain Billy in '58, you know what guerrilla warfare is. When the big war is over, our Missouri rebels will fade into the Democratic party and continue their proslavery fight in the countryside, count on that. It is already happening. Here comes the great Confederate conqueror, General Sterling Price, with his Army of Missouri, and we easily crush the fool and send him reeling, but where are his irregulars, his Bushwhackers, they're dispersed, they remain a formidable enemy. We're considering the formation of a special brigade, we'd call it that, actually it would be a small command, ten to fifteen people maybe. I know you've been shot full of holes, but you are still strangely fit, and we know, people have told us, your elite soldiers in Third Arkansas were famously disciplined and efficient, just what we want, our actions always controlled, specific. Everyone says you are the only man to lead this special brigade."

I was silent.

Higgins also silent, his thin face in shadow, his hands folded in his lap, waiting.

I was thinking of Isaac Phelps and the abiding mystery of his connections and arrangements. Where did this strategy meeting take place and who was there, sitting and smoking with Judge Phelps? I owed my selection to the Judge. Dead, he remained a force in Army planning. What should we do now? Isaac Phelps always had an interesting opinion.

Higgins was rising. "We're prepared to leave you alone, Colonel Finn, with best wishes and deepest respect."

Still silent, I reached to shake his hand.

He said quietly: “We’re in the service of a free Missouri.”

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I stayed on at the Inn. I had word from a local banker that Sophie Grahame sent me a message, now considerably late in arriving, no doubt by a special messenger, so I delayed my departure for Hannibal. Best to keep a stable address, the chances of delivery otherwise perilous. It was comfortable at the Inn. A war widow, Mrs. Granger from the start gave me privileges and favors, thinking I was eligible. She would bring me hot tea and a warm biscuit late at night as I sat in my room working on the memoir. She was thrilled to know that I was writing my memoir at her boarding house. When the memoir was finished, I told Mrs. Granger, I would return to my social life. I missed Pat and Sid, their happy inconsequential blather, as I sat silent at Mrs. Granger’s table, listening to the other boarders contest the news.

In the great world, here comes Confederate Sterling Price into Missouri with his state guard, his eye on our complacent St. Louis happily collaborating with its federal occupation force. More unwelcome knocking on my door. Mr. Edward Mason, on the City Council, an administrator, offers me a commission in the Missouri State Guard. General Price will give me an important command. Our victory, the fall of Republican St. Louis, the restoration of Confederate rule in the trans-Mississippi, that is precisely what the South requires, Colonel Finn, in order to force the North to negotiate a ceasefire and strike an equitable deal to end the war.

Well, seems like next day, there goes General Price with his shattered Guard tumbling south in Kansas, south in Arkansas, wrong way, and what about those gentlemen in long coats and wide brimmed hats, Price’s auxiliaries, his appointed bushwhackers? They melted away, went back to their firesides, put away their musket, milked the cow, and waited for instructions. I’m sure I knew many of them. They hated antislavery Republican Missouri, my homeland.

“I’m an independent in the Enlightenment Army,” I said, “and I fight on my terms. That was always my understanding with Judge Phelps. He knew my exclusions and exceptions. Often, he simply ignored my protest. Judge Phelps was too theatrical.

That was largely his undoing, also his drinking. But you know that, Mr. Higgins. Tell the committee I consider myself still in the Army on those original terms.

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I lingered in St. Louis, enjoyed the comfort of my room, wrote ten pages a day on Caleb's excellent stationery, dined on Mrs. Granger's special fare (I was a retired wounded veteran), and usually took a stride for exercise in the evening. At the end of the stride, Finnegan's Saloon, a noisy place with quiet corners, just my ideal saloon. Regulars soon knew who I was and then I had their amiable deference. Among them, late of Hannibal, Mo., one Eugene Crawford, quick to exploit his advantage. He knew of me, he knew of Tom Sawyer, he knew of the whole gang, and could say where everyone presently was, above and in the ground. Back in the day Eugene was a church choir boy who enviously witnessed our juvenile pranks from a sanitary distance. We mostly drank champagne in Finnegan's Saloon and we had a quiet corner.

"Tom Sawyer, left leg, below the knee," said Eugene, "Amy Lawrence, widow, three children, owns two residential houses and three downtown commercial buildings, property inherited from the brief second husband, just months enlisted, clipped at Shiloh."

"Becky Thatcher."

"Dead," said Eugene.

The message from Sophie never arrives.

I sat with Eugene Crawford, sometimes also Claude Boray, French Canadian merchant stranded in wartime St. Louis, and one-eyed Charlie Hewitt, clerk in the central G&S bank in St. Louis, all friends of Caleb Croker. We were a genial company of friendly strangers brought together by Claude Boray's magical production of exciting champagne and the fact that they were all citizens of St. Louis's demimonde. As Caleb's good sensitive friend, I had an immediate pass to their society. We sat at the same corner in Finnegan's. I needed the pop and fizz of their raillery, Confederate Tennessee collapsing at Franklin and again at Nashville, finally an entire army (Dads, sons, cousins, uncles, et cetera) everywhere defeated (divisions, brigades, regiments)

ceasing to exist. At our table we wanted the Confederacy to lose as rapidly as possible, and yet our local people were lost in those battles.

We lost Patrick Cleburne, a star division commander, a real Confederate hero, not someone like me, shot, again and again. We knew of Cleburne in the Enlightenment Army, a senior Confederate army officer who argued within the bounds of Confederate patriotism that Confederate independence could only come about with the emancipation of its slave population and the enlistment of its manpower. Wasn't that article three in Isaac Phelps's manifesto? Cleburne was shot in the field at Franklin, Tennessee, just before Christmas. In our conversation Claude Boray referred to Cleburne. He was, said Claude Boray, the epitome of a tragic Confederate hero, bravely dead for a wrong cause. "He didn't want that job," said Charlie Hewitt. "You're a much better Confederate hero." We clinked glasses.

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I thought I could better endure the cold drippy mid-Mississippi winter in St. Louis. Two good restaurants, two fairly interesting newspapers, a friendly well-furnished saloon, Mrs. Granger's infatuation serving me with welcome gifts and comforts, happily received. She would have her satisfaction in due time, I thought. It was, for the moment, a good ordinary life. Claude knew a telegrapher in the Commandant's office. We had the news before anyone else. Then, spring looming on the horizon, an early evening at Finnegan's, quietly celebrating recent Union victories, toasting General Sherman who had turned the corner at Savannah and who was coming north, Eugene Crawford, Hannibal, Missouri, the Big Subject, and I took a walk. I knew at the first step that I shouldn't have consented to Eugene's invitation, that he had a situation to present, some difficult complex thing, and my mind was still bubbly from the table, my mood jovial, I didn't think I could turn to it.

Some major military fight is probably going to happen in or around Hannibal, soon, and I am on the spot, a military hero, I know every crack and crevice in the twin counties, Ralls and Marion. Hannibal of course is of several minds in each county, mostly mean, mostly proslavery. On this walk we're talking about the good Hannibal:

Eugene's Protestant parents, his abolitionist comrades, poor folk, white and black, truly Christian women. Not a lot of firepower there.

We were walking at night, St. Louis fragrant with spring flowers. "I respect your silence on the matter," said Eugene. "You're not ready to ask the hard questions. But I know what the situation is in Hannibal. People know you are in Missouri, probably St. Louis, and they expect you to arrive, to do something, to say something."

We were walking down a deserted residential street, past a white picket fence, Eugene said: "Tom Sawyer," and I said, "captured second day at Shiloh, was a prisoner up north in Illinois." That was all I cared to know at the moment. We walked on, turning onto the street that would return us to Finnegan's. I needed a drink. "There's more to the story," Eugene said quietly. "Tom Sawyer lost his lower left leg in a prison fight; I don't know the details. No one in Hannibal knows. A Confederate horse doctor also in the camp went to work on Tom Sawyer's bad leg with a crosscut saw and saved his life. Tom's back, paroled, doing legal work in downtown Hannibal, preparing wills and contracts, advising folks, and also, as an unreconstructed rebel, he's in thick with Arabella Watson's crowd. There's more, but this is enough for now. He sends his regards." Here again was Finnegan's Saloon, an uproar of drinkers, thank God.

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I had already planned my departure. I would complete my spring in St. Louis, finish this middle section of the book, enjoy Charlotte Granger's company, savor my evening libation with Caleb's crew, let the war, for now, slide by me. I gave bone and muscle and teeth to the Army of Northern Virginia. I deserved a measure of rest and recreation. The war was grinding down and sputtering out. I thought it would be over in early summer, and then would come the brutal aftermath everyone dreaded. Vengeance, sayeth the Lord, and a whole population of black people, formerly enslaved, will emerge from the invisible, and we will look at each other, face to face.

"Don't go back to Hannibal," Charlotte Granger said. "Hannibal is just a poor broken down sideshow in Missouri politics. If you must go, go at Easter time. Uncle Bernard is

coming up from Baton Rouge and he would not be pleased to find a turncoat rebel comfortably residing at the Inn." She put a warm slice of apple pie in front of me.

Later, in my room, on my writing table, I studied the calendar. I would leave April 15.

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Lincoln, shot!

Assassination politics, I immediately thought, Knights of the Golden Circle, with secret Canadian support, that was the game. Hit them hard, the ones you can catch. Confederate Justice took down Judge Phelps's Enlightenment Army faction, whatever it was, in a few days. I was scheduled to swing in a few days. Finnegan's was closed, but the saloon had back rooms that were almost always open, so I promptly went to the green room looking for my gang, and there they were, primed, ready to go, waiting for me, for my framing judgment. I hadn't thought that much about President Lincoln as a man. He had to win, and he had, and now he was dead.

"Let Canada tremble," said Claude Boray. "French Canada, English Canada, it doesn't matter. Confederate spies and secret agents have always been welcomed in both Lower and Upper Canada, especially Lower Canada. We've given safe haven and material support to incendiaries and assassins. I've no doubt Canadians are involved in this conspiracy, giving money, making bombs."

