

LIBERTY STREET

A NOVEL OF LATE
CIVIL WAR SAVANNAH

Liberty Street

LAWRENCE MARTIN

LIBERTY STREET: A NOVEL OF LATE CIVIL WAR SAVANNAH

By Lawrence Martin

Author of:

Out of Time: An Alternative Outcome to the Civil War

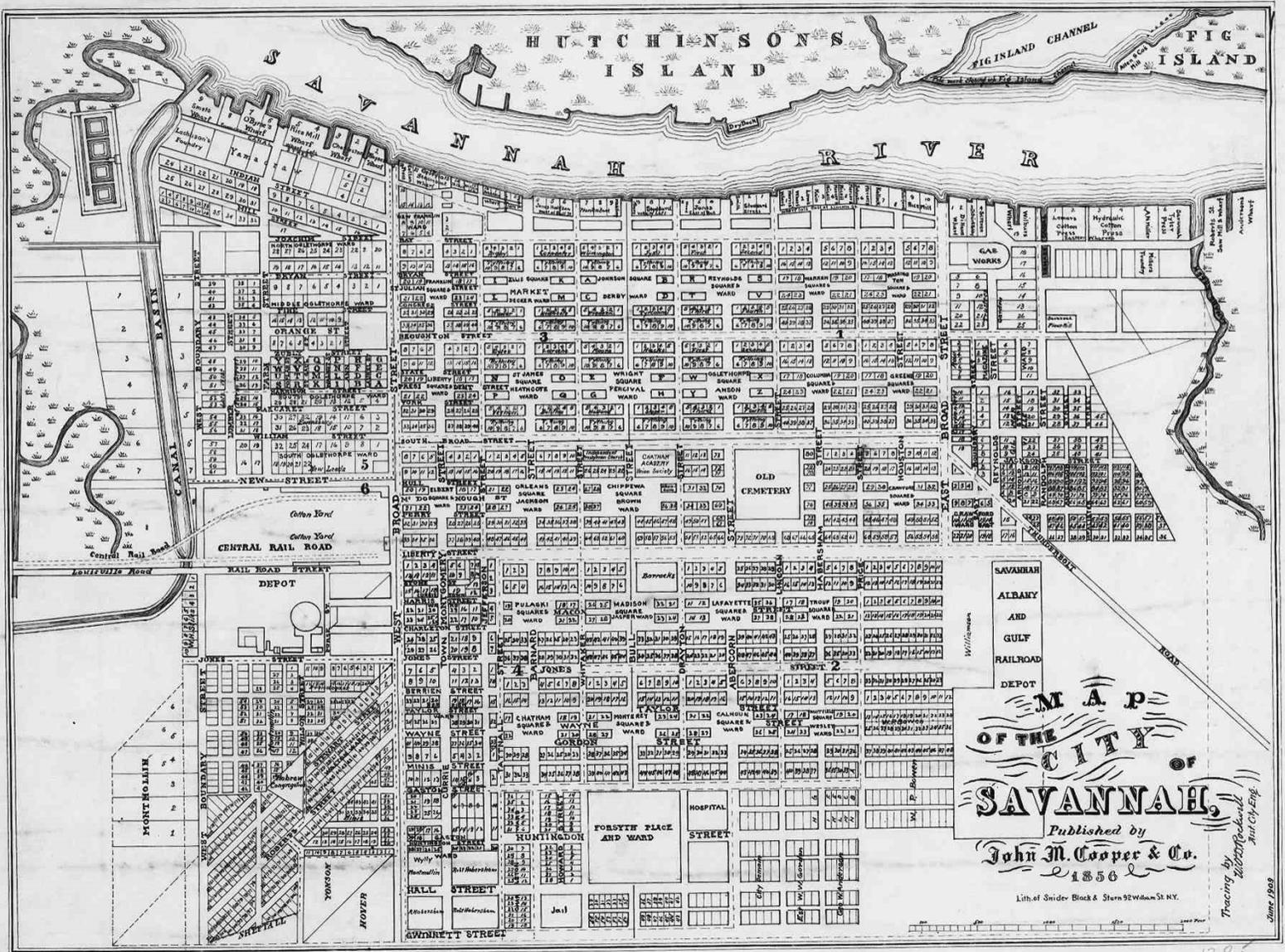
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**Cover: View of Savannah's Forsythe Park Fountain,
constructed in 1858.**

**Next Page: 1856 Map of Savannah. Reproduced with
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Preface

Liberty Street is a work of historical fiction. The framework is historically accurate, including dates and outcomes of battles, the general movement of troops, all messages and letters sent by General Sherman and President Lincoln, Sherman's Special Field Orders issued when his army occupied Savannah, and the plight of slaves toward the end of the war.

The story of Abigale Tate and her family, including their interactions with historical figures such as Mayor Richard Arnold, General John Geary and General Nathan Bedford Forrest, is entirely fictional. The character of Rufus Simms is fictional as well. These characters speak the language of the 1860s, some of which will sound offensive to modern readers. Also, words that today would be routinely capitalized, like negro and Colored, are presented in lower case as they appeared in records of the period.

A number of historic documents are mentioned or briefly quoted in the novel, followed by a footnote reference to the Appendix. As part of the story I have created several letters, newspaper items and a book excerpt; these are not footnoted and all are fictional.

Historical Note

The Civil War began April 12, 1861, with the firing on Fort Sumter, Charleston, by Confederate troops. The war effectively ended April 9, 1865, with General Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox to General Ulysses S. Grant. In the four years of fighting more than 700,000 soldiers died, about a third from battle wounds and two-thirds from disease.

Until near the end, a Union victory was not a sure thing. In the summer of 1864 President Lincoln thought he might lose the November election because of mounting battle losses. Then in September 1864, General William T. Sherman conquered Atlanta. With that victory northerners sensed the war's end was, in fact, near and that the Union would prevail. Historians credit Sherman's Atlanta campaign for turning sentiment in Lincoln's favor, and he easily won re-election two months later.

In mid-November 1864 General Sherman began his infamous march from Atlanta through the heart of Georgia. On December 21 his troops entered Savannah, without opposition. The Confederate forces under General William J. Hardee, whose numbers were no match for Sherman's 60,000 troops, had fled the city the night before.

Sherman stayed in Savannah until January 21, 1865, when he relocated to coastal South Carolina. Later that month, he led his army up the interior of South Carolina, with plans to eventually join General Grant's army in Virginia.

Savannah was fortunate, having avoided fighting that destroyed large parts of Atlanta, Charleston, Columbia and Richmond. For its residents, however, both black and white, the old ante-bellum way of life was forever changed.

Part 1: 1864

Chapter 1

— *Savannah, Georgia – Tuesday, September 20*

Around ten in the morning an envelope arrived to the townhouse at 27 Liberty Street, addressed to Mrs. Abigale Tate. Abigale, age twenty-four, was teaching at the Dayton Finishing School, so her negro servant Polly put it on a table in the front parlor.

Abigale's mother, Mrs. Henrietta Gordon, saw the envelope and felt sure of its message. She had received a similar message the year before, announcing her husband's death at Gettysburg. She retired to her bedroom and prayed.

Another daughter, Jane, age seventeen, was in her room reading a book about men and women and love.

Abigale came home for lunch.

"Mail be for you, Miss Abigale," said Polly, pointing to the table.

"Oh?" Abigale opened the envelope to find a one-page letter.

Dear Mrs. Tate:

I regret to inform you...Capt. Franklin Tate was mortally wounded on Sept. the first, in Jonesborough, Ga. He fought bravely and succumbed

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from a bullet to his head. I do believe he passed without pain. We recovered the body and gave him a full military burial...

Abigale stared at the letter, then fell to the floor. Polly yelled upstairs: “Miss Henrietta, come quick! Miss Abigale sick!”

Mrs. Gordon ran down the stairs. “Oh, my God, she’s fainted!”

Jane appeared. “Mother, what happened? What’s going on?”

“The letter. The letter. Help me get her to the couch.”

The three women picked up Abigale and laid her on the couch. Jane and Polly rubbed her arms while Abigale’s mother read the letter. “I knew it,” she said in a low voice.

Abigale awoke, looked at her mother.

“Oh, Abigale, I’m so sorry,” said Mrs. Gordon. “I just read the letter. Are you all right?”

Abigale could only scream. “Let ... me ... die! LET ME DIE!”

— *Friday, December 9*

“Stop playing that funeral music!” yelled Jane.

“It’s Chopin. Piano Sonata No. 2,” retorted Abigale as she lightened her touch on the piano keys.

“I don’t care who wrote it. It’s driving me crazy.”

“Girls, girls,” admonished Mrs. Gordon, “must you always argue? Oh, if father were here, he would know what to do.”

Abigale stopped playing, turned around on the bench to face her mother. “But father’s not here. He’s dead. Just like my husband. And just like we’ll be soon, when General Sherman arrives.”

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“Don’t say that,” said Mrs. Gordon. “Abigale, you’ve changed so. I don’t know what to do with you. You used to be a happy girl.”

“I’m not a girl anymore. I’m a grown woman. Without a husband. Without a father. And with a brother God knows where, fighting in this damn war.”

“Do you think Johnny will be all right?” asked Mrs. Gordon, as if Abigale somehow had the information at hand.

“We don’t even know if he’s alive,” Abigale replied. “When was our last letter from him? Six months ago?”

“Mother, I’m going upstairs,” said Jane. “I can’t take this family much longer. My sister is a bag of melancholy, and you are in perpetual mourning. I feel as though I am growing up in a funeral home.” With that, Jane climbed the townhouse stairs to her second floor bedroom.

“Polly,” said Mrs. Gordon. “Go to the kitchen and fetch me some tea. Abigale, would you like some?”

“No thank you.”

Polly left the room to do as asked.

“Abigale, I’m worried about Jane. She’s only seventeen but puts on airs like a worldly woman. Do you know what I found in her room the other day?”

“I can only imagine.”

“A book, with just a brown paper cover. I looked inside. It’s called *The Art of Making Love — For The Modern Woman*. By some Frenchman, but it is our language. Where did she get such a thing?”

“Why didn’t you ask her?”

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“And have her snap at me? Oh, if only your father was here. Would you ask her, when you get a chance? I am afraid it is an evil influence.”

“Did you read any of it?”

“Yes. To my dismay. It seems to convey a European viewpoint.”

“Tell me. Nothing will surprise me.”

“Well, he – this Frenchman – wrote that love between a man and a woman is all about physical attraction, that the woman wants the physical touch as much as the man, and that she won’t be satisfied otherwise. And that was just the first page.”

“Did you read more?”

“No, that was enough. I think the book is a manual for women seeking intimacy. Even, perhaps, before marriage. Only the French could write such a thing.”

“Mother, you want some advice?”

“Yes, please.”

“Leave Jane to herself. She is feeling the full blush of womanhood and is affected by our family misfortunes. As am I. One difference is that I have had what she now wants, and am more mature for it.”

“What are you speaking of, I—”

“Tea is ready,” said Polly, entering the room with a cup on a plate. She handed the cup to Mrs. Gordon.

“Thank you, Polly,” said Mrs. Gordon. “Abigale, we can talk later, I am going upstairs to lie down. If you wish to resume playing Chopin, that is all right with me.”

“Thank you, mother.”

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As soon as Mrs. Gordon left, Abigale lowered her head and sighed. Polly walked up to her, placed a hand on Abigale's shoulder and said, "Is you hurtin' Miss Abigale?"

Abigale looked up at her servant. "In ways I cannot express, Polly." She repeated her answer, but in a low voice and slowly, as if speaking only to herself. "In ways I cannot express."

"Sho' is a bad time."

"Polly, what are you going to do when General Sherman comes?"

"Ma'am?"

"He's coming soon. He's marching from Atlanta, and when he gets here he's going to free all the slaves. President Lincoln gave a proclamation to free all of you. General Sherman is coming to enforce it. If he doesn't rob and kill us all first."

"Ma'am, don't you talk like that. You and Mrs. Gordon have treated me right well. And besides, I gots no place to go."

"True enough, and I'll tell you a secret," said Abigale. "I have no place to go either. We are cut off, isolated here, surrounded by Yankees."

"How you knows dis?"

"Oh, everyone knows. Sherman is just outside the city. Do you know what he did to Atlanta?"

"Don't rightly know, Ma'am."

"Burned it. Burned it to the ground. He may do that to Savannah."

"Don't know 'bout that, Miss Abigale. But I see what I sees in da Gordon house, and I know what might help you," said Polly.

"Oh, what?"

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“You need to come to church with me this Sunday, hear our Reverend Simms. His sermon will make you feel better. He’s got powerful speaking, he does.”

“A colored church? A black church? Is that where you go every Sunday, on your day off?”

“Yes, Ma’am. Ain’t no secret.”

“No, I suppose I knew that, just never thought much about it. This reverend, he’s colored?”

“Yes, ma’am. Rufus Simms, a free colored man. He’s got a nice-sized congregation. Third Ogeechee Colored Baptist. You heard of him?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“You go with me, Miss Abigale. He’ll make you feel better.”

“I bet he’s happy Sherman is coming.”

“Don’t know ‘bout that. Maybe he’ll mention it in his sermon.”

Abigale was not partial to religion. Though raised Methodist, the war had left her disillusioned and disinterested in Sunday sermons. She had last been to church in August, when her mother dragged her.

“Do other white people go?”

“Usually a few shows up. You’ll sit in the back. You won’t be noticed or bothered with.”

A colored preacher, thought Abigale. The idea intrigued her. *Why not go? I am willing to try anything to ease my despair.*

Chapter 2

— *Sunday, December 11*

Polly and Abigale walked the eight blocks to the Third Ogeechee Colored Baptist Church, in the section of Savannah known as Frogtown. The cool morning air and bright sunshine made the walk pleasant enough, except for trash strewn about the streets by local servants. Thankfully, there were no rotting animals. The negro work detail responsible for clearing the trash would show up Monday morning.

Abigale pondered what had become of her city. The war news was all bad. Atlanta had fallen in September, about the time Franklin was killed. In mid-November General Sherman began his huge army's march in a southeast direction. Reports of the march, which included pillaging, arson and wanton destruction of property, grew more frightening day by day. Now he and his army were just outside the city. Any day he will take us over, thought Abigale. Then what?