A Knight of the Golden Circle had recently tried to enlist Charlie Hewitt in their bold venture, relocating the Confederacy to central America and the Caribbean. "It is probably a Knight, maybe two," Charlie said. "The Knights need a shock to re-energize Confederate people everywhere. You may simply outnumber us in the field, but we can easily murder your president. We're a scorpion people, a scorpion nation. As you crush us, we will sting you. If it is the Knights who did the deed, run for the hills, my Southern brothers."

"What if it is someone from St. Louis?" Eugene Crawford asked. "Could be martial law in the city, everyone suspected, soldiers knocking on doors. And what if the assassin is from our community, our brotherhood, police will look to search us out. Life will get fairly tense for us. Life will demand vigilance."

I was grateful to them for diverting the conversation. When Cousin Isaac thought I might be the first postwar governor of Missouri, the perfect mismatch of allegiances, he was always wanting me to read Lincoln's campaign biography and I did finally and I really liked it, it was funny and it was factual, mostly, but not for me, I'm writing my *Life* only once, and I'm putting it all in, Mrs. Susan Mary Tibbs, and the wages of sin, Sophie Grahame, girl genius, everything.

It is highly possible, I was also thinking, I know the fellow who shot Lincoln. Crazed proslavery secessionists were everywhere in the South. You could be talking to a mild pious gentleman and say a few wrong words, trigger words, and he'd explode, angry Bible verses flying everywhere. Ordinary people in the South were fuming, wanting to blame and punish whatever persons were responsible for their misery. Then, too, the killing might have been a cold controlled action devised by the likes of that Joseph Henderson and his crowd in Confederate Justice, and we'll never catch the villain, his entrance and exit meticulously planned.

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I came into Hannibal on the night packet. I didn't notify anyone of my arrival. Thank God, Mrs. Benson's boarding house was still in business, Mrs. Benson alas no longer living. The place lacked the old homey feel that she had imparted to it, bread baking in her kitchen, fresh flowers set about. A sour faced old biddy manned the reception desk. The air was stale. There was dust on the reception desk. Home, sort of. I brought Jack Grahame here after I rescued him from the mean lads who were persecuting him. We plotted futures in this room, smoking and drinking, Jack explaining his genius sister, never once referring to the coast line of western Italy impressed upon her visage. Home was lethal for Jack, any home. First night at this new Mrs. Benson's boarding house, I pulled back the coverlet and discovered sheets that were neither fresh nor tightly fitted. My heart sank.

There is an uproar in the town. Folks say Jim Watson, who might have been laying it to skinny Miss Caroline Watson, who came away after her death with his freedom, her name, and $800, that infamous guy is back, boldfaced, in Federal blue with gold braid, a

salaried officer in the newly established Freedmen's Bureau. He's got a special room all to himself in City Hall not far from the mayor's office. He's going to bring complaints and charges against many people in Hannibal at present living comfortably in their snug homes. He is not your friend. Sergeant James Watson. He's good friends with the provost marshal, what's his name, Jerry Lynch. I've seen them at the backside of Ma's tavern eating ribs and drinking Dutch lager, thick as thieves. Jim Watson spit in our face in 1859, before the war, and now, after the war, Sergeant James Watson has come to take our property. See how he ambles around town as if it already belonged to him. That's what folks say.

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Everything, buildings and streets, looks smaller and poorer. A single stack steamer is docked at the big wharf. Here and there a wagon, a cart, someone pulling or pushing a load, and it was raining. My first home, Hannibal's port, needed paint. The ugly jail where Pap had ruled and ranted was still there, still in residential use. On my walk, as I lingered in front of it, keeping a respectful distance; the door, hanging on loose hinges, was pushed open and a black man, shirtless, in raggedy trousers, came out and stood in front of it, coldly, if not hatefully, glaring at me. Whatever mean thing I was planning to do, he was ready to deal with it. I backed away and moved on. I didn't recognize anyone in or about city hall. It needed paint. James Watson was in the countryside explaining a new federal benefit to poor black farmers I went to Tom Sawyer's law office in the Warren Building. He was in St. Louis on a business trip, expected back around the end of the month.

I had moved out of Mrs. Benson's boarding house and was now residing in Hannibal's best hotel, which was, I think, what it was called, "Hannibal's Best Hotel." It was average to poor, I'd say, a step up from Mrs. Benson's. There was a small uncomfortable drinking salon with an ignorant bartender. I was soon spending much of my time at Ma's tavern, front and back. Early on a drunk gent recognized me and then again, I had a certain fame, not as a military hero, though everyone had to observe my scarred face, but as the boy wonder who, along with the other boy wonder, Tom Sawyer,

had discovered a buried treasure chest just outside of town, and they were both instantly wealthy, Huckleberry Finn wisely keeping his fortune, Tom Sawyer unwisely losing his fortune. It was a story told to me by this and other drunk gents, and did I still have all those rubies and emeralds?

Hot sweet ribs, Dutch lager, and the admiring company of amiable drinking companions, it tenderizes and dissolves your dark thoughts. Was I back in Hannibal to buy properties? Did I know that Jim Watson was now a black man with power and money? Did I see what Arabella Watson did to the original Douglas manor? I had. The manor now had wings and towers and a spiked iron fence inclosing it. Nobody liked Tom Sawyer. Not married. Probably no longer interested, leg gone and what else, said one drinking companion. Took Lee's surrender hard, another companion said, be careful what you say around him.

I began to relax with them, I explained my scar, showed them Sister Susan's dental device, described the blitz that knocked me down at Gettysburg, and soon I was beginning to feel good about myself. These citizens, front and back at Ma's, would happily vote for me, if I ran for any office. I could see that. I was a certifiable Confederate hero, regard the scar, and I was also, I was open about it, an abolitionist Republican. How did Cousin Isaac put it, all the time, I was like Abe Lincoln, I was bisectional. The leader of the new United States, Cousin Isaac always said, had to be at least bisectional. Biracial, multiracial, these identities were never mentioned, though several of these identities were present at Ma's on all those evenings. Hey, Charles. Hello, Shorty. You could feel good and at ease at Ma's, but as soon as you stepped back onto the street, you were back in the middle of the nineteenth century, you were in sweaty tense Hannibal, where sides were regathering.

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Then Jim Watson was back in town and I must say my heart was aflutter when he sent word that he wanted to see me. And when I saw him, first off, at his little riverside house, I was surprised. He was no longer brawny with the lithe body of a theatrical dancer, no longer a handsome young man. In shirt sleeves, in suspendered trousers, early evening, he came to the door to let me in. We were going to dine together, grilled fish and greens, pretty much the food we ate in the old days on the river, but this wasn't the same Jim. He was thin and a little crook-backed, bent is the word, his glossy African black skin had faded to a rusty brown, his nappy hair grayed and receding, and to top it all off he was wearing large spectacles the size of goggles. He looked like a middle-aged addled schoolteacher. Jim never knew his precise age. He might be, I'd guess, in his mid-thirties, but he looked like a fellow in his sixties. Of course, I didn't look much better, my scarred face, et cetera.

We stood and took each other in, silently.

Then Jim said: "We've got to do the old thing first," and we went to his table where he had set our plates. We sat, put elbows on the table, grasped each other's earlobes, and went brow to brow. Jim had a good smell back on the river, I can't say what it was, maybe the smell of just picked weeds. He still had a pleasant herbal smell. He had taken off his glasses. Used to be he impressed his superior power on me, little Huck, but gently, with restraint, and I clung to his ears, my brow against his, not intimidated, not fearful. It was, I suppose, a rite of respect. Color, age, power, ability. We had to get along. Now, in fact, I had the superior power, my brow pushed his brow back, but the exchange of respect was still the same.

His big yellow dog came up and sniffed us, as if to say, what's up, are going to fight? Jim let go and we relaxed. He had dogs, at least five outside, vigilant guard dogs, and two inside, this big yellow one, and a smaller longhaired dog who didn't approach you, who was the scary one in the inside pair. When I came riding up to Jim's house, a brown lad came out of a shed and had to beat the outside dogs back with a big broom.

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“I know what you’ve been up to,” Jim said. “Fighting in the wrong army, getting shot up at Antietam, taken in by the rich and powerful Grahames of Georgia, shooting a Grahame woman, right on her porch step, people say, everybody in town has the story and an opinion of what you will do now in this postwar life. I, too, wonder.” The big yellow dog stood by Jim’s chair at the table and Jim fed him a morsel of fish. We were having fish even though Jim knew I detested fish, especially catfish, but that was what he had and a sauce, so it wasn’t too bad. The dog padded back to its rug by the stove and lay down with a thump, the shorthaired dog simply regarding me with its cold measuring eyes.

“I will tell you this,” Jim continued. “When we parted last time and I took off in that puny little rowboat, I was scared out of my mind. I didn’t think I was going to make it. You know how big and shifty that river is. Well, I played the currents, I played the wind, and I got to Cairo. I found Mr. Edward Bailey and then I was in the circuit.”

I was trying to imagine his arrival in Cairo, where he came in on that little boat, where he hid it, then his moving carefully into the shadowy outskirts of Cairo, all this in moonless dark, looking for the house with a cross upright on its front roof.

“But guess what, Huck, guess what happened next to me? I was put into a cold dark root cellar with only one dirty dinky window and I was there for weeks on end, three for sure I figured. I was right back where I was in the shack on the Phelps farm, miserable, only now without the crazy talk of you boys, but talk all the same, human contact. I was fearfully alone in that root cellar. Every other day old Mrs. Bailey came down to pick up my bucket and give me cold food scraps, saying almost nothing to me, treating me as if I were some kind of animal.” Outside the dogs were suddenly restless, barking and growling. We paused to listen. I ate the grilled bony catfish, methodically chewing, and took up some steamed greens. It was the same slop I ate as an orphan boy in Hannibal.

Jim liked it. “Pour some of this sauce on the fish,” he said.