She also thought of Polly, sure to be freed when Sherman surrenders. Abigale had an affection for the woman, now thirty and with the Gordon household fifteen years, and hoped legal freedom did not diminish her loyalty or induce her to leave. Polly did most of the house chores, including cooking. Unlike many of Savannah's slaves Polly did not lack for nourishment.

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Big-boned and a few inches shorter than Abigale, Polly was on the heavy side, with a full, round face.

Polly had married a decade earlier and initially she and her husband lived in the Gordon's basement. She had had no children and after about two years they separated, and though never legally divorced they were fully estranged. He was owned by a prominent Savannah family, the Caseys. Abigale did not know if Polly had another man, but doubted it.

Despite her foreboding Abigale enjoyed the walk, a chance to get outside and exercise. She wore an old deeply-pleated skirt and blouse, with a head bonnet. No new clothes had entered the household since shortly after the war began, and the women repurposed and re sewed what they had. Polly wore an old unformed smock with skirt, and a kerchief for head cover. Both women had on jackets, Abigale's made of silk and trimmed with braid, Polly's of cheap pre-war cotton.

Initially, Polly stayed a few steps behind her mistress, as per custom, but Abigale insisted she walk beside her. "I want to ask about your church."

"Yes, ma'am."

"You go to the same church every Sunday?"

"Yes'm. Although Reverend Simms is not always doin' the preachin'. Sometimes others fill in for him."

"What's his regular job?" She knew that colored ministers, of which there were several in Savannah, had regular jobs to sustain themselves.

"He be a carpenter, I believe. He's a free man, though, do what he want."

"Yes, I understand." Well she did. Out of a Savannah population of 22,000, an estimated 7700 were legally slaves, with free blacks counting for another 700. "Free" meant they were not

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owned by anyone, though each free black person had to have a white “guardian,” to represent them in legal matters. Still, they could move about, earn their own living and, if they had the means, even own slaves themselves.

“Does he own any slaves?” Abigale asked.

“Not as I knows, ma’am. He be a man of God.”

Abigale pondered the statement. “Owning slaves is not God’s way?”

“I don’t rightly know, ma’am.”

Abigale did not take offense, and let it go. If her servant had abolitionist ideas, they did not show in the household. Besides, everything would change in short order, when General Sherman arrived. Polly would be liberated in name, but Abigale and her mother and sister would still need her services and Polly would still need a job. So perhaps nothing would change for her family. Unless, she thought, Savannah is burned to the ground by that odious Yankee.

A few horse-drawn carriages passed by. The two women were careful to avoid any clouds of dust kicked up by the conveyances. Abigale’s family did not own a carriage or she would have taken it to the church, but she didn’t mind the walk; it felt good to get outside. She was thankful she had said yes to the invitation. It gave her an excuse to dress up a bit, to feel more like she did before death and destruction entered her life. For the first time in weeks she had an agenda, albeit unusual for a woman of her background. She imagined what others might think of her going to church with Polly, and then realized she didn’t care.

After about twenty minutes they crossed West Broad Street and reached the church. Abigale had seen the building before but never paid much attention. It was of the second category of Savannah structures, built of wood rather than masonry or brick. Abigale noted it to

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be in some disrepair, with its white paint peeling, several window shutters missing, and some wood planks needing replacement.

The two women climbed a few steps and entered the building. A single wood-burning stove adorned the stage, but the air remained cool inside, the stove simply unable to warm the whole interior. In wintertime, parishioners kept their coats on, making the services tolerable.

Abigale noted a similar seating arrangement as in white churches, with two long rows of wooden benches, starting near the entrance door and ending just before a raised stage. The benches could seat 300 people comfortably, and were now half full with negro parishioners. As more people entered behind them, Polly steered Abigale to the rearmost bench on the left, closest to the front doors. The bench was empty and Abigale sat on the end near the aisle. She felt a little awkward as the only white person present, man or woman, but her arrival didn't seem to cause any notice.

“Other whites be coming, Miss Abigale,” said Polly, apparently sensing her mistress's discomfort. “We always have a few.” The same could not be said of Abigale's First Methodist church, where no blacks were permitted to sit with the congregation.

“I goes up front, Miss Abigale. You'll see and hear fine from here. I'll come for you after Reverend Simms done with his sermon. That's when da service be over.”

“If I choose so, Polly, I may go out earlier, so if I'm not here I'll see you back at the house.”

“Yes, ma'am,” Polly replied, and left Abigale to take her seat up front.

Abigale sat down and surveyed the room. The women mostly wore shawls, the men old jackets, some of them army issue. She wondered if they came from their dead masters.

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After a few minutes a portly white gentleman entered the church and excused himself as he squeezed past Abigale to sit on the bench, leaving a space of two feet between them.

“How do you do?” he said, in a guttural German accent, and held out his hand. “I am Gustav Heinz.”

She shook his hand. “Pleased to meet you, Mr. Heinz. I’m Abigale Tate. Mrs. Abigale Tate.”

“Is this your first time, Mrs. Tate?”

“Here? At Ogeechee Colored Baptist?”

“Yah, yah.”

“Yes, I came at the urging of my negro servant. She lured me here, I’m afraid. Said I should come listen to her Reverend Simms.”

“Where do you live? On a plantation or in the city?” A fair question, since the city was surrounded by many rice plantations, run by women while their men were off fighting.

“Oh, close by, on Liberty Street,” she said.

“I see. I see.” He looked her up and down, nodding his head. This made her feel slightly uncomfortable. She turned away and tried to focus on the stage.

She was about to ask why he was staring at her, when he spoke. “You’ve suffered a loss.” It was not a question.

Abigale jerked her head toward him. “What do you mean?”

Now she looked more closely at this figure and noted that perhaps he was not a gentleman at all. She noted unpressed pants and a frayed coat, and he had at least a two day’s growth of facial stubble. She guessed his age in the late 40s, close to her father’s age if her father had lived. By reputation most German-speaking immigrants, of which there were many in

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Savannah, were hard working and prosperous, and perhaps Mr. Heinz was too, but something about him suggested a lower middle class background. She smelled a faint body odor, but could not discern if it was sweat or cologne.

“Excuse me,” he said. “I don’t mean to pry. But I notice these things.”

“Oh? What things?”

“For a beautiful woman, which you are, one whose life should be joyful, you do not show a smile. You introduce yourself as Mrs. Tate but wear no ring. And you came with no other family, at the entreaty of your negro servant. And alas, this is war time in America. Am I wrong?”

Though crude, his comment was somewhat reassuring. Even a ten-pound weight loss and a repressed smile did not dim Abigale’s beauty. At five feet five inches she was well-proportioned with a full bosom, unblemished skin, golden-brown hair and sparkling-blue eyes. Gloom in her countenance did not diminish her attractiveness to men.

“You are very observant, Mr. Heinz. I am in fact a widow.” Why, she wondered, is she even responding to him? Out of courtesy? Curiosity? Loneliness in a sea of black faces? Perhaps all these reasons. “My husband was killed just this year, near Atlanta. And what brings you here to this church, and to Savannah in war time?”

“Ah, before the war, long before the war,” replied Gustav. “I came from Frankfurt, in Hesse.”

“Hesse?”

“Ah, part of a loose German-speaking Confederation. One day we will all be united. Like your country, it seems.” He gave out a short and sardonic laugh, as if responding to a private joke.

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Abigale did not share his amusement, but remained polite. It was well known among educated Southern whites that Europe had long ago given up slavery, and that the South's adherence to the institution partly explained why no European country came to its aid. Had France or Britain entered for the South, the war would likely be over by now, and General Sherman would not be at Savannah's doorstep.

"I have been here since fifty-six," said Gustav. "Now proprietor of Savannah Gardens, boarding house on Broughton. You've heard? Fine establishment."

She had heard. Savannah Gardens was a boarding house in name only, a brothel for soldiers being its main function. There was even rumor that he employed one or two young black girls, a premium for white soldiers seeking forbidden fruit. *So Gustav is the proprietor!*

"Yes, I know where it is," she said, showing no surprise. She was careful not to say "what it is."

"Yah," he replied. "This war is terrible. Bad for business. Bad for the economy. Reverend Simms is a free black man. He speaks the truth and when I have time I come to listen."

At that point a tall skinny negro man came on the stage and bellowed out "Children of God, let us stand and pray."

"Is that him?" asked Polly.

"No," said Gustav. "He is the choirmaster. First we have the singing. *Then* comes the Reverend."

Abigale and Gustav stood with the others. Just then an elderly white couple came in and entered their bench. As they squeezed past first Abigale and then Gustav, the Hessian moved closer to her, to give the couple more sitting room, a totally unnecessary maneuver considering

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the bench was long enough to accommodate eight people. After the opening prayer, with everyone seated, she found him a foot closer than before.

Abigale pondered the irony of being made to feel uncomfortable by a white man in a black church. Should she just leave? For a minute she vacillated over what to do: stay or walk out.

Just then a group of men and women came on stage, hymnals in hand, and the singing began.

No. I'll stay. I'm too damn curious about this Reverend Simms.

Chapter 3

Across the rows of people Abigale saw Reverend Simms stride to the pulpit, attired in a flowing black robe fringed with a white collar that dipped down below his neckline. From the back of the hall he appeared light-skinned, though clearly negro from his dark, thickly-curved hair and general facial features. He was short and stocky, with broad shoulders, and clean shaven except for a small chin beard. Before speaking he stared left and right, then straight ahead. The first words he spoke surprised Abigale. They were not standard English.

“Our Fadduh awt’n Hebb’n, all-duh-weh be dy holy ‘n uh rightschus name. Dy kingdom com.’ Oh lawd leh yo’ holy ‘n rightschus woud be done, on dis ert’ as-‘e tis dun een yo’ grayt Hebb’n. ‘N ghee we oh Lawd dis day our day-ly bread. “N f’gib we oh Lawd our trus-passes, as we also f’gib doohs who com’ sin ‘n trusspass uhghens us. ‘N need-us-snot oh konkuhrin’ King een tuh no moh ting like uh sin ‘n eeb’l. Fuh dyne oh dyne is duh kingdom, ‘n duh kingdom prommus fuh be we ebbuh las’n glory. Amen.”

There followed a chorus of “Amen” from the audience, along with stamping of feet.

Gustav leaned over to Abigale. “Gullah,” he said. She nodded in agreement. By the time Simms had reached “N f’gib oh Lawd” she surmised it was the low country dialect of slaves

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imported from Africa. If this was to be Reverend Simms' choice of language, she saw little point in staying. *Another reason to walk out of here.*

"That's just to warm up the audience," Gustav chuckled. "Most of them know Gullah somewhat, especially those who spent time on the Sea Islands. He likes to start out that way."

"Loses me," said Abigale. "Will he speak in English?"

Before Gustav could respond Simms continued, his voice from the pulpit clear throughout the room. "My friends, what a glorious moment we are in. It's been a long hard road, it has. We have lost many brethren in the rice fields, to the plague and to the fevers and, yes, to the taskmaster. And our white folk have lost many of their own, to war and disease and more war. These have been difficult times. Is that right?"

"Difficult times!" the flock yelled in unison.

"Who among us has not suffered some loss, some pain, some hurt?"

"No one among us," they all responded, again in unison. This was not the first time Simms had asked these questions.

"But we see a light now. Yes, we do." He pointed to a man in the first row. "Do you see the light?"

"I do," said the first-row parishioner.

Pointing to a woman in the second row, Simms called out: "And do you see the light?"

"Almighty lawd, yes!"

Simms walked about twenty feet stage left and called on another woman, a middle-aged negro in the first row. "Do YOU see the light?"

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“Hallelujah!” she yelled, and began gesticulating and making strange sounds with her tongue. At this the audience chanted “Amen! Amen! Amen!” The tongue-speaking woman had to be restrained by her neighbors, until she finally quieted down.

Simms strode back to the podium and turned to face the assembly. “WE ALL SEE THE LIGHT” he exclaimed. “The Lord is a comin’ to deliver us, He is.”

Abigale felt uneasy. She did not want to hear any more and stood to leave. Gustav reached for her forearm with one hand and raised his other hand to indicate ‘wait a minute’. She was about to pull away and bolt for the door when Simms spoke again.

“And white folks see the light, including war widows and war mothers and war sisters. We have all suffered together, and now we can all see the light. White folk, dark folk. Don’t matter. We are all children of God. Is that not so?”

“That is so! That is so!”

Simms smiled and lifted his eyes beyond the sea of black faces to the very rear of the hall. The reverend’s gaze and the Hessian’s gentle hand persuaded Abigale to sit back down. Gustav let go of her arm.

Abigale was thankful no heads turned in her direction. She would find another moment to make her escape. *Why did he mention ‘war widows’?*

The sermon continued. “God has a purpose, he does. We must believe in God to make sense of the last four years. Why would God allow white folks to kill each other in such high numbers? So many deaths. The women folk left behind—those who’ve lost a father, a brother, a son or a husband, they may feel deep down that God is evil. But is God evil?”

“No!” roared the audience.

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“Why would God allow black folks to suffer so, under the yolk of repression? Why would God allow our brethren to be shackled and whipped and torn asunder from their families? Must be an evil God. Is God evil?”

“No!” came the reply, from 300 souls.

Simms raised his voice to seek a louder response. “I say, IS GOD EVIL?”

“NO!”

“No, WHAT?” screamed Simms.

“God is not evil!”

“That’s right! God is not evil. He has a purpose. This war has a purpose, as horrible as it is. It will free us. Our savior is coming!”

Abigale wondered how Simms could get away with such blasphemy. *My father and husband didn’t fight to free the slaves! If Father was alive and heard this—he wouldn’t stand for it, that’s for sure. I bet this isn’t the first time Simms has spoken such inflammatory rhetoric. Why didn’t the authorities stop him? Where are the men in this city? Mayor Arnold and his aldermen? General Hardee and his army? How come only a few white people are hearing this? Can free blacks speak in public this way? In Savannah?*

She glanced over toward the elderly white couple. They seemed unfazed by the speech. Perhaps this is what they came to hear. She did not recognize them and wondered if they were visiting from up north. Then she realized no one was visiting from up north, at least not within the past two years or so.