“We were waiting for transport,” Jim said, “and it was very dangerous. Once or twice a week, the police visited us, with a slave catcher, maybe two of them, and they would tramp around on the floor above me, cursing Mr. Bailey, pushing him around, threatening him. I listened to these bastards talk. Everyone in Cairo knew Ed Bailey

was a bad fellow. Nobody would much care if they killed him. He was a violent antislavery man who hated the police and the slave catchers who persecuted him. Often there was a scuffle, heavy breathing, grunts. Word was Ed Bailey never gave a fugitive slave up, though he didn't love the knee-grow, nor did Mrs. Bailey. When the slave catchers insisted on visiting the root cellar with their lanterns and clubs, I was in my big burlap bag, wedged between barrels, a sack of potatoes. I didn't move, hardly breathed. I sometime slept in that coarse scratchy sack. Days went on forever, nights even longer. I sometimes thought I might go crazy, but I had a purpose, Huck, I had a destination, and I was going to get there, war or no war. I would return to Hannibal and square my deal with Arabella Watson, Copperhead Queen of the four counties. In the dark, in the cold, I planned that return, I clung to that scheming, and here I am."

We had hard cider to drink. I never cared for hard cider but that was what there was to drink. I had grown to like other kinds of drink. I had grown to like cuisine, that's what dinner was called on the steamboats, and at the Grahame mansion cuisine was often what we had to eat. I studied Jim's strange new face. He wasn't a handsome dude any more.

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"Then one morning the trap door was flung open and I came up the stairs into the world humanity inhabited, sunshine in the window, rug on the floor, rocking chair by the stove, Mrs. Bailey fixing me a package of travel food. I was off, out of the root cellar, but still I had to climb into my burlap bag and be a sack of potatoes, now in a wheel rumbling wagon pulled by stubborn mules, a profane teamster cracking his whip and cursing the mules, two pulling hard. We were in a train of wagons. At night I was let out to stretch my legs and do my business. I had Mrs. Bailey's hard bread to chew, and a wrinkled dried apple. I had three apples and I carefully measured them out. Other fugitives emerged from the wagons and stood about, three women, one man. They ignored me. I kept to myself. I slept in my burlap bag and then it was morning and the wheels rumbling again. We were on our way to Cincinnati. The first driver of the wagon train had charge of us, a mean sonofabitch who would never let us forage for food at

night though at times we were parked right next to fields and streams where you could easily catch a fish. Eat it raw. Never got there."

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"Lord God, Jim," I said. "I had no idea."

"Well," said Jim, "in Cincinnati everything changed. Church people took us on. We got bathed, we got fresh clothes, I got shoes. There were tents for men and women, comfy considering what we had all been through, tents with beds and blankets. They hid us among revival people. Hot food. Last hot food I tasted was with you on Jackson Island back in dear old Missouri. In Cincinnati my life began to change. There were ten of us and we went to school in an actual school building. I got to know a Judith and a Reuben enough to exchange pleasantries. Books, Huck, you can't believe what books looked like to me. Hard covers, soft covers, paper pages, each page blocked out with print. Dead people talking to you. When teacher would ask us questions, I always had the answer. I scrawled my name, James Watson, and I wrote simple sentences. I did very well in Cincinnati, but it was like it always is with me, I was lonely, I couldn't share my private thoughts with teacher or my fellow pupils. Judith Simpson, that was her name, she made a stab at getting me to open up, but what could I say, there was murder in my heart and murder in my thought, everything I was doing was to get me back to Hannibal and there I would do the murder that would give me justice. Judith was thinking about her future as a free person. Not me. We studied the same book, made the same recitation, but I was lost to her friendly overtures."

I was thinking of Jack Grahame, how we promptly disclosed our private selves to each other in Hannibal, no problem, though he was a rich boy and I was a poor one, how, on the raft, Jim would go off on long rambling meditations about his dreams. He wanted to join up with a circus, jump the dance black people did; he wanted to sing songs, and be funny, make people laugh. I couldn't join him in this dreaming, I couldn't dance a lick or sing a silly song, I was just his sympathetic audience on the raft. "What you want to be?" Jim would ask. "Where you going to go when we get off the river?" Back then I had no idea. Future was the next day.

Jim was scraping his plate into a pail. I was thinking what happened to the exuberant boy-man who entertained Tom Sawyer's Gang in Hannibal? This is what happened: a root cellar in Cairo, Illinois, a long slow wagon train across several states, life in a burlap bag, a free boy-man in constant solitary confinement. And then his civil war struck him. His lean black brown face, his bent skinny frame, those goggle glasses. I did not know this James Watson, who must be in his middle thirties. There was no fun his eyes. He was very serious even as he had scraped his plate. He was serious coming back to the table, steadily looking at me, a scarred killer of men and women, a Confederate hero, his long-ago little raft brother.

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"And then here's the big thing that happened," Jim said. "You might ask why I didn't become a preacher in Boston or a teacher in Philadelphia, I was that quick in my learning. I was smart, but for no good purpose. We were living in Hazeltine Village, this place that antislavery church people had constructed for fugitive slaves: church, meeting hall, several small houses, cottages, really, our founder and leader, the Right Reverend Josiah Hazeltine, lived in one of them, also two small dormitories, and that small tent city. We had our own police and several enforcers, local men from the adjacent countryside. Hired detectives and professional slave catchers knew Hazeltine was not on their map. The thing is, Josiah Hazeltine, at God's great command, did not know what to do with us once we were rescued and educated. Nobody outside the Village wanted us. Some went north to Massachusetts. Some chose Canada at the crossing in Buffalo, New York. To do what, no one knew. I hate white people, no personal insult intended." He looked at me, soberly. I nodded. I sort of did, too, hate white people. "Thing is," Jim said, "white people don't love us, can't like us, or maybe it is the other way around, they can't love us and don't like us. In any instance, we're screwed. We need them for essential services. All they want from colored people is to use us, to steal our labor, even when we're free. Which they openly do, north, south, profit in slavery." "Amen, brother," I said, without thinking. "I never had a civil word with the Right Reverend, "Jim said. "It was his doing, that fateful change in my life, so here I

am, Huck, your same old Jim, but bitter, bitter." He wanted me to say it, that white people in the North, in the South, were the same. Still, He thought the provost marshal, Jerry Lynch, a white person, was trustworthy in his dealing with black people. There were exceptions and he didn't have to say it, I was an exception.

"It was the Right Reverend who got Major Robert Barkley to come to Hazeltine to meet me. It was the second year of the war. Black people free and slave simply believed the Union Army would just walk down to Richmond and hang Jeff Davis from a sour cherry tree. I did, too. Southerners didn't have an army. They just had militias. Union Army had all the cannon and all the ammunition. Well, you were there, Huck. The South found an army somewhere. The Union army soon needed more men and we sons of Ham were readily available. I was enlisted as a corporal. Major Barkley and I began to canvass the Middle States looking for likely young black men on farms, in factories, to serve as leaders of the forthcoming black regiments. I gave speeches in black churches wearing my nice new blue uniform, stripes and all. We did a good job, but not once did I ever dine with Major Barkley or sleep at his hotel or boarding house. He kept a proper distance and I was always Mr. Watson or Corporal Watson. I stayed with black church people, ate their food, and never really got to know any of them either. I couldn't join them in their prayers. Their God talk disgusted me."

It was growing dark outside, the evening spent, and I could see that Jim was only halfway through his narrative. The unfailing awfulness of white people was weighing on me. I had just picked at my fish and greens. I was still hungry and thinking about the sausage soup I could get at the backside of Ma's. Jim wanted to fight in one of the colored regiments, to lead a company just as I did in the Third Arkansas. It was so curious, the way our lives paralleled during the war. But Jim couldn't run, couldn't carry a backpack. That last long pull across the Mississippi, then that month of solitary in Cairo, much of the time forcibly curled up in a burlap bag, had done things to his back. He wasn't strong for military service and so the Army put him in an office in Washington, D.C. He was a translator, black speech into white English. He explained what and why black people wanted this or that. "I was liaison," he said. "I liked the title."

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“I know you have to go,” Jim said. “I can’t believe all this story has come out of me. I don’t share my life with anyone, but we had raft life together and you knew, more or less, that I had a wife and child. You and I grew up together in all that slave misery. Didn’t you used to say, you were Pap’s slave, that you knew first-hand what slavery was. Well, you have to go,” Jim saw or sensed my desire to leave his house and his dogs,” and I’m not through spilling my life story out to you. There was a white woman in Washington, a Quaker, plain and plump, and she got to me, she pried open several shut doors in my life.”

I was up and collecting my hat and coat. “Next time,” I said. “I’ll tell you some part of my story.” Jim was up, adjusting his glasses, buttoning up. “Well,” he said, “you shot a Grahame woman right between the eyes right there on her porch. What else is there to say, Huck?”

“Yes,” I said.

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I was to meet with Higgins and the district leader, one Oskar Dietrich, and get my instructions. I did not want to go into the field again, ride horse, sleep on hard ground, chew hard biscuits in a cold rain. I could do it, but I strongly did not want to. I did not want again to bond with a crew of miscreants and misfits, and then lose them one by one. I knew the talk almost word for word. All this sacrifice for a free and liberal Missouri. Oskar Dietrich fought for a free and liberal state in Germany and now he was fighting for a free and liberal Missouri in the United States. Democrats were vicious adversaries. There was no arguing with them on issues. Dietrich was a degreed chemist. He cooked up potions and salves. He made medicines. He also made bombs. I was honored that he had come personally to talk to me about what the Enlightenment Army was going to do in our district.

Eliminate Arabella Watson, I thought. Get to her before Jim does.

Madam Arabella Watson, Queen Copperhead of the four counties. Arch conservative, an antiwar Democrat, a despiser of the Union, she had come through the war her family firm intact and still profitable. She was a thick folder in Higgin’s private

safe. He was certain she had something to do with the shooting of Lincoln. Her thugs shot people down in the streets of Hannibal. She was the bank for Democrats opposing Republicans in state and local elections, and she gave money to several reactionary bands roaming about in our several counties, scaring Republican voters.

Arabella Watson hated black people, simple as that, a hatred magnified by the spectacle of Jim's return as Sergeant James Watson. He had her name. Arabella's illustrious grandsire, founder of the firm, was James Edward Watson. There was no doubt a small crowd of unnamed Watsons living their lives in our region. Jim was not a black Watson; he was the black Watson. The sign on his office door in City Hall: J*ames E. Watson,* spoke their connection. People in town who hated Arabella Watson (almost everyone) believed the ugly story that her addled sister had done obscene things with Jim. The firm, Watson, Inc. paid out $800 to a handsome young black man. Didn't this say that white Watsons had unjustly held and treated black people in bondage? $800 was a reparation, plain and simple.