“You say God is not evil, my friends,” Simms continued, “and once again you speak the truth. There is a purpose in all this, God’s purpose. We are all creatures of God, and I say this. Count your blessings. For whether you are enslaved by the white man’s shackles or you are a

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prisoner of your own inner demons, there is light coming. There is light coming! DO NOT DESPAIR!”

What does he mean, prisoner of your own inner demons? Do blacks have inner demons? Is he speaking to me? How would he know? Polly! She must have said something to him!

Just then Simms pivoted to New Testament scripture. “Jesus said, in Matthew, ‘Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.’ Our light is coming. It is coming.”

Simms continued with more biblical quotes, each one powerful yet opaque, allowing him to fit it to the times. He never once mentioned Sherman by name, but didn’t have to. Even the least literate among his flock knew, from countless conversations among their brothers and sisters and other kinfolk, that General Sherman was “the light,” or was “bringing the light,” and that when he arrived there would be a new order.

Simms’ sermonizing went on another half hour, as Abigale wrestled with it all. He was infuriating and soothing, treasonous toward her culture and understanding of it as well. He spoke in generalities, yet his words seemed to touch her inner soul. Whenever she decided to leave, the next moment she decided to stay.

The parishioners intrigued her as well, especially when compared with her own Methodist congregation. Apart from race, she noted a striking contrast. Savannah’s white Methodists sat in their pews dutifully, stoically, reciting scripture when called on, but without excitement or verve.

Here, when Simms swayed back and forth, so did all the negroes. When he threw up his hands to the Lord, they did as well. When he bellowed out a question, they yelled back the

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answer. And several times throughout the service, a man or woman would stand, call out “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord” and sit back down after the audience approved with a loud “Amen.” Such a thing was unthinkable at her church.

Yes, she thought, *verve* was the right word. Compared to Simms’ flock, the white congregation was sedate: no involvement, no *verve*. Her people attended Sunday service as obligation, lest they rot in Hell after death. Simms’ people came to be entertained and uplifted; they attended for the here and now, not for any promise of a better afterlife. Her white church was duty. This black one was joy.

So despite initial misgivings, and the obnoxious Hessian beside her, Abigale decided to stay. As soon as the service was over she would question Polly about what she had told the reverend.

After the last “Amen” the audience rose to exit. Polly rushed to the back bench and before Abigale could speak, pulled on her mistress’s arm and said, “Come, Miss Abigale, he wants to meet you.”

“Who?”

“Reverend Simms.”

“Why? What did you tell him?”

“That you be the nicest mistress in Savannah. He a free colored. He likes to meet nice white folks.”

Abigale hesitated and Gustav chimed in. “Ah, you should go, Mrs. Tate. When General Sherman comes, will be helpful perhaps to have connections with the colored elite.” He flicked his hand toward her, indicating she should go with her servant.

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She did not reply. Instead, she looked down the aisle at the stage, then the opposite way, toward the church doors. Should she now run home? If she left, would Gustav follow her? Going with Polly to the pulpit would be a way of getting rid of him, at least, so she acquiesced. There was another reason; she *was* curious to meet the reverend.

Polly and Abigale fought their way down the aisle, past the exiting crowd, and climbed a few stairs to the stage. Simms was at the pulpit, conversing with several followers. Abigale noted that Simms was only an inch or so taller than herself. She estimated his age around thirty-five to forty.

Polly made a quick introduction. "This be Miss Abigale, Reverend."

He held out his hand and Abigale shook it.

"Nice to meet you," she said. *What am I doing?*

"The pleasure is all mine," he replied. "I hear nice things about you. Sadly, I have also learned of your losses. Please accept my deepest condolences."

"Polly told you?"

"Yes. It is indeed unfortunate."

She gave Polly a disapproving look but said nothing. Simms exchanged a few pleasantries with the remaining parishioners on stage and they dispersed.

He sounds intelligent, she thought. Cultivated, even.

"Thank you for coming to my church," Simms said. "We welcome white folks who have an open mind. I see you sat with the Nelsons and Mr. Heinz."

"They are new to me," she said. "I did meet Mr. Heinz. He told me he comes to hear you often, that you speak the truth." How well did the reverend know Gustav? Was he a patron of Savannah Gardens? Why would she think that? She didn't even know if he was married. Abigale

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looked back at the bench she had just left and saw Gustav sitting there, now alone, as if waiting for something. Or someone.

“Well, thank you,” said Simms, “but I’m afraid the truth depends on whose viewpoint, wouldn’t you agree?”

Truth and viewpoint. Abigale thought the words sounded strange coming from a colored man, free or not. She chose not to answer his question.

“How did you learn to become a reverend?” she asked.

“Ah, that is an interesting story. Perhaps you and Polly would like to come to my office for a few minutes? We can speak privately there. It’s right behind the stage.”

“Be fine with me,” said Polly.

“Yes, for a few minutes,” said Abigale. By then Gustav would be gone, she figured. And besides, there was something about this reverend that stoked her curiosity. *He doesn’t seem like any negro I’ve ever met. If I closed my eyes he would sound like a white man. An educated white man.*

Chapter 4

— Tuesday, December 13

General Sherman, along with General Oliver O. Howard and several aides, stood on the roof of the Cheeves' Plantation rice mill, two miles from Fort McAllister. From this vantage point they could make out the ramparts of the low earthen fort, and easily spot its high-flying Confederate battle flag. Another mile beyond the fort lay Union ships at anchor in Ossabaw Sound, their masts also visible from the mill roof. Owing to the curve of the river, the ships and the fort were invisible to each other.

As Sherman gazed through his telescope he asked an aide, "What time is it?"

"Half past four, sir," replied his lieutenant.

"What's the delay?" Sherman's question was rhetorical, and reflected his mild anxiety for the moment. The sun would set in little over an hour, so there wasn't much time left. Two hours earlier Sherman had heard musket-skirmishing from the fort, and knew his troops were poised to strike. Three thousand Union soldiers surrounded the fort, under the command of Brigadier General William B. Hazen. *I personally selected Bill for this task. I'm sure he'll get the job done.*

Using semaphore flags, one of the ships in Ossabaw Sound signaled to the rice mill: "Has the fort been taken?" Just then Sherman espied Hazen's troops emerging from the dark fringe of

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woods before the fort, with colors flying and moving quickly. Sherman instructed his semaphore man to signal back to the ship: “Not yet, but it will be in a minute.”

Sherman’s master plan to capture Savannah required he first take Fort McAllister, which lay just south of the city on the Ogeechee River. He needed the Ogeechee to resupply his troops. Trying to attack via the Savannah River was not feasible. Its mouth was fully blockaded with tons of debris dumped by Union forces in late 1861; clearing that river could take weeks.

Sherman could try to starve Savannah by laying siege, much as Grant had done at Vicksburg. But without fresh provisions, this was not a sound military option. His men were tired, ill-clothed and hungry from the long march through Georgia. For several days prior to reaching Savannah they had subsisted only on rice.

Fresh food, clothing and all manner of supplies lay aboard ships in Ossabaw Sound. To get those supplies, the ships had to travel up the Ogeechee River past Ft. McAllister. Union ships had tried to capture the fort several times in the previous two years, and each time were repelled by McAllister’s cannons. The only sure way to take the fort was to attack by land.

Sherman certainly had the manpower. The Fort McAllister roster consisted of only 230 troops. All but two of the fort’s big guns faced the river, and they could not be easily repositioned to repel a land attack. The numbers alone foretold the outcome of this battle. The only question in Sherman’s mind was how long the fight would take.

The rear of the fort faced a forest whose trees had been leveled by the Confederates, to a distance of 300 yards. Any assault would thus be over an open plain. Hazen’s men had to run the plain, then the deep ditches around the fort with their abatis and other obstructions. Once past those, they had to climb steep earthen walls to enter the fort. McAllister was well protected, but not against overwhelming numbers.

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At 4:45 p.m. a “boom-boom” of cannon fire washed over Cheeves’ Plantation.

“Hear that?” Sherman said to General Howard.

“Loud and clear, William. Hazen has engaged the fort.”

White smoke obscured the movement of men but Sherman heard the loud reports, both cannon and rifle shot.

Inside the fort, greatly outnumbered Confederates fought valiantly. One of the defenders, twenty-two-year-old Corporal Orville Bradley, a crack shot, was able to reload faster than most of his Division, and could fire his single-shot rifle twice a minute. Each shot required momentary exposure above the rampart, to sight the onrushing enemy. His last words were “I got two of ‘em! I got two of ‘em!”

“Orville’s hit!” yelled a comrade. “Pull him down, pull him down!”

They pulled Orville down from the earthen rampart but it was too late. Too late for Orville, and too late for the soldiers still alive. The Yankees kept coming, over the abatis, over the ramparts. A fair number were killed attacking the fort, felled by rifle shot or mines planted in the ground, but so many came so quickly, the end was foretold. Within minutes of the first shot, bluecoats were inside the ramparts, fighting the rebels hand-to-hand – initially one-to-one combat, but within a minute, two-to-one, then three-to-one, then...it was over. The entire affair, from start to surrender, lasted a mere fifteen minutes.

Orville was one of sixteen McAllister defenders killed that day.

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“I hear no more gunfire,” said Sherman. “That’s good.” Through his telescope he espied the most wonderful site: the Confederate flag being replaced by the Stars and Stripes. Then he saw his bluecoats on the ramparts, defiantly waving their rifles.

“Men, the fort is ours,” said Sherman. “This is the prettiest damn thing I have seen in this goddamn war. Let’s go to the fort. Get me a boat.”

As Sherman climbed down the tower stairs he was already planning moves for the next few days. *Savannah is ours. It’s just a matter of time.*

Chapter 5

— *Wednesday, December 14*

In the early afternoon, a colored boy came up the townhouse stoop at 27 Liberty Street and banged on the door. Polly opened it.

“What you want, boy?” she asked, always skeptical of folks who came calling without an invitation.

“These be for Mrs. Tate,” the boy said, and handed Polly a bouquet of flowers with an envelope attached to one of the stems.

“Who give you these, boy?”

“They’s come from Master Johnson’s garden. Dat’s all I know.”

“You works for Master Johnson?”

“Yessum.”

“Dat’s good. You run on now.”

Seeing no tip forthcoming, the boy ran down the stairs and into the street. Polly brought the flowers inside and called for Abigale. Jane came first.

“Oh, what lovely flowers. Are they for me?”

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“No, boy said dey for Miss Abigale.” *Abigale Tate* was written on the outside of the envelope, but Polly didn’t read.

“Oh,” Jane said, “let me see that.”

“No, chile, dese be for Miss Abigale. I gets in heap of trouble if you mess with dem.”

Jane was about to make a demand when Abigale and her mother walked into the living room.

“What’s all the commotion?” Abigale asked.

“Dese be for you, Miss Abigale,” said Polly, and handed her the bouquet.

Jane walked up to smell the flowers. “Ooh, a secret admirer.”

“Who are they from, dear?” asked Mrs. Gordon.

“I have no idea.”

“Well, open the envelope and read it to us.”

Abigale wondered if she should open the note in front of them. *Oh, why not?*

The three women stood around Abigale, waiting for the answer. She pulled the envelope from the stem, opened it and read the message. Her face turned crimson and she crumbled the piece of paper.

“Abigale,” said Jane, “what is it?” Jane reached for her sister’s hand and pried away the paper. She read out loud.

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Dear Mrs. Tate,

So nice it was to meet with you on Sunday. I hope you will return to the same church this next Sunday. Same bench, Yes? You are very lovely.

Your servant,

Gustav Heinz

“Who is Gustav Heinz?” asked Jane

“Who is Gustav Heinz?” asked Mrs. Gordon.

Abigale did not reply. Polly did. “He be dat German man who sat with her, I believe.”

“Ooh,” said Jane. “You *do* have an admirer.”

“Hush your mouth,” retorted Abigale. “He’s a pig.”

“A pig?” asked her mother, in a manner to suggest it was a literal description.

“Oink oink,” teased Jane.

“Now I can never go back, even if I wanted to.” *I was planning to return. Now what do I do?*

“You can go Sunday, Miss Abigale,” said Polly. “We can seat you wi’ da black folks up front, if you don’t mind. We dun that befo.”

Before Abigale could respond there was a loud knocking on the front door.

“Who now?” asked Polly. “We is gettin’ busy.” She moved to open the door.

“Could be Mr. Heinz,” said Jane, “calling on my dear sister.”

“Hush your mouth,” scolded Mrs. Gordon.

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In the doorway stood Josephtha Morgan, the next door neighbor, a widow about sixty years old. Her husband had died before the war, and now she lived alone.

“May I come in?”

“Of course,” said Mrs. Gordon. “You look upset. Is something wrong?”

Josephtha entered the foyer as Polly closed the door. “I’ve just come from the market. The news is everywhere. Fort McAllister has fallen!”

“What?”

“It’s true. Yesterday. Our boys were beaten badly. Who wasn’t killed was captured. They say a dozen of our boys killed, maybe more. No one knows for sure.”

Suddenly turning serious, Jane asked, “What does that mean?”

“Where is Sherman now?” asked Mrs. Gordon.

“They say the Union ships are up the Ogeechee. Bringing in supplies.”

“Will someone tell me what this means?” yelled Jane.

“It means,” said Abigale, in a monotone, “that Savannah is doomed.” *Johnny, where are you? Please, please be careful. With luck our family will survive Sherman. We won’t survive if you don’t come back home.*

Chapter 6

— *Thursday, December 15*

Deep in the woods south of Nashville, a Union soldier raised his rifle and aimed at the lone man on horseback. The horseman wore a grey uniform, but its officer insignia indicating he was a general would not be visible beyond a few yards. At that moment the horseman was riding alone, though to his rear rode dozens of other cavalry.

The man on horseback was none other than Nathan Bedford Forrest. Foolish Forrest, for riding without escorts, exposing himself to random sniper fire. Brave Forrest, for fearing nothing and no one. His reputation preceded wherever his men rode. Brave, cantankerous, headstrong, brilliant leader. Generals higher in command sparred with him, and feared his independence, but they needed and welcomed his abilities to lead men in battle.

In particular, Forrest had chafed under General John Bell Hood, in charge of the Confederate's doomed Nashville campaign. Less than two weeks earlier, Forrest had lost a battle at Murfreesboro, Tennessee, in part because of bad intelligence about Union troop strength. Now Hood's army was close to losing this campaign to Union General George H. Thomas. Forrest and his men were not directly engaged in the fighting, but were instead patrolling the area between Nashville and Murfreesboro.