Arabella Watson hated that transfer of eight hundred dollars from her white skinny hands into the strong black hands of Jim Watson. She didn't personally pay it out; a Watson lawyer did, but she dwelt on it, the counting out of the dollars, the outrage, the injustice, Jim's crime, his flight from bondage, handsomely rewarded. 1861, just as the war was starting, she hired Tad Cole, the best and most expensive slave catcher in the southwestern Confederacy, a specialist who could follow your runaway into large cities, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Cincinnati, cuff the person in broad daylight. She sent him forth with good money and if he could at last put a manacled Jim before her, to stand there in the glare of her scornful scrutiny, she would give Tad Cole big money. He went off and never came back. James E. Watson walked the streets of Hannibal. He was a person of consequence in its civic life.

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The day of Jim's arrival Arabella Watson withdrew from public life. She had an office and a board room in the rear wing of the mansion. Bank people, legal people, political people, came to her through a single gate that was guarded. Jim took the town simply by being visibly in it, free in his movement, in his socializing, but he did not enter her fortress. Hannibal had to do a delicate dance of compromise, not showing Sergeant Watson the slightest disrespect, yet anyone showing Jim decent recognition risked reprisal, Arabella vigilant. Everyone knew this, Eugene Crawford, Clive Higgins, reporters of the Hannibal scene, that James Edward Watson was the name of the great grandsire, founder of the Watson empire, his first fortune made in the Caribbean trade, slaves, sugar, rum. Arabella wanted the Watson name back, whitewashed, wanted a Hannibal court to declare Jim a rapist and a thief. She wanted, in whatever way possible, to own Jim again and then to have him sentenced to do punishing labor at the Hollister Farm where she had earlier sent his wife and child. Jim had a debt to pay off. He owed Arabella Watson $800. She wanted Justice.

Arabella Watson knew how to get her way. She neatly pulled her cotton empire through the war bribing Yankees, bribing Confederates, and here she was, still in charge, locked away in her castle, ruling Hannibal. The provost marshal came to Arabella Watson through the guarded gate to conduct necessary business. "Madam," Jerry Lynch called her, and the title stuck. As a proscribed person, Jim was possibly the only free person in town, not on her payroll, not obligated, fearless. He strolled about town, sat on a bench in the square reading a book, lounged on the courthouse steps chatting with lawyers, and he was always impeccably dressed, cool elegant lines.

Folks noticed that, of course, reports came back, almost daily, to Arabella Watson, who gave the Jim Watson file to a new attorney from Virginia, Joseph Henderson, the very same. He had a certain reputation, having once almost hung Huckleberry Finn for treason. That was out, people knew of it, that Colonel Finn was pardoned at the last moment, freed to come back into the political world, and here they were, Joseph Henderson and Colonel Finn. They ignored each other. Arabella Watson understood that her principal associate, Captain Thomas Sawyer, once had a close relation to Jim Watson, which he had not renounced, so Tom Sawyer was excused. We had random sightings of Joseph Henderson in Hannibal, a sober pale faced fellow, looked like an

undertaker. He was said to be buying up mortgaged properties. Didn't fool me. His eye was one me and certainly on Jim Watson. For the moment, James Watson, some kind of federal officer, was untouchable. Madam couldn't just have Jim eliminated. The provost marshal ate ribs and drank Dutch lager with Jim at the back bar of Ma's tavern.

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Truly the time had come for Arabella Watson to suffer a fatal accident. Whatever schemes Oskar Dietrich might bring me, I would see the intention of Isaac Phelps, master plotter. I had already plugged one proslavery Confederate woman, why not this one, a Confederate spider woman? Wasn't this the cold bitch who threw me out of the Hannibal house, a mere boy, who robbed me of an ordinary life as a dentist, a sensible future briefly considered in the Douglas household? Arabella punished Jim's family, sent his wife and disabled child to the work camp at Hollister's Farm. I could see Cousin Isaac's cocked eyebrow, his grimace, as he loaded my gun, metaphorically speaking. Hadn't I already schemed to kill Arabella Watson, the gang exploring the ways? Well, now I didn't have to worry about operating with a nitwit crowd. I would execute the assassination alone, simply, efficiently, her dying and death an abiding mystery. Cousin Isaac left the details to me.

Higgins, Oskar Dietrich, and I sat in the back of Ma's tavern at a far corner eating ribs and drinking Dutch lager. Higgins had rented a house downtown for Army business, we could always go there, but Dietrich insisted on an afternoon with Ma's ribs. He had a long list of names he wanted me to scan. Arabella Watson wasn't on the list. Our Army faction liked her just where she was. It was the young men around her, advisors, agents, what not, two or three of them in particular, who were the present danger. I saw the name Joseph Henderson, a mysterious new guy at work for Watson Enterprises. Someone had put question marks after his name. Did I know him? Yes. I thought I'd see him again. I hoped I'd see him again. He wanted very much to be the man who hung Huckleberry Finn for treason. Many people hated and feared Cousin Isaac. He knew too many secrets. If you were a friend or associate, those same people hated and feared you.

Thomas Sawyer, seventh name down.

"We know he was a boyhood friend," Oskar Dietrich said, "so you could be excused, and yet the very fact that you were close boyhood friends, makes you the perfect person to do the job. Sawyer actually has lurking guards, that's how important he is. You won't see the guards, but they're there, lurking. In a very short time Arabella Watson has come to depend on him. He found a way to focus her anger, arson always the last resort. You wouldn't believe how skilled he is in the art of voter intimidation, identifying voters, names, addresses, then marking their residence with a red mark. You went to bed unmarked and woke up marked. Red tag day. Nothing more is said, as to its meaning. New voters black and white who live in the red splashed houses are left to ponder their new situation. Who are the splashers? What is the message? He has other devices, often cruder, to get at what Arabella Watson wants.

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Higgins: "Tom Sawyer has that big office in the Warren Building. He walks around town, never mind the lurching gait, the swing of his wooden leg. He might play chess with Deputy Hale in the square and then, get this, he goes home to a small apartment in the back wing of the old Douglas manor. That's where he lives. Hard to get at him in that place and even harder to get out if you did get in. Dogs, guards, the fence, but you know this, this is the kind of work you did for Augustus Grahame in Georgia."

A ghost army was forming in the sweet Missouri countryside, Captain Thomas Sawyer was its leader, and I was to deliver a killing shot, of some kind.

Higgins paused, overcome by a sudden emotion. "We won this bloody war," he fiercely said, "I lost a brother, an uncle, three cousins, and by God we ended slavery in the United States, and yet here I am still dealing with these obstinate not surrendered moron Confederates. They want to combine their several outlaw bands into a little army. They want to create a new Confederate nation. This time we must show them no mercy."

It was finally Judge Phelps's position: assassination politics, drastic surgery, decapitation of the principal agents, no more wasteful charging back and forth, ranks

and ranks of falling men, no more expensive cannonades. Return war to personal combat. Oskar Dietrich was nodding as he listened to Higgins's tirade. "Just remember," he said when Higgins paused to draw breath, "these new Confederates, in their own special department, have also drawn up a list and most of you are on it. They will be hunting you as you hunt them."

This is my life, then, I instantly thought, this is what I've become, grown up, honorably served in the great Civil War, had sexual intercourse with a minister's wife, and I've shot a desperate crazed woman, right between her eyes. Also, I'm a Confederate military hero, seriously wounded at Antietam, knocked down at Gettysburg, and this is what I've become, not a general, not a governor, a sort of senior assassin available for special assignment. I'm writing my unique eccentric memoir to demonstrate, if only to myself, that I have indeed a singular life, that I exist apart from the machinations of Tom Sawyer and Jack Grahame, apart from the veiled orders Cousin Isaac sent my way, that I was only loosely in the Army of Northern Virginia, only loosely in the Enlightenment Army, always reserving my right to light out for the territories.

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Remember, first ten or twelve years, I lived every day in the immediate, doing slave labor, I did not have the concept of a future. The future was tomorrow, the same grind, another day of slave labor. That is what slavery is, labor, food, fuel. When I was a border ruffian, I rescued a school primer from a burning house in Kansas and read it by firelight on the prairie. It began with an illustration of a well-dressed teacher, her long hair up in a bun, standing before her desk, fingers touching the surface, addressing a large class, boys and girls in separate rows. Lesson I was Position. "Lay your hands upon your desk, side by side. Which side shall we call the right side? The left side?" I saw the sweet upraised faces of the students happy to receive this knowledge. Their hands were placed palms down on their desks. This is my right hand. Out there on the prairie, contemplating the page, I was sick with envy and anger. I did not receive that instruction. I could not march in military formation. I did not have right turn left turn on

automatic, soldiers would collapse behind me, I had to be prized for other military skills. What learning I had I got on the fly, from book loving boyhood pals, from lonely learned men like Caleb, from campfire comrades, Tom Whittington a Classics professor before volunteering, who was richly provided with example and analogy.

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A boy came with a note.

> T*uesday, seven, my office, Warren Building, cold supper, welcome home, Colonel Finn.*

The door guard at the Warren Building recognized me and said, as he unlocked the door, “Evening, Colonel Finn.” *Thomas Sawyer, Special Services,* was two doors down and his door knob turned easily. I was expected. I stepped into a dark deserted outer office. In the far-left corner, a solitary clerk, a young man in shirtsleeves, was at work studying documents, two oil lamps hung on his either side, a right side and a left side, I might add. I looked to greet him, but he did not look up from his labor. Next, Tom Sawyer is standing at the entrance to his inner office calmly regarding me.

Tom Sawyer, Himself. Good stature, standing on his two legs, one true, the other false, both handsomely booted, ready for the stirrup. Of course, one booted leg is removable, boot and all. Everything I once liked about his appearance, his look, his swagger, was still there, hair darker, beginning a tactical retreat to higher ground, his frame heavier, chest brawny from all the exercise on crutches, in and out of chairs, lifting the body up and down, his face still handsome, the eyes still bold and penetrating in their gaze, even as they were cruising my present appearance, frankly regarding my scar, frankly wondering why I am so skinny, almost gaunt.