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Forrest's advance scouts had not reported any Union activity in this area, and he did not think riding unescorted was particularly risky. Forrest did not see the sharpshooter. Lt. Johnny Gordon, riding only twenty yards behind, did. The general's lieutenant let go the horse's reins just long enough to aim his rifle at the Union soldier and fire. The rifle's report was loud and unexpected.

Forrest jerked his head back to see smoke coming from Gordon's rifle. "What the hell? What are you shooting at?"

Gordon pulled up beside Forrest, pointed his rifle at a soldier in blue slumped over a log some 100 yards to the right. Just then other riders caught up to them.

"Fine job, Gordon," said Forrest. It did not have to be stated that Johnny Gordon had just saved the life of his commanding general.

"Didn't expect any Yankees this far from Nashville," the general yelled out to horsemen now surrounding him. "There may be others over there. Dixon, take a party and see if there's more Yanks. I don't want prisoners, understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"We'll wait for you ahead. Gordon, you come ride by me. Need more fellas like you around."

On the same day her brother was saving the life of Bedford Forrest, Abigale decided to do some shopping. The newspapers didn't seem to know much about what was happening with General Sherman after the fall of Fort McAllister. Maybe the real, up-to-date news was only to be found in the town market on Ellis Square. It was only a twenty-minute walk from their home. She took Polly to help carry the groceries and set out around nine in the morning.

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What a lovely city this once was, Abigale thought, with its squares and gracious oak trees. Now it showed decay. Most buildings and streets were in want of some repair. All port activity had ceased long ago. Early in the war renegade ships could break through the Union Navy's blockade, but none had done so since December 1861, when the mouth of the Savannah River was all but dammed with sunken stone and wooden pilings. The only rail line connected to Charleston, and operated mostly for military purposes.

Even with the blockade and the shortages, the place kept much of its charm. *What will General Sherman do to Savannah? To us?*

Abigale and Polly passed many people on their way, and none seemed in a rush or exhibited any anxiety. There were rumors of people clamoring to get on the train to Charleston but she didn't know if that was even possible. All other routes north or south through Georgia were impossible because the city was now surrounded by Sherman's army. And the river was blocked, so there really was no escape route. It made eminent sense that no one seemed in a rush; there was, quite literally, nowhere to go.

Rice, some chickens and vegetables, were still being brought to the City Market from a few local plantations, for sale at reasonable prices. Reasonable, that is, considering the marked inflation of Confederate money in recent weeks. Abigale's family was among the more fortunate in this aspect; their father had hoarded silver and gold coins, and much silverware, anticipating a problem with the South's paper money should the war drag on. As long as the markets stayed open, they would not starve.

Several dozen stalls were in business when they arrived. The temperature was a cool fifty-five degrees. People were buying, walking between stalls, or just sitting on local benches, enjoying the morning sun. Abigale noted both negro servants and a fair number of citizens. She

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heard English, Gullah, German, and some English with a German accent. The accent made her think of Gustav, and she was relieved not to see him at the market.

They stopped at a stall selling rice, a necessary commodity to eat full at any meal. Polly could cook the rice plain, or mix it into a broth.

“Let’s get a pound today,” Abigale said. The old proprietor—he appeared old to Abigale, though he was probably no more than fifty—weighed out a pound.

“Twenty-five cents,” he said. “Specie,” by which he meant gold or pure silver, not confederate money.

“How much in Confederate?” she asked.

“I don’t want paper,” he said.

“I know, but Sherman isn’t here yet. How much in Confederate?”

He thought for a moment. “Two dollars.”

She had some paper money, which she wanted to get rid of, but thought that price way too high, so she handed over the requisite coin. She turned to go find another merchant, hoping to secure a chicken or two, and found herself facing a well-dressed, middle-aged man.

“Well, Mrs. Tate, nice meeting you here.”

“Mayor Arnold, how do you do?”

“Fine, thank you. I am most happy to see you out and about. Please accept my condolences over Franklin. I trust you received my letter last September?”

“Yes, it was very kind of you.”

Abigale did not expect to run into Mayor Richard Arnold, perhaps the most respected man in the city. He was also a physician, and still maintained his medical practice when administrative duties allowed. Her father had been a political ally during Arnold’s previous terms

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as Mayor, 1851-1852, and 1859-1860. Arnold was very supportive of the family following Mr. Gordon's death in July 1863, visiting at least twice and arranging for a memorial service.

"The war is abominable," he said. "Our boys have suffered in the extreme, and now our great city is surrounded. I trust you know about losing our southern fort, McAllister?"

"Yes, I heard. What do you think will happen?"

"Wish I could predict, wish I could predict. All sorts of rumors are flying about. General Hardee has a small army in the city, but Sherman's troop strength is anywhere from 50,000 to 100,000. He could walk in without much of a fight, or we could end up like Atlanta, burned to the ground. I shudder at the thought. How's your mother, and that baby sister of yours?"

"They're fine, thanks for asking." Just then Abigale realized Polly was standing nearby holding a pound of rice. She didn't want to break off the conversation just yet, so she instructed Polly to go find a chicken vendor, and wait for her there.

"That negro's been with you sometime, hasn't she?" asked the mayor.

"Yes, about fifteen years."

"So how are you doing? Still in mourning, I presume."

"I quit wearing black long ago, if that's what you mean," said Abigale.

"Well, that's fine with me. I perfectly understand."

Just then a troop of soldiers marched by in formation, heading toward the West Broad Street dock. Unknown to the Mayor, or any city official, General PGT Beauregard had issued orders to General Hardee that, if Hardee had to choose between saving Savannah and saving his army, to "save your army." This could mean only one thing: get out before Sherman arrives. And the only way to do that would be across the Savannah River, to South Carolina. This meant a bridge had to be built, and fast.

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While the soldiers marched by, Arnold's eyes moved elsewhere, up and down Abigale's torso. She was not unaware of his gazing.

As soon as the soldiers passed, he said, "Would you like to get a cup of tea? We can talk some more about the happier times and your family."

Abigale sensed a subtle change. His roving eyes, his invitation, his body language. *Now that I'm a widow, I'm available. I know what he would like. He's showing it with his eyes. I should not be surprised. He's a man and men are like that. He's in his fifties, older than my mother! Is that to be my fate? But he's been a friend to my family, and I mustn't be rude. He is certainly no Gustav Heinz.*

"Oh, thank you Mayor Arnold, that is most kind. But I told mother we'd return home as soon as possible. She is, of course, terribly lonely since Father passed away. I fear these next few days may be decisive for us all, and our tranquility may be short lived."

"With God's grace we will survive, Abigale. Do give my regards to your mother, and to that darling little sister of yours. I imagine she's all grown up by now. Haven't seen her in over a year."

"Yes, I will. Thank you, sir."

Abigale left the mayor to search for Polly and some chickens.

That night, at a campfire south of Nashville, Forrest made it his business to query the young lieutenant.

"Where you from, Johnny?"

"Savannah, sir."

"Learned to shoot there?"

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“Yes sir. Since I was ten.”

“How old are you?”

“Twenty-two. Been in since I turned twenty.”

“We’re losing the war, son.”

“Don’t look promising after Murfreesboro, I reckon.”

“We’ve given it a good fight. Just outnumbered by them Yankee bastards.”

“Yes, sir.”

“What are you going to do after the war?”

“Don’t rightly know, sir. Was a dock worker before I joined up. Savannah has a big port. No river business now, with the blockade.”

“I know. And my intelligence tells me General Sherman is headed that way.”

“I hope not, sir. Still have my mom and two sisters there.”

“Your father?”

“Dead, sir. Killed at Gettysburg, year and a half ago.”

“That’s too bad. All for a bunch of Nigras. Your family own any?”

“Just one. A domestic.”

“How old is she?”

“Don’t know. Late twenties I reckon. Been with us since I was a little boy.

“You had her?”

“Sir?”

“You know what I mean. Have you taken her to your bed?”

“Not really partial to black snatch, sir, if you don’t mind my sayin’. Besides, she’s a dumb nigger. And fat, too. I like skinny women.”

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“Fat or skinny, all the niggers is dumb, Johnny. Some are just dumber than others. They want freedom but don’t know they’d be worse off. They can’t read or write, so what the hell they gonna do? They sure are going to be sorry if they get their wish. You can bet on that.”

Johnny sensed a bonding with his commander over the sorry state of slaves, and felt the courage to ask a question.

“Sir, do you really think there’s no chance of us winning?”

“As much as a warm pot of spit freezing in July, I’d say.”

“What about General Lee? He’s still got his army up in Virginia.”

“That be so, that be so. But when Thomas links up his army with Grant, and then Sherman joins *his* army too, they’ll outnumber Lee three or four to one. Hard to beat them odds.”

“Maybe if we all take to the woods, Indian-like?” said Gordon.

“Thought of that, I have. But we’d still be outnumbered. Meanwhile, they could rampage our cities, despoil our women—while we’re out hiding in the bushes. Your sisters, they married?”

“One was. The last letter I got from home, learned her husband died in the fight for Atlanta, just the day before Sherman took the city. The other one’s only sixteen or seventeen, I don’t rightly know which, it’s been so long, but she’s a young ’un.”

“Tell me they’s pretty. I bet they are.”

“They are very pretty, sir. Or they was when I left home. Probably prettier now.”

“Well I’d like to meet them some day.”

Johnny did not ask if the general was married, thinking it best to avoid any personal questions. He also sensed what the General might have in mind, but didn’t take offense. Southern gentlemen don’t despoil Southern women.

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“I do look forward to getting home, sir.”

“You will, son, you will. What did your father do before the war?”

“He was a lawyer. We was comfortable.”

“You didn’t want to join him? Law’s a fine profession.”

“I worked in his office for a while, and he gave me some books to read. I got bored, couldn’t take it. He said I wasn’t suitable for the law, and I agreed. Got a job on the docks. When Abigale—that’s my older sister—got married, her husband went to work in the law office. He was studying law until he enlisted along with my father.”

“War is hell, ain’t it?”

“Ain’t fun if you get hit, that’s for sure.”

“Somehow, Johnny, we have to continue our traditions, our way of life. The bullies may defeat us with their guns and superior numbers, but we’ve got to carry on the battle. We’ve got to preserve our culture, our values. Wouldn’t you agree?”

“Yes, sir!”

“I’ve got some ideas how to do that, once this war is over. Would you be willing to help in that type of endeavor?”

“Yes, sir. Anything you ask. What do you have in mind?”

“Not exactly sure just yet. But we hope to have many like-minded men scattered throughout the South. Like you and me, they’ll want to preserve the culture, keep the Nigras at bay, keep the Yankees from imposing their will on us. If we work together, we can accomplish much. But it takes leadership, and strong young men such as yourself.”

“You can count me in, General. If I survive, you just come calling. Johnny Gordon, 27 Liberty Street, Savannah.”

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“Good to know, son. I am pleased. Men like you are the backbone of this army. Now let’s get some sleep.”

Chapter 7

— *Friday, December 16*

At three in the morning Mrs. Gordon carried a lantern to Abigale's bedroom door and knocked. There was no immediate answer. She opened the door, walked to the bedside and shook her daughter's shoulder.

Abigale awoke with a start. "Mother, what's the matter?"

"Where's Jane? She's not in her room."

"Not in her room?"

"No, I went in to get one of those headache pills she keeps. She's not there. Her bed's not been slept in. She's not downstairs either. Did she leave?"

"Leave? Why would she leave?"

"She's not happy here."

"Where would she go?"

"So you don't know anything?"

By now Abigale was on her feet, assuming charge of the investigation. "I'll ring for Polly. She may know something."

"Yes, please call her. We must find out."

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Abigale moved to the corner of her room and pulled on a rope that hung from the ceiling of her second floor bedroom through small circular floor openings, all the way to the street-level basement. Each pull rang a bell at the bottom, a summons to the servant living there. They had not had to call for Polly in this manner for over a year. The last time was when Mrs. Gordon took ill with vomiting in the middle of the night, and needed help cleaning up.

“She never said anything to you about leaving?” asked Mrs. Gordon.

“Never. I still don’t know where she’d go.”

“I’m worried. Can’t take any more losses. You children are all I’ve got.”

Abigale did not respond. There was no need to. A few minutes passed and Polly appeared in the doorway.

“You rang for me, Miss Abigale?”

“Mother said Jane is nowhere in this house. Her bed has not been slept in. Do you know anything?”

“No ma’am. But if she not be here, I have idea where she might be.”

“You do?” both women asked in unison.

“Not sure, but I seen her go out back once at night. To da stable. Figured she needed to be alone, and didn’t bother her none. Maybe she be there.”

“The stable?” asked Mrs. Gordon. “Why on earth would she go there? And if she went, why isn’t she back already? It’s unheated. Polly, you and Abigale go there now. I don’t like this girl’s shenanigans, but if she’s there and not harmed, I’ll forgive her. Here, take the lantern.”

Abigale put on her robe and shoes and together with Polly walked downstairs and across the back alley. The moon was three-quarters full and with the lantern they had plenty of light to see their way. The stable had been built for a horse and small carriage, neither of which the

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Gordons now owned; both were sold after Mr. Gordon joined the army. Now the stable was full of old tools and horse blankets, and some discarded furniture.

The stable door was fastened from the inside, which meant someone was in there.

“Miss Jane, is you in dere?” yelled Polly. No answer.

“Jane, this is Abigale. Are you inside?” Still no answer.

Abigale began banging on the door.

“Leave me alone!” came a girl’s voice from within the stable.

“Mother is very worried. What in heaven’s name are you doing in there?”

“I’m fine, just need to be alone. Tell Mother I’m fine.”

“We’re not leaving until you come out.”

A minute passed, then Abigale heard the low murmuring of another voice. A man’s voice.

“Who’s in there with you? Who is that?”

The door suddenly opened and Jane came outside, fully dressed but without a coat. She slammed the door behind her.

“Let’s go,” Jane said. “A body can’t have privacy anymore.”

“Who’s in there?” demanded Abigale. She pushed the door open and stared into blackness.

“Never mind,” yelled Jane. “Let’s go!” She pulled on her sister’s arm.

With a quick jerk Abigale pulled her arm free. “We’re not leaving ‘til I find out who’s in here.” Then Abigale turned to the darkness. “Whoever you are, come out or I will call the police!”

From the shadows a tall young man appeared, his features still obscured by the darkness.

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“Ma’am,” he said, “I didn’t mean no harm. We was just talking.”

“Who are you?” she asked. “Come outside, where there’s some moonlight.”

He followed her order. She saw he was wearing a Confederate uniform.

“Why, you’re a soldier. Shouldn’t you be at your post? What are you doing with my sister?”

“None of your damn business!” yelled Jane. “Let’s go. Winston, go back to camp. I’ll take care of this. We’ll be in touch.”

At that Winston scurried off at a fast walk. Abigale stood to face her sister. “You’ve got a heap of explaining to do.” Then, to her servant, “Thanks, Polly. You’ve been a big help. You can go back to sleep now.”

Back in the house there was both relief and consternation. Questions came fast from Mrs. Gordon, all variations of “You’re only seventeen—what are you doing with that man?” and “How long has this been going on?”

Jane did not answer. “Leave me alone,” she said. “I’m going to sleep.”

“Jane, I demand to know—”

“Mother,” interrupted Abigale, “let it be. Right now, we’re all very tired. Let’s all go back to sleep. We can deal with this in the morning.”

“I suppose,” said Mrs. Gordon. “All right, I’m going back to sleep. And you two should do the same. Let’s have no more aggravation this night.”

As soon as Abigale heard the upstairs bedroom door close, she turned to Jane. “Mother was deathly worried. Figured you had left home. Don’t you at least have some concern for her?”

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“I’m going to sleep,” replied Jane. “As you said, we can deal with this in the morning.” Jane proceeded up the stairs, lantern in hand, and Abigale followed. As Jane was about to close the bedroom door Abigale blocked it and forced her way in.

“Do you want to tell me about him? I think I’m a little more tolerant than Mother.”

“There’s nothing to tell,” Jane said.

“Who is he? Where’d you meet him?”

“If you insist. Anything, to go back to sleep. I met him at the Colonial Cemetery. That’s where they are billeted.”

“They let you into his camp?”

“He was doing guard duty on the corner of Abercorn and South Broad. We struck up a conversation.”

“Conversation? Then how did he end up here?”

“He asked if he could see me. Is that so bad?”

“Polly said you’ve been out back at least once before.”

“Suppose so. Been seeing him about a month.”

“How many times? Why didn’t you leave a note on your bed? My god, you scared Mother pitifully.”

“Didn’t think you’d get up or notice. He’s only here an hour or so, always after midnight, before he has to get back.”

“So more than once?”

“I suppose so.”

“How many?”

“Maybe three, four.”

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“But he’s a soldier. How does he get away?”

“Others cover for him. He only comes in the middle of the night.”

“So it’s not just talking. Come clean, dear sister. I was not born yesterday.”

Jane did not answer.

“Aren’t you cold in there?”

“We have the horse blankets. And he keeps me warm.”

“Do you know what you’re doing?”

“He’s got protection.”

“Oh my God!” exclaimed Abigale. “At seventeen?”

“How old were you?”

Abigale did not answer.

Jane taunted her with possible replies. “Fifteen? Sixteen? When did you meet Franklin? Seventeen?”

“Eighteen.”

“So, long before you got married. Somewhat of the hypocrite, are you not, sister?”

“I said we met at eighteen.”

“You got married when you were almost twenty. It wasn’t that long ago. Were you a virgin?”

“No.”

“So it’s do as I say, not as I do.”

“But I knew we were going to get married. That was different.”

“I don’t think so. If I say I know I’m going to marry Winston, then I think it’s the same.”

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Abigale was immediately struck by the logic of her young sister's argument. She could only get this skill from their father. They both had it.

"Excuse me," Jane taunted. "I didn't hear your reply. And by the way, just out of curiosity, since father was alive then, and we had a horse and carriage, just where did you two have your little trysts?"

Suddenly Abigale was on the defensive. She could have answered the question, explaining how she and Franklin made love in his home during the year before they married, always when his parents were away. Instead, she decided that any more personal explanation was futile. Jane had bested her in argument and logic.

"We were careful," said Abigale. "I just don't want you to be hurt," that's all.

"I said he uses protection."

"I know, but sometimes condoms don't work. They break. That's a simple fact. I don't want you to become pregnant and unmarried."

"Mama was pregnant with you when she got married."

Jane was correct, of course. Her mother and father married in January and Abigale was born in June, a fact not discussed in the household. Whether it was a faulty condom or none at all, the children never enquired.

"Mother's worried about you. I'm worried about you. He's a soldier and there's a war going on. Are you planning to marry him?"

"Hasn't been discussed. We just enjoy each other's company."

Abigale pondered the situation. The more she thought about it, the more she realized how close she was to losing her sister. Jane was of age and headstrong, and would go her own way, if not now then soon enough. This alone was not unacceptable, but what bothered Abigale more

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was the fact—and it was a fact, she felt certain—that if Jane didn't stop seeing this boy, her infatuation would come to no good end. She could think of several 'no good' ends: pregnancy without marriage; his court martial and disgrace (hanging?) for leaving camp without permission; a marriage doomed because it was based on lust and not love; his death in battle and *another* grieving sister.

What could Abigale do? Jane would do what she wanted, and if it wasn't with Winston it would be with the next Bill or Charles or Gaston she met at one of the local camps. There was no opportunity for normal socializing in Savannah, not with the war on and every young man either maimed or in military service.

"Now can I go to sleep?" asked Jane.

Abigale reached over and hugged her sister. "Oh Jane, Jane. I'm so worried about you."

As the household awoke after a night of turmoil, and the women strived to stay busy—reading, or sewing, or tinkling at the piano—no one ventured to bring up recent events, lest it create unwanted conflict. Mrs. Gordon fretted over Jane. Jane wondered how she could achieve her independence. Abigale pondered what to do about Jane, about Gustav's unwanted attention, and whether to return to Reverend Simms' church on Sunday.

And Polly, too, pondered—what might really happen if General Sherman comes? Among all the negroes, whom she met at the market or when out on the street, there was general understanding that the famous Union general was close by, and would enter the city at any moment. It wasn't just Rufus Simms, but everybody saying the same thing: "He's a comin' soon."

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It was Jane who broke the ice, by asking Abigale if she was going back to “that colored church” on Sunday. It was a taunting question, knowing that Abigale’s not-so-secret admirer would be there. When Abigale didn’t answer, Jane thrust the knife a little deeper: “I’m not using the stable tonight.”

“Jane! Hush your mouth,” said her mother.

“I don’t sleep with pigs,” said Abigale.

“Stop it! Both of you,” scolded their mother. “I can’t believe the language coming out of your mouths.”

“I gots an idea,” said Polly.

“Let’s hear it,” said Mrs. Gordon.

“I mention this two day ago, just befo’ Miss Morgan came a knockin’. If da family all comes to church, I can get you together up front, so this man won’t be anywhere ‘bout. We’ve had white folk up front befo.”

“Me go to a colored church?” exclaimed Jane. “Let me eat cow dung first.”

“Where do you come by such language?” asked her mother. “I didn’t raise you that way. Oh, I wish your father was here. He’d put you in your place.”

Abigale rose to the challenge. “*Would* you come mother? You should hear some of the blasphemy out of this black preacher’s mouth. First he speaks Gullah, which you can’t understand, then he talks our language. If we are invaded, which seems most likely, it would not hurt to be acquainted with this Reverend. You, too, Jane.” *Somehow, Simms seems to understand me and my inner demons. Strange, he alone.*

“How far is it? I’m not walking to Frogtown,” pouted Jane

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“It’s on the edge, not far. If all of us go I’ll arrange for a carriage and driver,” said Abigale. “I think we can afford it.”

There was more back and forth, and in the end all agreed to go. Polly, through her network, would secure a bench up front for the four of them.

— *Saturday, December 17*

Courtesy of the United States Army, the *Savannah Republican* was able to publish the list of Confederate killed and wounded during the brief Battle of Fort McAllister. They were all members of the 2nd Division, XV Corps, Army of the Tennessee. Only one was a native of Savannah: Orville Bradley.

“Oh my God,” said Abigale, on reading the notice. “Mother, Orville Bradley was killed at Fort McAllister on Tuesday. Remember him? He and Johnny were such good friends.”

“Oh, dear,” she replied. “A nice boy. I think his mother still lives here, too. I wonder if she knows. That’s such a tragedy. Do you think Johnny knows about it?”

“I don’t think so. I don’t see how he could. We don’t even know where he is now.”

Dear God, how many more? How many more have to die before this war ends? Will Johnny be one of them?

In Savannah’s streets life seemed as normal as ever, but all Savannah knew something big was about to happen after the fall of Fort McAllister. Possibilities ranged from total annihilation of the city, to the far less likely one of Sherman bypassing Savannah altogether and heading straight to South Carolina. In this latter scenario, wishful thinkers assumed there wasn’t

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much worth capturing in the city except a bunch of cotton, so why would Sherman risk his troops?

The ‘bypassers’ were wrong. Under a flag of truce, on December 17 Sherman sent a written message to General Hardee, demanding “the surrender of the city of Savannah, and its dependent forts, and shall wait a reasonable time for your answer, before opening with heavy ordnance...”¹

General Hardee had different plans. Savannah could be sacrificed, but not the army. He just needed a few more days to put his escape plan into action. He replied: “General...Your demand for the surrender of Savannah and its dependent forts is refused.”²

Chapter 8

— *Sunday, December 18*

Gustav arrived early to the church. He sat all alone in the back bench, waiting for more white folks to arrive, most of all Abigale. He placed his hat on the bench to reserve a space for her. Fifteen minutes later she walked in, with her family.

Gustave immediately stood, picked up his hat and motioned for her to enter his bench. But that was not her plan. Abigale, Jane, Mrs. Gordon and Polly all walked past him. Abigale nodded to Gustav so as not to be rude, but did not stop to make any introductions. The look on his face told her he was both surprised and disappointed.

In the front of the church the four women sat in the first bench. Polly had arranged for it to be held. The bench still had room for four more people, so just in case Gustav decided to relocate, Abigale arranged so she was at the far end of the bench, with Jane, her mother and Polly to her right. If Gustav did come down he would be sitting next to Polly the entire service.

She did not have to worry, for within a few minutes the bench filled out with four negro women.

“I can’t believe I’m actually in a negro church,” Jane whispered to Abigale. “What is our city coming to? If Winston saw me now I’d die!”

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“Where is he, by the way?” asked Abigale. Jane did not answer.

As the previous week, there was music by the choir, then Rufus Simms appeared. He looked down to the front bench and acknowledged his white visitors with a head nod, then began with a Gullah prayer: a New Testament quote from Matthew 5:14.

“Oona jes like light fa de whole wol. Ain no way ya kin hide a city wa people build pontop a hill. An ain nobody light a lamp an den pit um ondaneet a bushel basket...

Jane gave Abigale a look to suggest, ‘you dragged me here for this?’

“He will speak normally. Patience.”

Just then Simms launched into his sermon. “What a glorious, a glorious day. Is it not a glorious day?”

“It is!” thundered his audience.

“Any why, my children?”

“The light is a comin’.” That was of course the message in his Gullah recitation.

“I notice quite a few of our white brethren here today,” said Simms, and his eyes scanned the hall’s front and rear sections. Abigale turned her head around to look at Gustav’s bench. It was now filled with seven white visitors, including the Nelsons from last week and four new people, three men and one women. She did not recognize the newcomers.

“You are most welcome,” said Simms. “For as I have said, we are all God’s children!”

“All God’s Children” recited the audience.

“We are all equal in God’s eyes.”

“Equal in God’s eyes.”

Jane gave her sister another dispirited look. Mrs. Gordon did not flinch. Abigale considered that perhaps her mother just wasn’t listening. Polly sat with a smile on her face.

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Jane looked like she wanted to speak but remained silent. Abigale sensed her sister's uneasiness and reached for her hand. "Please," she whispered, "just let him finish."

There was more of the same "light-a-'comin'" speech from Simms, not once mentioning Sherman's name. He worked his audience up into a froth, then brought them down again with recitations and replies to his questions. This was not new material. They came to hear hope and that's what he gave them. But unlike previous years, or even previous months, this was tangible, real hope, for its source was at that point camped outside the city, 60,000 strong, and the congregation knew it.

Simms finished with a flourish—REJOICE! THE END IS NIGH!—then gave the benediction. As the parishioners got up to leave, he didn't wait for well-wishers to come on stage. Instead, he walked down the short flight and stood just in front of Abigale and her family.

"Again, thank you for coming," he said to Abigale. "And who are these other two lovely ladies?"

Abigale introduced her sister and mother. By this time there were other parishioners crowding around, seeking his advice or just waiting to thank him for the service. Simms excused himself from the throng and pulled Polly aside, out of earshot. He said a few words and she nodded her head, then he returned to the other negro parishioners, now in an informal line to speak with him.

Just then Abigale heard a familiar voice, a German-accented one.

"Ah, Mrs. Abigale Tate."

Gustav had bounded down the aisle to her bench.

"Oh, Mr. Heinz," she said facing him, as civilly as possible. "How do you do?"

"Yah, fine, fine. I see you came with others. Your family?"

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“Yes, yes.” Abigale made the introductions, but offered no background. “This is Mr. Gustav Heinz. He comes to hear Reverend Simms.”

“Yah, yah. This reverend repeats himself, but still he has interesting outlook. Is never boring like so many others.”

“Oh, you come often?” asked Mrs. Gordon. Abigale cringed. She did not want to encourage him to linger.

“As often as I can, when I am not busy.” Same smell, thought Abigale. Must be his German cologne. Ugh!

Abigale was pleased to see Jane looking totally bored.

“Mother,” said Abigale, “we really must be going.” Polly pulled on her arm, and whispered in her ear.

“Oh?” Abigale said, genuinely surprised. Then to her family, “It seems Mr. Simms would like to meet with us after he is done with his parishioners.” She moved her body so as to exclude Gustav from the invitation.

“Well,” said Gustav to Jane and Mrs. Gordon, “I don’t want to intrude. It was nice to meet both of you” And to Abigale: “And very nice to see you again. With that, he bowed and walked up the aisle.