“Huckleberry Finn, the Original,” he said.

“Tom Sawyer, Himself,” I said.

He was in a starched stiff white shirt, open at the collar, black suspenders, gray green military trousers, specially fitted, of course. I was in rags, comparatively speaking. “Alex will join us later for a bit of our cold supper,” Tom said, and we went into his office, Tom carefully placing his booted wooden foot, ka-schlep, ka-schlep, until he gained his leather chair and signed me into mine. His office had a virtual legal library on

its walls, centered by a majestic desk, clawed feet gripping the carpeted floor. We sat in a sitting space beside this looming desk. Tom produced a bottle and we drank a sweet wine he said was Portuguese sherry. Nice. "Gold oak," Tom said, toasting his desk, "home made in North Carolina by mountain people. This is Justice Cecil Colborne's desk. The Justice wrote memorable opinions defending private property on this desk. It was going up to Boston along with the rest of the Justice's portable estate, a private sale, when his bankrupt widow approached me with the plea to rescue an important remnant."

Tom reached out and grasped the edge of the desk. "Home," he said, "and history." It was a big heavy piece, hard to move, once planted, a lot of wood machinery to produce a writing surface the size of a checker board. I could see Tom Sawyer cranking up his explanation, as he always did, going into lecture mode. "So much of our beautiful South is being removed, Colonel Finn, carted off by vandalizing Yankees. Great families have been stripped of their treasures. I raised the issue of repatriation with Madam and she immediately saw the political value in the project, purchased this remnant and bestowed it on me, stored it with me, until she could establish a society and secure a museum hall for all the returned emblems of Missouri Confederate glory. She saw that it was a provocation, planting the flag once more, right off Main Street, a handsome new building, dedicated to the Right Cause."

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Tom seemed lost in his own self-centered thought. I say "seemed" because he never quite stood behind what he said. He was playing, he would say, just playing, being free with it, whatever game it was. Thing is, and I realized this early, there was no other position, no real Tom speaking, at least so it was with me. Tom playing was what I got from him as a boy, and so it was in this moment. There is no Tom not playing.

Remember, I'm thinking, Tom Sawyer, playing the captain of our boyish crew, brought me into a recognizable boyhood: bed, clean sheets, breakfast, dinner at four thirty, all this, and a make-believe outlaw's life at night, nocturnal prowling. Until I was eleven or twelve, I was in a state of nonbeing. Next, I was the smartest pupil in my

grade. Girls had crushes on Tom. I was his sidekick. They sometimes gave me a look, but just that, a thoughtful measuring glance. Tom's first big play, based on real events, brought a lost Becky Thatcher out of McDougal's Cave, but his last play, a dramatic production of Jim's final escape from slavery, hounds howling, shotguns banging, almost got us killed. He was, and probably still is, fundamentally, an idiot, and this thought gave me a certain easement. As I read in newspapers, John Wilkes Booth shouted: "sic semper tyrannis," when he jumped to the stage from the balcony where he'd just shot Abraham Lincoln. I'm sure Tom Sawyer concocted similar scenes in his imagined plays and had Latin lines like those to say.

"Madam actually said to me, our country is wounded, as you are. We will never recover our stolen property. Your leg is in the ground at Shiloh. We were defeated in the field, Lee surrendered, Lee signed a paper, yet here we are, still resisting, still contesting, and not just in all the languages and literatures, also in practical politics, often reclaiming actual territory. After sundown many counties in north central Missouri belong to us. She could say that, coldly, matter of fact, because everyone knew it was true, not a fantasy. Madam came late to her full sense of it, but she has power, Huck, and I know how to use the portion she grants me."

I didn't say anything, I just listened.

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"I do not hate black people," Tom said. "When Jim and I meet on the street, I nod and salute him. He returns the salute. I acknowledge that Jim has become Sergeant James Watson. We both know what a joker he was as a kid. He could jump Jim Crow, sing all the songs and do tricks. I'm not surprised he's made his way out of slavery, got himself educated, and now is a big boss in Hannibal."

Me: "Isn't Arabella Watson the big boss of Hannibal?"

"Not really," Tom said. "She owns everything and she runs everything, but she is almost invisible in the public mind. What does she look like? Most people have no idea. Every day Hannibal has to confront, face to face, Jim's knee-grow face, and, for the most part, fake their politeness. For his part Jim is the very model of civic decorum,

no doubt deftly faking his politeness. That's the ongoing situation. Sooner or later some local citizen will crack and shoot Jim. Jim might want that. What does he want, Huck? He's put Arabella Watson in prison. She won't leave her estate so long as Jim walks freely in Hannibal. Folks want to know what his plan is, where all this affront and insult is going. Would he be interested in relocation? He's made his point here in Hannibal, Madam has suffered his rebuke, time now to step away to some new project. Think of it, Huckleberry, a reprieve for Jim, to go on living in another town, what a blessing."

"Jim likes living in Hannibal," I said, "he has that place on the river just outside south town, almost in forest, you camped there when you were a kid, fish and birds abundant. Jim thinks folks will get used to him in his blue uniform. He'll do good things for the new Hannibal. If that drives Arabella Watson crazy, so be it." That was the story. I was through with the sherry. I was hungry. "Let's talk a bit more here in these comfortable chairs," Tom said, "and this is called schnapps," pouring. The chairs and the schnapps had also been rescued at the train station.

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"I suppose," Tom said, "you are still a radical abolitionist. No use arguing. You're in the business of rescuing black people. I can see the satisfactions. But look, Colonel Finn, you've abolished slavery. All those black people are loose in our world. They can go anywhere they want. They can do anything they want. Now you're free to choose any probable future in front of you. What are your plans? Just visiting Hannibal, your old hometown, the hogshead barrel you used to sleep in, the Widow Douglas's house, you were pretty cozy there, as I remember. If you're looking to settle here, remember Hannibal has the worst weather in the universe. Black and brown freed people are in the streets, in our stores, mingling. Every day there are collisions. We must bring an order to this mingling or general confusion is the consequence, people no longer knowing how to behave." He paused. "Have you come back to woo Amy Lawrence?"

I always tell the truth, you know that. I said: “I’m an officer in a private debt collection agency here on an assignment. And yes, I hope to woo Amy Lawrence, if she is still wooable. I’m back, of course,” I added, “to see you in your lair and Jim in his.”

“She is still wooable,” Tom said. He knocked back his third tube of schnapps and sat, musing, no response to my statement that I was still some kind of soldier. “I came back not so long ago from Camp Douglas broke and suicidal, missing a leg. Judge Decatur got me an interview with Arabella Watson. I went out there in a chair, too many long walks for my sore knee, too far for crutches, I hate crutches, and that was my winning play. A house servant wheeled me into her study, my trouser leg pinned up, and parked me right in front of her desk. Madam is a Confederate patriot, didn’t matter to her how I lost my leg, not in combat, in prison, I’d lost my leg at Shiloh, that was her decided understanding.

It was business love at first sight. She had a problem with a Baptist minister in Palmyra and she wanted me to help her think through her probable action. I knew the fellow, problem solved. Next, several troublesome lawsuits, again easily solved. Ned Yorke, Madam’s senior advisor, too cautious and too old, was retired. I was her legal expert. I couldn’t be her lawyer. I’m an unrepentant Rebel. I haven’t signed the Perfidious Oath. She knew of my resistance. Didn’t matter. She had legal lawyers; I was her illegal lawyer. Madam is just realizing her power and I know how to use it. She wants to build a new better slaveholding country, wants to regain our old beautiful South, to win elections, to get back the levers of governance in the four counties. I am really her prime minister, as everyone says, and all this promotion overnight.”

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“How old is Arabella,” I asked. “When I was a kid, I saw her only as a mean old spinster woman, prune faced, always scowling, so how old is she now, in her seventies, I suppose?”

“You’d be surprised,” Tom said. “She’s fifty-seven and fit as a fiddle. True, I live in her castle, in a very comfortable apartment, with all the amenities, rent free, but I protect her rear end, I sit up at night, reading law books. Any night stalking villain seeking to reach Arabella Watson from the back of her mansion has first to pass through my

apartment. My buffering residence gives Madam a certain luxury of strong protection, and I'm worth it, Huckleberry.

I live there and work here. I'm a one-legged man, Huck, and I'm in action. You, too, I realize, even though you've got a monster scar on your face. I heard they were thinking of running you for governor, making your ugly puss a positive thing. Nothing positive about a missing left leg below the knee, a missing foot, those little clenching toes. Madam is my missing leg and foot. Soon as she hired me, I was myself again. Next, I was in St. Louis getting fitted with a new prosthetic leg, thanks to Madam; then I was in Jeff City protecting titles, people very kindly in seeing me along."

Monster scar, I was thinking, ugly puss.

"She hates black people," Tom said. "I do not hate black people. I believe in the neighborly separation of the races as the shared goal of all social policy. What do you think of that statement? If ever I stand for political office, I'll use it. I like the fog that hangs about the adjective, neighborly."

Tom was up, drawing two dishes from a cabinet, slices of cheese, chicken breast, brown bread, and a little pot of honey. "What about your clerk, Alex," I asked. "He'll join us later," Tom said. "I have a proposal to put before you, one you will immediately reject, I know that, but I will make it anyway. I'm sure you can break your contract with this private agency. Your future is not in the debt collection business. High risk, low returns. There's a reconstructed military academy just outside Jefferson City, its previous faculty either dead in battle, (two persons), or fired (three persons) because they wouldn't swear the oath. Cadets are now all in federal blue, though they're mostly Southern boys. As a Confederate military hero shot to pieces at Antietam and a dedicated abolitionist, you're the man to be their new president. Pay is reasonable and you get to hire the new faculty.