“Nice man,” said Mrs. Gordon.

“Can we go now?” complained Jane. “I’m hungry.”

“Did you not hear? Mr. Simms wants to meet with us.”

“Oh dear,” said Mrs. Gordon. “I have nothing to say to Reverend Simms. He seems like an energetic negro, but I think we’ve heard enough. If you and Polly want to stay, I’ll take Jane home in the surrey. You’ll have to walk home, though.”

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Abigale analyzed the situation. She did feel better when Simms sermonized empathy for those with losses. She accepted his blasphemy as understandable; Sherman was coming, nothing could stop him, and why wouldn't the negroes rejoice? She would, in their situation.

Then there was his *manner* of speaking. It was soothing, in a way she had not heard since her horrible ordeal began. Her first visit in his office the week before had lasted only a few minutes, and there was more about him she wished to learn.

"Are you sure?" she asked her mother, seeking reassurance.

Jane beat her foot on the floor and scowled. "Can we go?"

"Yes, I'm sure," said Mrs. Gordon. "Jane, you come with me, we'll return home. Polly and Abigale wish to stay a little longer, meet with this Reverend. For the life of me, I don't know why." Turning to Abigale, she said, "I wish you had this much interest in our Methodist church."

Polly and Abigale sat down and Mrs. Gordon and Jane walked up the aisle to exit the church. By now the hall was almost empty, except for the few people still standing in line to greet Simms. Soon, Abigale knew, she and Polly would be the only ones remaining.

Outside the church, the one-horse surrey began its slow trot back to 27 Liberty Street. Across the street, unseen behind a large live oak, Gustav noted the absence of Polly and Abigale for the return trip.

"I'm honored that you have returned, Mrs. Tate," said Reverend Simms. "I am sorry your mother and sister could not stay."

"Thank you. They did have to return home."

"Our abode is humble, indeed, but our message is powerful."

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The office furniture was old and worn: a table for a desk, some wooden chairs, a kerosene lamp. There was a potbellied stove but it had not been fired up. With her coat still on, Abigale did not feel uncomfortable.

“Are you in contact with General Sherman?” asked Abigale.

Simms laughed. “Whatever gave you that idea?”

Why did I ask him that? I sound like an inquisitor.

“Oh, we hear all the rumors, and you seem to know much about his coming. You may ignore the question.”

“Not at all. I am not in contact with the Union army. They will come and liberate my people, that’s true, but I do believe that’s common knowledge.”

Polly said nothing. Like a dutiful servant, she sat in her chair and conveyed no expression at the conversation before her.

“You seem to have a great deal of learning for a negro, if I may say so.”

“Well, thank you. I owe that to my mother and father. As I explained last week, I was born free, on Jekyll Island. My father was a free negro, and a preacher. My mother taught in the local negro school. I learned to read, to write, and to think for myself.”

“How did you learn of my husband and father?” Abigale knew the answer, but wanted to hear it from him.

“Miss Polly told me. She said she was worried about you.”

At that Polly nodded, but remained silent.

“I understand what it means to lose a loved one,” he continued. “Family is family, negro or White. We all suffer when loved ones die prematurely. I suggested she bring you to one of my Sunday services. It has not been for naught, I hope.”

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“No, not at all. Not at all. I see you have other white parishioners. How did you come about the acquaintance of Mr. Heinz?”

“Oh, he comes regularly, and contributes to our building fund. Only a few dollars, but every bit helps.

“And the Nelsons?”

“Ah yes, Margaret and Sam. They are retired missionaries my family knew on Jekyll. Whenever they come to Savannah they attend. Very nice people.”

With such easy back and forth, Abigale felt comfortable asking the next question.

“And your family, Sir? Do they attend?”

He showed a faint smile. “My wife is ill, at home. A chronic illness, I’m afraid. And we have no children. Thank you for asking.”

Chronic illness? What could that be?

There was more inquisition, all benign. She did not challenge him on his pro-Union rhetoric. Abigale explained how she had been a teacher, but was now on leave since her husband’s death, although she did occasional work as a substitute. He explained that he was a carpenter by trade, and hoped to find more work when old and worn structures start to get rebuilt in Savannah.

“How did you end up in Savannah?”

“I had a small congregation on Jekyll Island. Only fifteen to twenty. When I learned of this position opening up, I applied and was accepted by the church board. My wife had misgivings about leaving Jekyll and her family behind, but we both recognized better opportunities here, so came just before the war started.

“Was she ill when you left the island?”

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“No, that has only occurred in the past year.”

“Is she seeing a doctor? Do you know Dr. Arnold?”

“We have consulted Dr. Arnold, yes. Before his current term of mayor began. He thinks her problem may be related to a form of the typhoid fever, and has prescribed some medication, but she remains weak, I’m afraid.

“I’m sorry. I hope she gets well.

“Thank you.”

I am getting too personal. Does he meet with other parishioners and divulge his private life?

After several more minutes of back-and-forth, Abigale said, “Well, Polly and I must be getting back. You’ve been most gracious. Perhaps we’ll all get to meet General Sherman soon.”

Simms did not comment, but rose to shake her hand, and Polly’s, too.

The women exited the church and began their walk back to Liberty Street. Unseen, Gustav followed them from a distance, until they disappeared inside 27 Liberty Street.

— Sunday, December 18

At three in the afternoon Susan Tate came to Liberty Street to meet with Abigale. She had sent a note the day before, announcing her intention to visit. In this manner she would show up unless Abigale replied that the date and time were not feasible, and stating the reason why.

Abigale could not refuse to meet with her former mother-in-law. Their last meeting was at Franklin’s memorial service in September. They had not been close when Franklin was alive, a situation made worse by Abigale’s 1862 miscarriage. Franklin had just joined the army, which

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meant a long wait for that first grandchild as Susan had no other living children. Another son had died at age four.

Susan's demeanor back in September – aloof, unfriendly – conveyed resentment and disappointment. Abigale remembered thinking at the time, *she has no use for me. I will never see her again.*

Franklin's parents used to live in Savannah but just before the war moved to Pooler, ten miles and two hours away by carriage. Susan had only visited their Pooler home once, with Franklin, and they did not spend the night.

Now rumor had it General Sherman himself was near Pooler, deciding when to invade the city. Abigale wondered if Susan was forced out of her home. Her note came from an address on nearby York Street, home of a Tate relative. That made sense, but then the note gave no reason for the meeting. Abigale felt certain it was not a courtesy visit.

Abigale had told her mother of the impending visit, and when the knock came Mrs. Gordon answered the door. The two women hugged and exchanged pleasantries. When Mrs. Gordon commiserated over Franklin's death, his mother gave condolences regarding Mr. Gordon. Then Mrs. Gordon escorted Mrs. Tate into the living room, where Abigale waited. Abigale shook Susan's hand but there was no hugging.

“So nice to see both of you again,” said Susan. “I have been in town a week now, staying at my sister-in-law's. The Yankees are everywhere around Pooler. I wasn't even sure they'd let me leave, but they did. I was afraid to remain in Pooler. Bluecoats everywhere. Where is *our* army?”

“Is your home safe?” asked Mrs. Gordon.

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“They haven’t looted it, as far as I know. My home is modest, so perhaps it will be untouched. If they break in they would find nothing of value. I brought our few family pictures and most of my clothes with me. They went after all the farms around Pooler, took all the livestock. Sherman is a bastard.”

“Amen to that,” said Mrs. Gordon.

“Please sit,” said Abigale.

“Thank you,” said Susan. “I have come to discuss an issue with you. Your mother may stay if she wishes.”

I know what it is. I can tell. “Mother, perhaps we should speak in private. Would you mind?”

“Of course, of course,” said Mrs. Gordon. “I shall be upstairs. Please call up if you need anything.” She climbed the stairs, leaving Abigale and her ex-mother-in-law alone. Abigale sat in a facing chair. She wore her favorite house dress, a light blue blouse and skirt with a comfortably deep neckline, and only one petticoat underneath. Her visitor, by contrast, wore a coal-black long dress buttoned under the chin, plus a black shawl and hat. Susan appeared to have aged considerably in three months. *I believe she is close to fifty, but looks older. So thin and wan. Yes, that is the right word: wan.*

“What do you hear from Colonel Tate?” asked Abigale, referring to Franklin’s father. “I trust he is well?”

“You know what they say, no news is good news. He’s still up in Virginia with General Lee’s army. But I didn’t come to discuss my husband. I come because of what I hear – and now see – about you, dear Abigale.”

She never called me “dear Abigale.” She has come to criticize. It’s the clothes.

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“Savannah is a small city,” continued Susan. “My husband’s sister has a small circle of friends. They all know my situation, and have informed me what is going on about town.”

“I see. I do not think you are speaking of war preparations.”

Susan gave a little laugh. “That, too. Rumor is – did you know this? – General Hardee plans to escape with our army and leave the city unprotected?”

“No, but it would not surprise me. The rumor I heard is that Hardee is outnumbered ten to one. Did you come just to warn me?”

“No, no, dear. I came on a personal matter.” Susan brushed the front of her dress and sat more upright. “These women I mentioned, they hear things, see things. You have been out and about much lately, it seems. And not once has anyone seen you in mourning clothes. It has caused gossip, which now comes back to me. Understand, you are free to dress as you wish, but it reflects poorly on me, and the memory of my son – your dear departed husband.”

“I did wear black for the few weeks after the notice,” replied Abigale. “But honestly, it depressed me. I thought I could honor his memory more by dressing the way he would have liked to see me, and the way in which I feel most comfortable.”

“Umph. I must say, ‘a few weeks’ hardly fits our local tradition. A year is more appropriate. At least six months. I know of no widow who has not worn black at least six months.”

I must stay calm and not upset her, but this is outrageous. “Mother Tate, you acknowledge I am free to dress as I wish. Please, why does it affect you so? I don’t wish to offend. And you do not even live in the city.”

“As I said, I have my own honor to uphold. People talk. I hear you go to market without proper dress. I hear you walk in Forsythe Park in similar fashion. And then I learn you have even

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attended a negro church, without any of the proper clothing for your situation. Abigale! That is unacceptable. Simply unacceptable.”

“I am truly sorry if my activity offends you. I loved Franklin and would never do anything to disappoint him. But he is no longer with us, and I have my own life to live. It should not affect you.”

“But, don’t you see Abigale? It *does* affect me. And your poor mother, does she not feel the sting of gossip? When Colonel Gordon died, I know she wore black for a year. Has she no say in your behavior?”

“I am not a child.”

“Clearly not. Though I remember when you were a child, when we lived in Savannah. Your family always had a good reputation. Your father a prominent attorney, your mother an excellent homemaker. And you and your sister – you were good girls growing up. When Franklin fell in love with you, I was not displeased. I certainly would not interfere.”

“Interfere? What do you mean?”

“Interfere with the union. He was in love with you, that was all my husband and I needed to know.”

“Then you had a reservation? You speak obliquely.”

“Not about your family, no. But there was always something about you, something I kept to myself.”

“But you are going to tell me now, I fear.”

“It is flattering in a way, and I am somewhat embarrassed to bring it up. But I suppose there’s no harm now. I thought you were a touch too...how shall I say this...haughty.”

“Haughty? I don’t understand.”

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“Too smart for a woman. Smarter than my son. Quick, like your father. A certain way about you always suggested you knew you were so endowed, but worked to hide it so as not to scare away men. You are the smartest woman I have ever met, and that concerned me. What would become of a man in your grasp? The situation did suggest an eventual unhappy marriage, but I said nothing.”

“But Franklin was no slouch. He was studying with Father to become an attorney.”

“Yes, but you...you are something out of the ordinary for our sex. Were you not a woman, you would have been studying in that office as well. And no doubt be quite successful. But would you make a good wife, content to cook and clean and raise children? I had my doubts. I am being truthful.”

“Mother Tate, there is so much supposition in what you say, I don’t know how to respond. I can only say I don’t think Franklin ever found me wanting in womanly attributes. Nor in the kitchen, nor the laundry, nor the marriage bed.”

Abigale noted a smirk elicited by her reference to the bedroom. “If he did,” she continued, “I was unaware. Either way, what does all this have to do with my wearing mourning clothes?”

“I sense you feel our traditions are beneath you. You are smarter than everyone else, so what we ordinary people believe does not matter. I hoped and prayed this quality would not interfere with Franklin’s marriage. God has kept me from ever finding out.”

I have had enough of this. “It is plain I cannot satisfy you,” said Abigale. “There is really not much more I can say. I am sorry the gossip bothers you so, but these are not normal times. We are losing the war that claimed Franklin and my father, and Savannah is about to be occupied by the Yankees. We may be burned to the ground like Atlanta. And Sherman plans to free all the

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slaves. There may be social upheaval. Frankly, Susan, I think we have more important things to be concerned with than wearing mourning clothes.”

“I was so hoping you would see the error of your ways, and follow our tradition.”

“I am sorry. I cannot do what you ask.”

“Then my visit has been for naught,” said Susan, as she stood and prepared to leave. “I will give you a friendly warning, though. You may think society has changed because of this dreadful war. But people have not changed. Yes, our side is losing a valiant battle, but white people will still retain their morals, their traditions and their customs. Be very careful, Abigale. You are too free with your ideas, and could invite trouble.”

“I appreciate your concern, and will consider your comments. I certainly do not wish to invite trouble.”

With that, Mrs. Susan Tate said goodbye and left the home.

Abigale stared at the front door after it shut. *It is best Franklin left me with no children. She would make life even more miserable if I had her grandchild.*

Chapter 9

— *Monday, December 19*

At half past midnight, two men on horseback galloped up West Broad Street, the cloudless night lit by a near-full moon, their faces hidden under brown hoods cut with large round holes for the eyes and a wide oval for the mouth. Each man carried a flaming torch, the type made of tar and turpentine; once lighted, it could only be extinguished if fully immersed in water or sand. In each saddle, in a side pocket, rested a loaded rifle.

The two horsemen turned left on William Street. “There it is,” yelled the man called Mike. They stopped in front of the Third Baptist Church and stared at the wooden structure. “Billy, you go to the other side. I’ll take this side.”

They parted and took up positions adjacent to a church window. Using the rifle butt, each rider shattered a window pane, then threw his torch, flame first, through the open space. Deed done, they retreated to the street.

“That ought to do it, said Mike. “We’ll wait a minute, make sure it takes off. Giddy with excitement, Billy pulled out his rifle, shot in the air and shouted, “Whoo-hah!”

“Don’t waste your ammunition,” scolded Mike. Soon there was more noise, of burning wood, bursting glass and falling timbers. Flames were visible from the street.

“She’s burning fast,” said Mike. “That’s good.”

LIBERTY STREET

The noise awakened an old negro who lived across the street. He put on his pants and ran outside to investigate. "Oh my God, the church is on fire!" he yelled. "There's flames up to the roof!"

He spied the horsemen. "Hell and damnation!" he called out. "Did you do this?"

"Go back to bed, nigger!" yelled Billy, and raised his rifle.

"Don't shoot him!" said Mike. "We done our deed, let's go."

"Tell your people that's what nigger lovers get," said Billy, and pointed his rifle to the flaming structure. As they galloped off Billy brushed past the negro and hit him beside the head with his rifle butt; the old man fell to the ground, stunned but alive.

While the church burned, Jane and Winston lay naked in the shed. She loved the feeling of him inside her, of his chest hair against her bare breasts, his tongue probing her mouth. She gave a low scream in ecstasy. Each jerk of his body gave her pleasure as she thrust up to meet him.

Their lovemaking over, he asked in a low voice, "Are you all right, honey? You're not cold, are you?"

"With you on top, no. Not at all."

He pulled himself off and lay beside her, under the two horse blankets. "I have some bad news."

"You have another girl. I was expecting that."

"No, not that. It's bad news for us two, but good news in another way."

"What do you mean?"

"I am meaning that we are evacuating tomorrow. Leaving Savannah."

LIBERTY STREET

“What? You’re leaving?”

“Not just me. My whole outfit. General Hardee’s entire army.”

“But what about General Sherman? Aren’t you going to fight the Yankees?”

“Orders have come down. We are outnumbered something like ten to one. To avoid capture, we’re walking over to South Carolina.”

“On water? I do believe there’s a river between us and Carolina.”

“They’re laying a pontoon bridge over the river. Using rice flats.”

“You’re serious!”

“Yes.”

“I’m coming with you.”

He laughed. “You can’t. Civilians don’t travel with the army. And besides, even if they did, we ain’t exactly married.”

“Then let’s get married!”

“I ain’t ready for that, and you ain’t neither.”

She snuggled up closer. “Hold me.”

He embraced her. “I’ll miss you, but all us soldiers are pleased ‘cause I really think we’d all be killed by Sherman’s army.”

She began to cry, softly.

“Don’t cry, honey. I’ll write to you.”

“This is the last night?”

“Yes.”

“Then I want you again,” she said. She reached for his member and found it limp.

“Don’t stop,” he said, as he caressed her breasts and prepared to enter her a second time.

LIBERTY STREET

An hour later they emerged from under the blankets to dress, he to return to camp and she to her lonely bedroom. Despite their intimacy she felt awkward, not knowing quite what to say.

“You will write?” she asked.

“Sure will.”

“Promise? I sure can’t write to you, since you’ll be moving around.”

“I don’t know where we’re headed, that’s for sure. Generals don’t tell us, they just say get up, start marching this way or that way. And anything I write might not make it to Savannah until the war’s over. Especially if the Yankees stay in charge.”

They kissed one more time, pressing their bodies hard against each other. Then he stepped back and took her hands in his. “Stay warm.”

“I will, Winston. And you stay safe.”

Winston turned and set off for the cemetery. She closed the stable door and stood for a moment as his tall figure disappeared down the alley.

He won't write, because he's not in love with me. And I'm not really in love with him. I understand this situation, I really do. He wanted what I had to offer, and I wanted him just as badly. I enjoyed what we did. This is all new. I do like being with a man. How does Abigale go without? Mother? Polly? Aren't all women the same? Now I have to find another man.

Early that morning, as the sun rose above the horizon, a boy about twelve knocked on Polly’s basement door. He was part of an informal network of messengers that negroes relied on for information. And he had important news.

Polly opened the door, recognized the boy Moses, and said simply, “What?”

LIBERTY STREET

“Da nigger Miss Jones said to tell you the church burned down last night. She don’t know mo’ about it, but said you got to know as soon as I could get here.”

“You seen it, boy? You seen it’s burned?”

“Yes’m. Jus’ came from there. Nuthin standing no mo. Dey say it happened middle o’ the night.”

“Oh, Jesus! Anybody killed?”

“Miss Jones don’t say dat.”

“Go to the others you gots to tell. Know you have more folks to tell.”

With that Moses went on his way.

Oh lawdy. What’s this world coming to? Could Moses be wrong? She knew he wasn’t, no one would make up a tale like that. But maybe the church wasn’t as bad as Moses said.

Polly dressed and entered the street. Negroes were already at work removing the trash and sweeping the sidewalks. She put herself close to one of them.

“What you hear?” she asked.

“’Bout what?”

“Anything ‘bout the church? Third Baptist?”

“It burnt down.”

“Who told you so?”

He pointed to his working partner, who then answered Polly. “Come up from West Broad. Dat’s all dey is talkin’ bout. Burned down to da roots. Don’t know what caused it.”

Polly returned to the house. *Now I gots to tell Miss Abigale. I’ll wait til she comes downstairs.*

LIBERTY STREET

As soon as Abigale appeared in the dining room Polly relayed the news, quoting both of her sources.

“What are you saying? Burned to the ground?”

“Afraid it be true.”

“Get your coat,” said Abigale. “We’re going to see for ourselves.”

“Befo’ your breakfast?”

“I’m not hungry.”

Abigale ran upstairs to tell her mother she was leaving. Jane was still asleep and Abigale did not disturb her.

Where there once was a church now lay a charred foundation, burning embers and blackened beams. Smoke twirled in the air. By the time the volunteer fire department arrived there was nothing more to save. Now the only thing standing was a lone brick chimney. Miraculously no other building burned, because the church was surrounded by lawn and the night had been windless.

There were other people around, most notably Mayor Richard Arnold, who was just about to leave. He was accompanied by two other men, one an aide and the other a reporter for the *Savannah Republican*.

“Miss Abigale, what brings you here?” Arnold asked.

What does bring me here? What shall I say?

“Uh, this is my servant’s church. She learned about the fire early this morning, and when she told me I thought we should go see for ourselves. Was anyone injured?”

“No, happened last night, after midnight. Building was empty.”

LIBERTY STREET

Thank goodness!

“Well, is this Sherman’s work?” asked Abigale. “Is he planning to burn the whole city?”

The mayor laughed. “Hardly. We’ve interviewed an old negro who saw the whole thing. Just two men on horseback. Arson, pure and simple. They told him that’s what happens to nigger lovers.”

“Nigger lovers?” she asked. “But it’s a black church, my Polly’s church. Why would they say that?”

“Well,” interjected one of the men with the mayor, “apparently some white folks have been attending. Rumor has it this church’s reverend has preached some inflammatory sermons. Would you know anything about that?”

“I’m sorry, who are you, sir?”

“Name’s Jeff Biggert, and I work for the *Republican*.”

What am I getting myself into? She quickly decided to deflect inquiry with another question. “Are you sure, Mr. Biggert, this isn’t Union men, advance men from Sherman’s army?”

“Not sure of anything, Miss ... sorry, I didn’t get your name.”

“Oh, I do apologize,” said the mayor. “Mr. Biggert this is Mrs. Abigale Tate, and her servant, I believe Polly, you said?” He looked to Abigale for confirmation but Polly spoke first.

“Dat so,” said Polly.

“And the other gentleman with me is my secretary, Colonel Seth McGuire.”

McGuire tipped his hat.

“Colonel?” asked Abigale, “Are you in the army, sir?”

“It’s an honorific, Ma’am. Just call me Seth.”

LIBERTY STREET

Both men were younger than the mayor, and they looked at her the way most men always did, with penetrating eyes and a wish to do more than just look. Abigale decided she should leave this group and avoid any further questioning.

“Well, it’s nice meeting you gentlemen. I think Polly and I would like to take a little closer look at what remains of her church.”

With that she began to walk away. Biggert strode quickly beside her. “Excuse me, Mrs. Tate, would it be all right if I asked you a few questions?”

“Not now, sir. This is a most distressing day. Please let us be.”

“Then perhaps your servant? You said she’s a member of this congregation.”

Polly was about to speak but Abigale grabbed her arm and turned to the reporter. “Not now, sir, please. Not now.”

“Yes, ma’am. I understand.” At that Biggert returned to the other two men and the trio walked to their carriage. As they did so, the mayor waved goodbye to Abigale. She watched them leave, then continued to survey the ruined church.

Other white and black milled about, the two groups avoiding each other as they surveyed the embers. Polly said hello to a couple of negroes, and they commiserated together. Abigale heard some Gullah language, but didn’t enquire as to what was said.

She wondered if Reverend Simms would appear.

Surely he must have heard by now. Is he threatened, in any danger? Am I?

Chapter 10

— *Tuesday, December 20*

Word of the evacuation spread quickly and confirmed what Winston had told Jane—all 10,000 of General Hardee’s defense forces were to walk across a hastily-assembled pontoon bridge, into South Carolina. They would leave the city undefended against the massive Union army now surrounding it.

Jane insisted on going to watch the exodus. Abigale, too, was curious, but wary. “They’re marching tonight?”

“Starting when the sun goes down, so everyone says,” replied Jane.

Their neighbor Josephtha Morgan came over late in the afternoon, to announce she wanted to see the soldiers leave, and asked if anyone would like to accompany her. The fact of there even *being* a bridge that you could *walk over* intrigued everyone.

After some back and forth discussion, mainly over the question of safety at night, Jane and Abigale agreed to accompany Josephtha to the riverfront. Polly would could along as well.

Mrs. Gordon decided to stay home. “If they were coming *into* Savannah, I’d go watch and cheer,” she said. “But leaving? Why bother?”

LIBERTY STREET

The three woman started for the river just before sunset. The bridgehead was located where West Broad Street ends at the Savannah River, a twenty minute walk from Liberty Street.

A few blocks from the river they met a wall of soldiers, all waiting to cross the bridge. Civilians could not continue further. They were shunted east to Broughton Street, and then south on Barnard Street to the wharf area. There, between massive three-story warehouses, the gawkers could find a place to look out over the low-lying pontoons, situated end-to-end across the river. That they formed a true bridge was shown by the hundreds of soldiers filing across on foot, along with numerous wagons and horses.

“What a sight!” exclaimed Jane. “A full evacuation, just like Winston said.”

“Better to have them escape than be slaughtered,” sighed Abigale.

“It’s something I never hoped to see,” offered Josephtha. “What will become of us now?”

The torches carried by the marches, and some moonlight, gave enough glow to appreciate the one-way march, although not enough to reveal features of any individual. From her vantage point Jane tried to pick out Winston, by his silhouette if not his face, but found the troops indistinguishable.

The soldiers and animals disappeared from view once they reached Hutchinson Island, a landmass splitting the river. Another pontoon bridge crossed from Hutchinson over to South Carolina, but was not visible from the Savannah side.

Remarkably, the march itself was silent, no singing or yelling, lest the Yankees get wind of the evacuation. To further confuse the enemy, Confederates continued cannon fire in the general direction of the Union troops, to make them think Hardee’s army was still positioned to fight the invasion. Soldiers manning the cannons would be last to cross the pontoon bridge, at which point it would be dismantled.

LIBERTY STREET

Abigale surveyed the crowd around her, mostly women of all ages, along with a few middle-aged men. If there were any young men left in the city they would not show here, lest people wonder why they, too, were not on that bridge. She noted a faint smell of sulfur in the air, mollified by the cool temperature. Everyone wore coats or shawls. Nearby a baby wailed, and its mother said, “shush, shush, don’t cry.” Abigale wondered if its father was marching across the bridge.

“Frau Tate?” The question came from directly behind her, the German accent sending a shudder down her neck. Abigale turned to face a middle-aged, portly man whose body features she well recognized.

“Gustav?”

“Yah, Yah. I see you are curious like the rest of us.”

Jane also turned, but Gustav but did not acknowledge her at first. Then Abigale, out of ingrained politeness, said, “You remember my sister, Jane Gordon?”

Gustav faced Jane. “Oh, yes, of course, at the church last week.” He held out his hand and she took it.

“Please to meet you again, sir,” Jane said. A child’s greeting, learned at home and not easily unlearned.

“And my neighbor, Josephtha Morgan.”

“Am pleased to meet you as well, Mrs. Tate’s neighbor.”

Why did he refer to her this way? And is he following me, or is this just a coincidence?

Gustav waved his hand toward the departing soldiers. “Yah, this is good. I’ll tell you why.” Gustav paused for effect.

“Oh, why?” asked Josephtha.

LIBERTY STREET

“Because there will be no wasting of the blood. The city will be, how you say, spared, and my humble boardinghouse will not be burned. Now there is no reason to burn. I am most happy to see this.”

The women did not respond to his analysis, but turned back to follow the mass of soldiers still streaming quietly across the bridge.

“Well,” Gustav said, raising his voice to gain attention, with the ‘Well’ coming out ‘Vell’, “it was nice meeting you again. And I assume you know about the tragedy with Third Baptist?”

It was a question and Abigale felt obliged to respond, not to be rude. Turning around, she said, “Yes, we saw the ruin. Do you know who did it?”

“No idea. The newspaper said two men on horseback. Could be anyone. Where will you go now to worship?”

There are no bounds to his brazenness, thought Abigale. To this point Polly had not spoken, or been acknowledged to Gustav. Now was the time. “Polly has not decided,” she said. “And you?”

“I myself am not a religious man. I have little use for religion. I go to Third Ogeechee Baptist only to hear Reverend Simms. And I have just learned where he will administer to his congregation.”

“You have?” asked Abigale, with more surprise than she wanted to show.

“Yah, yah. Just found out this afternoon. He will preach at *First* Ogeechee Colored Baptist, guest of Pastor Patterson. Until his own church is rebuilt.”

“Polly, did you know that?” Abigale asked.

LIBERTY STREET

“No ma’am, dat be news to me. I heard of Mr. Patterson, tho. Lots of folks goes to him also.”