If, on the other hand, you're tired of hearing the trumpet blow morning, noon, and night, think about the calm quiet of a newly established commercial bank in Kirksville. I happen to know they are looking for a vice president to take charge of their estate business. High level banking opportunities everywhere in Missouri. All that is required is your departure from Hannibal. Get out of town. Go a comfortable distance. Assume,

as best you can, political neutrality. Madam knows that you and Sergeant Watson plot and scheme at Ma's back bar, to do what, she can't figure out."

"She should worry about our Governor," I said. "Tom Fletcher's the one who abolished slavery in Missouri, who's trying to set up free schools for their children. Why does she fret about James Watson and Huckleberry Finn? We're small fry, absolutely no danger to Watson Enterprises. I'm not working for Jim and he's not working for me. We do talk about politics, national, state, and local, as everyone does."

Tom had regained his chair and was rubbing his left knee. "Please, turn around," he said. "I have to drop my trousers and rearrange the wooden leg. It is a blessing when it fits perfectly, the fake to the real. It is supposed to be a masterpiece, Austrian cherry wood, the straps, the braces, the cushions, everything neatly figured, tight and snug. That's what Dr. Herzog said in his St. Louis clinic. I had to learn to walk with and on his device. Swing, step, swing, step. I'm still learning." He was finished, I turned around and there he was, two-legged Tom.

"Really," he said, "there's nothing for you in Hannibal. You'll do me an immense favor if you leave. You're slipping into Madam's obsession with Jim. Not a healthy place to be. I'll get credit for your departure. If there's a bonus, I'll split it with you."

I stood up and thanked him. We agreed to meet again, soon, in the coming week perhaps. I was interested in all of his offers, to see what they said by way of cloaked, bribery and veiled threats. Tom had no real questions for me, no interest in what I thought about the world and my regained life in Hannibal. He ignored the several remarks I made about my mission in Hannibal. Alex, in coat and tie, opened both doors for me. We calmly regarded each other as we passed. I was outside the Warren Building. A light rain was falling. The portal sentry gave me an umbrella from his hall collection, to be returned, and I went off into the Hannibal night.

"This is the deal," I said to myself, rain drops pattering on my umbrella.

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Amy Lawrence. What was her married name? She was married several times, her last a young fellow, ten years her junior, and they were just married when he was shot

and killed at Shiloh. Tom said Amy was a rich widow. She inherited her young husband's properties. He was an only child who came from a rich family. At 21 he had land and slaves, at 23 he was dead in the woods at Shiloh. Amy was now comfortably living a seemingly sad life in mourning black. Tom did not care for Amy who had carried forward grudges and hurts from school days, who gave him a cold eye whenever they met in Hannibal. "Still," Tom said, "she remains an attractive woman. Every bachelor in town wants his turn with her. For good reasons she's had suitors and spouses." I was immediately interested in visiting Amy Lawrence, perhaps indeed to woo her, to be honest, but also because I was simply curious to see what she looked like, to hear what she had to say. I sent her a card asking to visit her and she promptly replied, yes, come midday to her residence, she had things she wanted to say to me. No evening dinner, no dessert and wine before a fire. A midday meeting, a canary singing somewhere in another room, full light pouring through the windows.

She'd best be on her guard, I thought. I will be formidable.

Amy Lawrence, whatever her married name, lived in a good sized three storey white frame house with a porch and shutters, and a white picket fence, just as I expected, and the older woman in a fancy white apron who let me in was just as I expected, and there, in the parlor, just as I expected, stood Amy Lawrence, the belle of my early boyhood years, and she said: "Huckleberry Finn, so you're now Colonel Finn, a big Confederate hero, shot five times at Antietam, you shot a Confederate lady dead on her porch step, justifiable homicide, folks say, but who knows what other skullduggery you've been up to? Folks say you might be the governor of our fair state one of these days. As I see it, you're still ragamuffin Huckleberry Finn, and truly you still look like that ragamuffin boy in long-ago Hannibal. Who cuts your hair? Where did you buy that suit?" She stood there, a stout person, a non-signifying woman, yet still the belle I knew in school, the girl who bloomed earlier than the other girls who were still flat-chested, their unready bodies tight and trim. Amy flowered, seemingly overnight, and immediately had Tom Sawyer as her pledged boyfriend.

I took It bravely. I said: "Amy Lawrence, our little plum in my youth, what kind of doctor problems have you had in the last five years?" Something of a learning from Sister Susan Feldkamp, ladies get moody in their thirties, why not ask, and under these

particular circumstances, she first unloaded on me? Her audacity freed me to say what I was thinking. "You have no children, Amy Lawrence. What are your reasons?" She reexamined me. "People in Hannibal are disappointed in your behavior, Colonel Finn," she said, "associating with Jim Watson and Jerry Lynch, coming back to us a Radical Republican, our supposed Confederate hero. Some people in Hannibal say the war isn't over, that it is again coming to a choosing of the sides. We assume you will support their side, which is disturbing to us, since we all know about your military competence. I can tell you right now, I am still a patriot of the Confederate nation. We are on opposing sides."

A pause, I stood soldier erect.

"We have no sentimental claims to declare," she said. "As children, we were not friends. You were the weird smart boy and I wasn't interested in that kind of boy when I was twelve. We girls adored Tom Sawyer. You know what the girls said about Huckleberry Finn, that he wasn't quite right in his head, couldn't dance, had no chance ever of becoming a gentleman, that he lived among black people, participated in their life, when an orphan boy, and still, as a grown person, enjoyed their pleasures, that Jim Watson, his best black friend, has a white wife somewhere up north."

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She waited for my response.

I thought it over. Her talk was utter nonsense. Amy Lawrence's South was gone and it wasn't coming back, so what was the denunciation about? Ragamuffin? She likes my ragged edge, maybe even back in the day. I thought I could see through her indignant speech as if it were a gauzy scrim, acerbic Amy here, ample Amy on the other side of the scrim, in a different silent language, taking off her clothes, unbuttoning her blouse, removing her stockings, even as acerbic Amy is speaking. Why was I summoned? We had no earlier tie of school friendship. Why was I here? People said Amy was political. Expect trouble. She wanted to size me up. I wanted to size her up. She slammed me. I slammed her back. That job was done, I figured.

Now, part the scrim.

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"Come here," I said to Amy Lawrence, who was drawn up, indignant, looking at me. waiting to hear my defense, my explanation. "She is open to abrupt change," God said to me. God sometimes intervenes on the side of a horny man. "She wants abrupt change." That was my first thought, that we could, in the fractious spirit of the reunion, go right to it. "Let's embrace", I said, "then see what happens, after all these years, Amy Lawrence." She was astonished, mouth ajar, but only for a moment and then her expression changed from hard calculation to a look of slow recognition. She blushed; her eyes sparkled. In our slams we somehow spoke directly to the real issue before us, she denounced me as a traitor, as a murderer, and I wanted to know why she did not have children, not realizing it was the secret sorrow that had Amy soul sick in her deepest privacy. What a surprise, little ragamuffin Huckleberry, Amy Lawrence, belle of the schoolyard, so to speak, confronting each other in their present maturity.

An immediate attraction, a surge of feeling, quickly traversed the space between Amy Lawrence and Mark Finn. As if entranced, Amy took a step forward, one step, pausing to acknowledge some remote qualm. I reached her, took her gently by the elbow, brought her into my arms. She totally gave herself up to ragamuffin Huckleberry, wriggled and wrestled her way deep into the embrace, her face against my breast, her tremulous ample body aquiver against mine. "Thank God," she said, Amy Lawrence, belle of our juvenile ball, still pretty, a tad fuller everywhere. She led me, wordlessly, to a second or third bedroom. I was in, snug.

She took hold of me as Sophie Grahame did, and next we were in motion. She said, "Oh, Huckleberry," and I said, "Not my name, really, but you can call me Huck. My real name now is Mark Finn." Still, motion, heavenly motion, dear Amy Lawrence. "Whatever happened to that Sophie Grahame?" Amy had by now thrown aside her negatives, taken charge from above, her look serious, and I'm lifting her as she sets a tempo. "People say you were her bodyguard and probably her lover." Amy Lawrence wondered. "Sophie was exiled to an island in the Caribbean," I said. "She can't come back." Amy didn't ask whether Sophie and I were lovers, or why Sophie was sent to

her tropical prison. It was not a story for these circumstances, Amy now moving below me, and I am positively aglow, suffused with well-being.

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Jim said something like this, I paraphrase: “Forget about my biography. I went into accelerated studies. My first serious instruction was at Hazeltine Village where I learned to read and write. I spoke in neighboring churches. I learned to be civilized, like you, Huck. I can see you’re civilized. You talk “civilized.” You might be a teacher in some local academy. I learned how to explain the knee-grow to ignorant white people. What is our grievance? Ask me, Huck. I’ll tell you my grievance. I’m here to kill Arabella Watson, to rub her out, to make her pay for what she did to my wife and child. These several months I’ve tortured her, strutting around in downtown Hannibal, Mr. Benefactor, making friends, handing out contracts, but I haven’t yet had the full pleasure of her suffering. I’m just embarrassing her. I haven’t yet figured out how to get Arabella Watson right before me, eye to eye, so that she knows that black James Edward Watson is killing her, and that this is but a short measure of the full retribution she deserves. She lives inside an iron mountain and Tom Sawyer sits guard at her door, polishing his cherry wood leg. At last, you’ve come, old Huckleberry Finn, as you did in the old days, to lift me over this obstacle.”

He did actually say “Tom Sawyer sits guard at her door.”

“Suicide,” I said, “I won’t give you that help. I can’t give you that help. Tom Sawyer isn’t the only person who sits guard at her door. You have to survive so you can exult. She can go to the devil. People need you, Sergeant Watson. It would shut down your office, all Bureau business, set back race relations in all of Missouri, bad as they presently are. You’d be torn limb from limb. Tom Sawyer might preside at the street trial.”

“I know all the arguments,” he said, “but here is a hard truth, my revenge is outside arguments, Arabella Watson sold my wife and child into the worst pit of human slavery, made their suffering the price of my freedom, and when they died and I was gone, she thought that case was solved, to be shelved, forgotten. In ’62 Madam has a package

left for her on her door step, not by official mail, and when she opens it, out spills Tad Cole's account book, his famous handcuffs, and his bullet-holed shirt, cleaned and pressed. Jim Watson sends a message to Arabella Watson.

I've been scheming all through the war to get an appointment in the Hannibal-St. Louis region. I did many difficult things these past war years, but I never lost sight of my ultimate purpose. Where is Sadie? Where is little Lizzie? I can only respect their death by killing their murderer, two bullets in the heart region, then burning her ugly corpse on a pile of wood. That is the ideal situation. But how do I, a black man, get into Madam's fortified castle? I've been going crazy thinking up plots and plans. Some might say I have done enough just flaunting my presence in downtown Hannibal, a black James Edward Watson abroad in the city, advertising his Watsonian person, but I take little pleasure in her embarrassment. She is outraged, she's furious, she's scared. I'm not satisfied. I will not ever sleep easy again, never feel joy, until I have my satisfaction, until I exact my revenge. I know the races must reconcile, that's our business in the world, but this is personal. My ghost daughter cries out to me, in that strange way a deaf child cries out, and I can just barely see her in the dimness of her standing. She wants a conclusion to her death. Sadie doesn't let go of me. It is just her sad face I see. I have this heavy rocklike thing in my chest. It presses. It weighs. I have to get close to Arabella Watson. When I kill her, this rock in my chest will melt into nothingness. I've suffered and served in this world. I was in the Union Army. Now, I'm free to act. I'm not obliged to anyone."

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"To get close to her, that is suicide," I said. "I can't see it as a noble death. She dies, you die, shortly thereafter, where's the satisfaction in that act? I know you want a cold rational execution, and you escape. Justice is with you."

"I can't care what you think," Jim said.

We both sat upright in our chairs, silent, pondering.

"You need me," I said quietly.

"I do," Jim said. "As soon as I saw you at Ma's, I thought this is Jackson's Island once again. I'm stuck on that damned island, missed my ferry connection, looking at starve or surrender, I hear a commotion, and lo, there you are, dropped from heaven, that strange white kid, at ease with us, to some extent, and I see possibly a chance to advance my flight. Here you are again, dropped from heaven, to help me. How do I, an infamous black man, get close to Madam, the Copperhead Queen of the four counties? We can't meet in public. She has withdrawn from public life. You and Tom, as kids your heads were always full of crackpot ideas. Come up with one, now." He forgot that it was Tom who had the crackpot ideas. I was the reluctant accomplice, solemn, silent.

But now I had a very good crackpot idea. It leapt into mind before I could interrogate it, leapt, and was instantly a fixed notion. Oskar Dietrich was a chemist. His specialty was toxins. His favorite was called 'Jamaican killer.' It was a slow worker, took a victim five days of fever and flux to die. Time for you to be up and away. He had given me two capsules. One was Tom's adieu. The other I could reserve to use on any future threat to our Republican peace.

Dietrich challenged you to rethink your idea of revenge, that it necessarily involved violent physical contact at the climax, with conventional weapons, blades, bullets, bludgeon, outcome never certain. The first law in revenge, Dietrich said, is the avenger's survival. Poison gave the avenger time and space to create a survival. Dietrich abhorred indiscriminate poisoning; wouldn't do it. Poison was only for those who merited a rare dose. And you had to cook the mess yourself. That brought personality to the act. He had all sorts of rules and exclusions. Dietrich was also aware of the problem with Honor's complaint, that poisoning necessarily involved sneaking. Honor doesn't sneak. I raised that question and he had at hand the fourteen exceptions.

Our last meeting in the special room at Hannibal's Best Hotel, Dietrich put the capsules on the table. "Every plan you propose," he said, "involves your immediate death. We want to be rid of Captain Sawyer. We don't want to lose you." Higgins was in the room, also O'Neill and Fosdick, young guys with their opinion, Higgins saying Captain Sawyer might soon be elsewhere, not at all accessible. Oskar Dietrich always had this benign look on his face when he was attending to me. He liked me. I looked at

the capsules. I silently said the sentence, slowly eating every word. *I will poison Tom Sawyer,*" and it was revolting, to think of it, my secretly applying the dose.

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We were cleaning catfish on Jim's back porch. I don't eat catfish, I said as they came up out of the bucket. I do, said Jim. As the river swept by, it groaned and slapped the shoreline. Wind up at sundown, what did that mean? Chanterelles, turnip slices, greens, cooking on the grille. I explained Dietrich's chemistry as best I could. At some point Jim put his knife down and just stood there looking at the gathering dark of the river. His sister Anabel, who had a different last name, worked and lived inside the Watson household. She handled food preparation and delivery. There were other black Watsons in service, differently named. Madam had no idea. Household belonged to Mr. Loftis, the manager, and Mr. Loftis had no idea his house slaves were all variously related. Jim had thought of poison, but where to get it, how to deliver it. It was another dead end.

The capsules were on the table. "If you're not giving," Jim said, "I'm taking." He picked up the second capsule, held it in the palm of his hand, looking at it. The moment Dietrich displayed the two capsules, I thought the extra one is for Jim. Simple as that. He needed a crackpot idea and here it was, I had it, poison. As Jim went on, happily entertaining Oskar Dietrich's notion of satisfied revenge, I began to experience a misgiving, a regret. The two capsules were for military purposes, not for personal use. That was the understanding. I keep forgetting I'm inside a discipline, therefore not free to make spontaneous gestures to people outside the discipline. Case in point. I was ordered to give up any notion of personal revenge on Arabella Watson. The Enlightenment Army liked Arabella Watson just where she was, familiar, somewhat predictable, a predatory person out in the open. "Focus your attention on Captain Tom Sawyer and this new guy, Joseph Henderson," Higgins said, "and then get permission for your move." He would transfer the request.

It was a thought, my needing permission, that stuck in my mind. I perfectly understood command structure, I did my time in the Army of Northern Virginia, but now I

was a civilian contractor, not a sworn soldier, in the Enlightenment Army, so I said, and then did not listen to the small voice that insisted: ah, but once you accept an order, then you are in the discipline, subject to its rules.

We were drinking a bottle of Ma's whiskey. It had somewhere a taste of lemons. He always had a bottle of something delicious, to savor, this one a beautiful golden color. Jim was marveling at the coincidence of my reappearance in his life. How was he to get off that island, the roaring flow of that big dark river rushing past him on all sides? Enter Huck Finn, also a fugitive. Next, there is a raft. They can simply float away from the prison Jackson Island would soon become. How was he to wreak revenge on Arabella Watson when she was so amply protected? He was at an impasse. He had to finish this thing, to conclude the action, so that Sadie and Elizabeth could rest wherever they were, waiting. The obligation to bring Arabella Watson to justice was a heavy constant load to bear. As soon as he could testify that the work was complete, Arabella Watson dead on the ground, and he's the avenger, Sadie and Elizabeth would evanesce. He might also evanesce. He would somehow escape. Sleep would come back to him.

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As he spoke, I was thinking how I might get that capsule back, the one Jim had quickly sealed up in an envelope and put in his pocket. I wasn't sure I was going to use my capsule and here was the second capsule, out of my control, in Jim's pocket. And what argument could I make? The Enlightenment Army wanted Arabella Watson alive and Captain Sawyer dead. Jim, return the capsule to me. The Greater Good always rules. This poison isn't for our personal use. It is for political use. I made a mistake. We'll find a new way to the deed, a better direct revenge.

None of this would have deterred Jim. Once he got his mind set, you couldn't argue him out of it. Later that evening, he said: "Don't worry, Huck, my sister will easily and safely do it. Come out of these doldrums. Fate, whose name is now Herr Dietrich, has given us the means to complete a wondrous action, you poison Tom Sawyer, I poison Arabella Watson. Our satisfied revenge also effectively removes the leadership of the local Democratic party. What a beautiful thing it is, justice." I was silent. Then I said,

“justice.” And he said: “you go first, take Captain Tom out, and then we can evaluate the consequences. People are going to say “sudden fever and brutal shitting, we all know what that is. Poor Captain Sawyer, having already lost a leg in the war, now perishes of some kind of camp fever, dysentery, they call it, and who is taking his place? Might be that new guy, Henderson. We’ll let some time elapse, maybe several months.

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Higgins, again: “St. Louis is angry. For all his reputation and seniority, Oskar Dietrich has been furloughed. You’re being censured, I’m delivering that censure right now, as I speak. How could you let that second capsule get loose, out of your control? To a person as volatile and unpredictable as Sergeant Watson? He’s not in our Army, you know, he's an ally, and sometimes a big problem. You have to get the capsule back from Sergeant Watson. He will interrupt our carefully laid plans, start a ruckus, divert attention from the mission.

St. Louis reminds us to consider the present emergency. A large ghost army is gathering in the region, largely organized by one Captain Thomas Sawyer. He’s invented rituals and ranks, designed badges and insignia, issued passwords, signs and countersigns. You wouldn’t believe the medieval fakery. Hoods and cloaks. Ghost soldiers are said to be Confederate dead risen to fight again. They’re really storekeepers and farm boys, local white citizens, inside the scary hood and cloak. Sawyer has made enlistment very attractive, men in the four counties are signing up, thinking themselves safe in their hoods and cloaks, happy to play act knights and crusaders, but the real thing is coming, and that’s where you come in, Colonel Finn.

Tom Sawyer was in New Orleans doing Madam’s business, so they said. I was in St. Louis receiving my second reprimand. I had not returned Oskar Dietrich’s second capsule. I had not set the time and date of my action. I had one more meeting to endure. St. Louis was impatient. I was reminded that I could resign at any time, but I must first notify St. Louis. Some in our faction still had not made up their minds about the Phelps plot, every one caught and killed, except for Colonel Finn. St. Louis, I think, would have been satisfied with my resignation, relieved, and frankly I would have been

relieved to step away from the mission, if only I could have put my resignation as an honorable action. I was looking desperately for the exception, the loophole, in my commitment to a free and liberal Missouri, all the while feeling the noose of necessity tighten. A second meeting with Captain Sawyer was forthcoming, I said.

At this second meeting Higgins said that now was the perfect time to administer the dose of Oskar Dietrich's infallible Jamaica killer. Our faction in the Enlightenment Army, the military wing, was mightily tired of Sawyer's political maneuvering, of his popularity with young people, his successful recruitment of ghost troopers. Elections were coming up. We would need every vote to get our people safely elected. They simply wanted Tom Sawyer gone. I sat in the hotel's saloon sipping the house whiskey, reading the Book of Mormon, the only interesting book I could find in the saloon's scant library. I was waiting for that inner voice to speak, the one that long ago wouldn't let me do the right thing and turn Jim in, give him up to those red-necked homeboys in their rowboats. What do I do, that was still the question.

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In Hannibal that very night someone crept up on Sergeant James Watson who was, no doubt, comfortably sitting in his favorite rocking chair in the main room of his riverside house, thinking himself well protected by his five freely roaming guard dogs who would loudly announce any interloper and then tear him apart. Last time I was at Jim's house, he called in two of the dogs, showed me their jaws, their canines, and I congratulated him on his protection. A clever person somehow silenced the dogs, shot Jim just above his left ear, from behind, then came around to the front, arranged the slumped corpse, stuffed a red rag in its mouth so that it would be the first thing you'd see coming into the room. When I heard this story, I immediately thought, Jim, his somber look when he was scheming and plotting, deep in a solitude, no doubt, that look, his noblest, as the unseen killer pulled the trigger.

We missed the subsequent riot, the burning of the big Red Diamond warehouse, the shooting of Ebenezer Taft, the breaking into and ransacking of Sergeant Watson's office in the Court House, the sacred Court House, missed Jerry Lynch putting his soldiers

into the street, muskets leveled, bayonets fixed, first repulsing a Republican mob seeking to burn Captain Sawyer's law office in the Warren Building, then a Democratic mob wanting to attack anyone associated with the Freedmen's Bureau, which was effectively the local leaders in black Hannibal. I missed all that, train and steamboat trouble. I'm of course on the steamboat.

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The Hannibal we finally reached, Tom first by two days, was scorched and still smoky, a cindery smell in its air, stores closed, windows shuttered, solitary persons on the street. Hannibal's Best Hotel was still doing business. I went promptly to Ma's, which had also come through the riot intact, open for business. Here I got several versions of what happened. How did the killer get past that bristling, snarling, pack of guard dogs? Jim let his killer in, that was the prevalent theory, and the red rag was a Tom Sawyer signature. I know my Tom Sawyer and this wasn't his doing. It could have been my foe, Joseph Henderson, who has been lurking about town ever since he got here, a creepy fellow. I would see to him. The killer was a traitor, people said, Sergeant Watson trusted this mysterious person, silenced the dogs, let him in. What was the deal, people wanted to know, why were they conferring? When they turned to me for an opinion, looking at me, I stared blankly at them. "Maybe it was a woman," someone suggested.

I went next to the provost marshal, Jim's friend, and found him bruised and singed, fresh from the riot, so to speak, and full of story. "Jim's old cooking granny," he said, "come back to Jim's house for something, came upon him, went straight to her minister who came to me, and I got there just in time, Jim's stalwarts about to go off with his wrapped body. They unwrapped him. I examined the wound, looked for other wounds, found none. One stalwart told me he had retrieved the red rag from Jim's gaping mouth. I could have it, he said, must be some kind of evidence. The minister said they wanted Sergeant Watson in the ground, the place a secret, as soon as possible. People were saying ugly things about Sergeant Watson in town, he said, bad feeling was mounting, and he hoped I would do my job and protect public order."

Soldiers were indeed now on the street, casually patrolling, showing the federal blue. In all the accounts I heard at Ma's, everyone agreed Jerry Lynch had done his job. One dead, forty wounded. He deployed muskets and bayonets when he had to. He did restore order. That was the story.

"Jim and I worked together," Jerry Lynch said, "we shared intelligence; I told him what was going on in white Hannibal, as best I could, and he would report accurately the news in black Hannibal. I was getting positive reviews in St. Louis, things were simmering in Hannibal but we kept the peace, the programs set forth by Jim's Freedmen's Bureau were all working. People said I was going to be promoted, I was going to work in the Washington office, and then, without any warning, this catastrophe. It's Captain Sawyer's dirty work. No question of that. Of course, he wasn't here. He was in New Orleans."

That night, reading in my room, knock knock, I have a visitor, a messenger boy with a package and an envelope. Writing on the package: *Just back from New Orleans*. The letter inside the envelope said: *Not me*. *Not us*. Inside the package, a large bar of soap that smelled like a lemon, five tubes of different fragrances, and a packet of incense sticks. I was sitting there sampling the fragrances when, ten minutes later, the messenger boy is back knocking on my door.

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Supper, Saturday five pm.
To hold it in the palm of my hand,
this little tube,
to see it as the revenge weapon.
No pistol, saber, or club.
A sprinkle, a droplet.
Deliver it and go fishing.

I owe my life to Tom Sawyer. I was Pap Finn's child slave, without family, with a funny name. My hair was tousled, I was dirty faced, my trousers were ragged, my shirt too large for me, wrinkled and soiled. I couldn't join Tom Sawyer's Gang because the

admission oath required the blood sacrifice of a family member and I didn't have one. I was up against it. Pap didn't count. Stymied, I had a brainstorm, I offered Miss Watson, Caroline Watson, the middle Watson sister, as a substitute, and the exception was happily made. No one in town liked her. She was my religion teacher. She was mine to slay if the right occasion arose.

Tom got me into a regular house with regular meals and fresh sheets every Friday, got me into school, where I excelled in all my subjects, Master H. Finn, holder of several blue ribbons, not seriously entertained by any of the damsels in his grade and neighborhood, because of his name and his origin. Tom taught the Gangsters how to do it, how to rub a magic lantern and produce a genie. It was Tom Sawyer who quickly saw I did not have a foreskin, who then told me I had been mutilated as a wee baby in some barbaric tribal rite, that it might mean I was an Arab or a Jew. Skinny Dick, vile Hannibal youth, would sometimes throw that at me, "Jew," always safely out of the reach of my fist. I went through the flimflam of the oath, swearing, knowing it was always basically a submission to Tom's command. We were the plural; he was the singular. We weren't the Scouts or the Pirates, regular boy names for juvenile gangs. We were the Gangsters, must be, but we never spoke of the gang that way. We often toiled in his play-acting, dug ditches, piled branches, made ramparts. It wasn't all just pure amusement, being in Tom's play, a lot of sweat and blood was expended (cuts, bruises, mosquitoes), just to be told: you're dead, drop on the spot.

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and then I had to run for my life, Jim also running for his life, and we joined up, we were a gang of two, and that profoundly irked Tom, that Jim and I had shared adventures, a life on the run, a true friendship based on knowing each other, Jim and I forehead wrestled, not possible with Tom Sawyer, not in his lifetime. His Gang in Hannibal wasn't a real gang. There were several Gangsters who thought Tom was too big for his britches, and yet he held his command, the rebel Gangsters showed up at roll call. How did he do that? I helped him play all those dangerous asinine tricks on Jim still bound fast to slavery in that miserable shed, baking hot by day, damp cold at night,

totally dependent on these two ‘innocent’ boys for his escape, one of them, the plotter, enjoying the torture of suspense, and I saw now the sheer malice driving Tom’s dangerous asinine tricks. He envied us, envied our scary real adventures, Jim and me, riding a raft downriver. Here he was, in our direst emergency, trying to recreate a raft adventure, only now it was the three of us on the raft and he was in charge of the story.

Could we let this juvenile man subvert and destroy our free liberal Missouri? The one Cousin Isaac died for? Captain Sawyer ran a ghost army of night riders, sort of like Captain Billy did in the ‘fifties, fathers and uncles and some older brothers, out for revenge and maybe some booty. Essentially, outlaw life. The rituals and the regalia, pure Tom Sawyer. He was, people said, Arabella Watson’s prime minister. He had powerful support from certain conservative business people in central Missouri. People liked his one-legged swagger, his jaunty positive attitude.

When I think about Tom, and make excuses for him, I hear Cousin Isaac disagree. Considering everything, no mercy. The Army needs a militant wing, needs a retaliatory force, one that retains its Enlightenment ethical integrity, and yet does its cold clean job of removing the violent adversary when the situation requires it. Was I dedicated to this core set of rules and principles, dedicated to a free liberal Missouri, then I was in the Army, either sent right to the front or rusticated, given over to ongoing social life, but on call. Given a mission, you did it. If James Edward Watson fell, so must Tom Sawyer.

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I still waited for the inner voice to speak to me, to tell me what I could not do, that person in me who, on the raft, would not let me do the right thing, turn Jim over to that passel of rednecks hooked to our raft. Is your man white or black, they demanded. I was so scared, I froze. Truly, in that moment, I couldn’t say was Jim white or black. He was both and he was neither. I was speechless, then that wonderful idea came to me, do not answer the question, restart the conversation, different topic. I had the sudden guile of a knee-grow slave, I invited them onto the raft to help me with my sick Pa who had the pox.

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Isaac Phelps saw something in me when I was a boy. He recruited me, not Tom. I suppose he thought I might be a strong agent in the world when the time came. Do the right thing, this is what heroes did, and here it was, the time had come. It was the raft emergency all over again, I'm torn between loyalty and duty. I fought in the Civil War, but I never knew a single Yankee, a single Northerner. I had no brothers on that side. Tom Sawyer and Jim Watson, they were my brothers, and now, Jim gone, Tom Sawyer is my only brother. He is our enemy, so said Dietrich, so said Higgins, leaders in the Enlightenment Army. Here it was, a smack in the face, a spike in the heart, my civil war.

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I looked again at the stiff bloody red rag that Jim's killer stuffed in Jim's mouth. I'm almost sure that was not Tom's doing, that final violation of Jim's humanity.

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I went to the Warren Building precisely at five. I knocked on the door. There was Alex, calmly measuring me as he showed me in, the office in post-riot repair, step ladders here and there, planks leaning against a wall, and there was Tom Sawyer standing in his doorway, on one leg, on crutches, trouser leg pinned, saying: "Old Huck, by God!"

The End.

I can't write any more. My civil war is over.