“I am curious,” Abigale said, “how did you find this out ahead of Polly, who is a member of Mr. Simms’ church?”

“Yah, I meet lots of people who visit Savannah Gardens, some know more than others, they tell me. No secret, I just learn first.”

Abigale could not help wondering who ‘they’ might be. Rufus Simms himself? Reverend Patterson? Since the two preachers were negroes, she thought it unlikely they visited his ‘boardinghouse’. Not just because of their position, but also because negroes had their own brothels in Frogtown, and were not welcomed at white establishments.

She also considered that Gustav was making up this information, to get her attention. Either way, the news would be confirmed shortly. She decided to ask no more questions about the plans of Reverend Rufus Simms.

“Well,” said Gustav, “I really must be going. It will be hours before all the troops are over the bridge, and I must get back to my establishment. So, good evening.” With that he left the women and began his walk up the steep incline from the river, toward Bay Street.

“He seems like a nice man,” said Josephtha.

“Abigale thinks he’s a pig,” said Jane.

“Be nice,” said Abigale

“Well, it’s true. You said that.”

“I find him crude,” countered Abigale. “And his boardinghouse is a brothel.”

“Oh?” asked Josephtha.

“How come you never mentioned that before?” asked Jane. “And how do *you* know?”

LIBERTY STREET

“I don’t gossip. But it’s common knowledge. He may be nice outwardly, but I know what he’s interested in. If not for business, then personal pleasure.”

“You can’t put men down for that,” said Jane.

How did I end up in this twisty conversation? I should shut my mouth now. Joseptha is a gossip.

“Think what you want,” said Abigale. “I don’t think he’s a particularly nice man. There is even rumor he has negro women in his employ.”

“That’s interesting,” said Jane.

“Well,” said Joseptha, “if that’s true, the Yankees should become his best customers. I understand they love the Nigras.”

The women watched the marching soldiers for another half hour, then walked home, unfollowed and unmolested.

Chapter 11

— *Tuesday Night, Dec 20 to Wednesday Morning, Dec 21*

“What’s going on?” asked Savannah Alderman Henry Brigham. “Why do you need us at City Exchange nine o’clock at night?”

“Gentlemen, the situation is dire,” replied Mayor Richard Arnold. “General Hardee has begun his evacuation.”

“How can that be Richard? I hear guns in the distance. Surely we are being defended.”

“Surely not,” Arnold shot back. “Hardee began evacuating a couple of hours ago. The gun fire is to cover their retreat. Go down to Anderson’s Wharf on West Broad after you leave here. You’ll find a pontoon bridge over to Hutchinson Island, and then another bridge to South Carolina. That’s why I called you in now. It’s just nine. By three o’clock in the morning our troops will all be gone from the city and you won’t hear any more confederate shelling. The ironclad *Savannah* has been scuttled and Fort Jackson by now should be empty of all soldiers. The only troops remaining in Savannah will be the sick, the infirm, and those who faked illness to stay behind. Probably many of them, I’m afraid.”

“How do you know all this?”

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“Hardee met with me twice, Monday night and again this morning. He showed me the order. It’s from General Beauregard. Hardee is to defend Savannah, but if it’s between Savannah and the army, save the army. They are needed in South Carolina, where Sherman is sure to go next. He says Sherman has well over 62,000 battle-ready troops. They were resupplied after we lost Ft. McAllister. Hardee has but 10,000.”

“What did he tell you to do?” asked George Wylly.

“Pray.”

“Pray? You’re the doctor, Richard. Surely you have a better remedy.”

“Yes, Richard, what do you propose?” asked Christopher Casey, a middle-aged, paunchy alderman. He puffed on his cigar as if this affair didn’t concern him as much as the others.

“We must meet with General Sherman. His troops are very close to the city, and poised to enter. They will come right to our doorstep as soon as he realizes our troops are gone. Sherman may have already given orders to burn the downtown, but we must implore him not to. If we can just get him in peacefully, so he can see what we have, see that he is truly welcome and will not be snipered, I trust they will spare us.”

Henry C. Freeman, unmarried and with no close family, spoke up: “Sherman has burned everything so far: Atlanta, Milledgeville, farms, homesteads. He’s torn up the railroads. The man is a monster. You have read the papers. We should join Hardee and get the hell out, I say.”

“A lot of that’s hearsay, we don’t know what he plans to do here,” said the mayor. “We really have nothing strategic of value except the cotton.”

“Maybe hearsay,” said Casey, “but I do hear a lot of people say it. A plantation owner came into the shop just yesterday. His place near Millen was pillaged, then burned to the ground. He saw it all from a redoubt. Nothing he could do. He skedaddled here with his wife and two

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children. I don't think he made any of it up. He said it was like that all around Millen; plantations that owned slaves have been stripped bare, the slaves gone and in most cases the houses burned. And we know for a fact Sherman uprooted all the citizens of Atlanta before burning it to the ground. Sherman's been on his goddamn march since middle November. It's now December 20. That's five weeks of burning, pillaging, stealing, raping."

"It's war, Chris. And we're out of bargaining chips, or fighting chips, or any chips."

"We should get in line with Hardee," blurted out Freeman

"And your wives and children?" Arnold asked of the other aldermen. "What of them? And your property? I'm not talking about your slaves, they are no longer your property, at least not after Sherman gets here. How many of you even own slaves?"

Four of the eight raised a hand.

"Well, if not already, they will be free by tomorrow morning. Unless you don't understand Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation." He pronounced the document with sarcasm: e-Man-ci-PA-shun Pro-CLA-ma-shun.

"But what of your homes, your horses?" continued Arnold. "Give it all up? I say there is a better way. I say as the last of our troops cross over the river, that we rush to meet Geary, catch him before he has a chance to do any damage. I propose to formerly surrender the city."

"How can you 'surrender'? Last I heard that's a military tactic."

Arnold ignored the comment. "As painful as it may seem gentleman, we have no other choice. I will go alone if I have to, but I sincerely wish us to be unified in this matter, to represent the city government. We may be vilified by the citizens, at least in the beginning, but soon they will come around and be thankful if we can save Savannah."

LIBERTY STREET

Freeman did not respond and the others murmured agreement. None of them really wanted to march across a wooden pontoon bridge into the marshes of South Carolina.

“Excellent. Then we are agreed,” said the mayor. “Let’s meet here at one o’clock. All the carriages are gone, taken by the troops. So we will have to go out on our own horses. Anyone not have a horse?”

There was no reply in the negative. “Excellent. That will make eight of us altogether. I have some knowledge of where the enemy is camped, out on Augusta Road. We best ride from here to Anderson’s Wharf together. As soon as the last troops enter the bridge, we’ll head out to meet them. I think we’ll find Union blue in no time and they can take us to General Sherman.”

The night was cold and rainy. At one hour past midnight the city officials rode their horses down Bay Street to West Broad, then to the pontoon landing. Another thousand troops were milling about, waiting their turn. Straw had been placed on the pontoons to minimize the sound of footsteps. General Hardee was already in South Carolina. The ranking officer approached Mayor Arnold.

“Dr. Arnold, are you planning to cross over?”

“No, we are going to search for General Sherman after you leave, to negotiate something. How many are going across?”

“We estimate about ten thousand altogether. We’re leaving a whole lot of guns and ammunition behind. General Sherman should be happy with that. Wish we could help you, Dr. Arnold, but orders is orders.”

“I completely understand, Colonel.”

LIBERTY STREET

An hour later ties to the first pontoon were cut, letting it drift into the river. At that, Arnold and his party rode south on West Broad, then turned right on Augusta Road. Arnold carried a white flag and a letter of surrender in his saddle bag. In the rain the horsemen spread out some distance and became separated. Arnold and four others turned down a narrow lane, while the remaining three aldermen stayed on Augusta Road. Just when the separation became apparent the Augusta Road group ran into a roadblock manned by a dozen union troops.

“Who goes there?”

“We are here to surrender Savannah,” said O’Byrne.

The Union Captain approached with a torch. Rifleman on each side stood ready to shoot

“Yeh? Who is we? Dismount or risk being shot.”

They all dismounted, not sure what else to do but raise hands in the air. “We are Mayor Richard Arnold and seven of his alderman. Can you take us to General Sherman? We want to surrender Savannah.”

“I only see three. Three ain’t eight. Where are the others?”

“They split off, took another road. The mayor is with them, but they will find us shortly.”

Surrounded by blue coats, the three hapless aldermen were marched 200 yards beyond the roadblock, to a small tent city.

“Wait here.” A bluecoat entered one of the tents and awakened General Geary, who promptly came out in coat and hat. He did not seem pleased.

“I am General Geary. Which of you is the mayor?”

O’Byrne explained the night’s events, that the mayor was temporarily separated from them, but that their intent – unanimous – was to surrender the city.

LIBERTY STREET

“Well that explains the silence over the past half hour,” said Geary. “Not a word nor any response from Hardee’s boys. Skipped to South Carolina, heh? So who’s defending your city?”

“No one, sir. The only Confederates you’ll find are those too ill to leave. That’s a fact.”

“Well, which direction did your infernal mayor go?”

They gave him an idea, and he dispatched half a dozen soldiers to find Arnold and bring him to camp. Half an hour later Arnold and the others rode in, surrounded by blue coats on horseback. In his right hand the mayor carried a white flag on a short pole.

Geary yelled out. “Flag’s not needed. Got your message. Mayor Arnold, I presume?”

“General, I am Dr. Richard Arnold, mayor of Savannah. Thank you for meeting with us.” He dismounted and bowed, as if he meeting a European potentate. “I have in my hands a letter of surrender for General Sherman.”

“Sherman isn’t here now. I’m in charge.”

“Yes, sir,” replied the mayor. “Sir, General Hardee has left the city and we are defenseless. We ask of you, protection of the lives and private property of the citizens and of our women and children. We have no troops, no one to fight you. I think you will enjoy our beautiful city and our hospitality. You will see it is well worth preserving.” With that, Mayor Arnold handed his letter General Geary, who read it quickly.³

“So Hardee has escaped over the Savannah River, and you will offer no opposition?”

“His entire army, General. As I wrote, we are utterly defenseless. The city is yours. Sir.”

“Excellent, Mr. Mayor,” said Geary. “Now you and your men can lead us into Savannah. If it’s as you say, no harm will come to your city.”

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Just before sunrise Mayor Arnold and his aldermen led a 1000-strong Union division up West Broad Street. Heads poked out of second floor windows, believing and not believing. The troops encountered a black freedman on the street, perhaps slightly inebriated, bowing profusely and yelling "Praise the Lord, Sherman is come!" Near the end of West Broad the marchers turned right, to enter Bay Street. When they left camp the sky was still dark with a wet drizzle. By the time they reached the corner of West Broad and Bay the sun was lighting up the morning sky.

It became apparent with daylight that looting had been going on all night. Word of the evacuation spread fast, and shops were being vandalized by lower class whites, but also some blacks, as well as Confederates soldiers who had stayed behind. Some of the looting was motivated by hunger, but there was no way to separate out the desperate from the despicable. Several times Geary dispatched a small contingent to put a stop to the looting. Each time Arnold chimed in with "Thank you General, we are so glad you're here." In truth, Arnold was glad. He knew what chaos might ensue without the Federal presence.

Two blocks from Bull Street a shot pierced the air, then a scream. Geary turned his head briefly, then kept riding. He knew the sound -- a Union rifle. Arnold, just a few yards to the side of Geary, was very curious but said nothing and kept riding. A few minutes later a union captain galloped past the marching columns and trotted next to his commanding general, saluting smartly. They exchanged a few words and the young officer rode off. Geary then spoke, with a hint of sarcasm,

"You have one less looter to worry about, Mr. Mayor."

The troops stopped in front of the Customs House at the corner of Bay and Bull Streets. Geary and Arnold climbed to the base of the spire to reach a spacious four-sided balcony. From

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there the general could survey the city in all directions, as his aides raised the American flag and lowered the Confederate one. Alongside the stars and stripes they also raised the flag of Geary's Twentieth Corps. A complete transfer of power had just occurred with no shots fired (save against looters).

The sun was now fully above the horizon. The city was, Geary confessed to Arnold, just as he had heard: a grand and beautiful place, full of small parks or squares, handsome buildings, and a series of capacious warehouses fronting the Savannah River. In them were thousands of bales of cotton -- cotton that would no longer be of service to the Confederacy. They climbed back down to Bay Street and orders were given to encamp on the nearby squares. Geary then sent orders for the rest of his division to deploy.

“Where the hell is Sherman?” Geary muttered to himself.

Even as events were unfolding, the *Savannah Republican*, one of the city's two daily papers, apprised of Hardee's evacuation and the Mayor's desire to quickly surrender, published a most timely editorial, counseling “obedience and all proper respect on the part of our citizens,”⁴

Chapter 12

— Thursday, December 22

Late in the morning Abigale looked out the front window and saw several blue coats ambling down her street. Each man carried a rifle and back pack, and as a group they seemed jaunty, in no hurry to get wherever they were going.

Nothing inside the house had changed but outside was a whole new world. The Confederate army was gone, and Savannah was occupied by the enemy. The *Savannah Republican's* December 21 front page editorial told citizens what was coming;⁴ it did not mention that the paper itself would immediately cease publication. The *Morning News* would soon cease printing as well.

One didn't need a newspaper to learn the city had been invaded, or that it was, to this point, a peaceful occupation. Abigale felt overwhelming relief that Atlanta's fate was not to be Savannah's. Intense curiosity overcame her and without much thought said to Polly, "Let's go to the market. I want to see all this for myself."

Mrs. Gordon did not want to leave the house, at least not now. She was still waiting for the newspaper that would not be delivered, because it was no longer being published. Jane also did not want to join Abigale, stating rather archly, "I'd rather go out on my own. I feel safe."

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Abigale knew what Jane wanted—to search for someone to replace Winston. The very thought made her wince. *Nothing good can come of this. But what can I do? Tell her not to leave the house? Insist mother quarantine her? Mother has given up on Jane. If only daddy was alive! He'd know what to do.*

Abigale could only offer her sister weak advice. “Take, care, Jane. Be careful. These boys are hungry, they’ve been marching for weeks. They’re not Southern boys. They don’t share our values.”

“Don’t worry about me,” Jane replied.

Polly and Abigale entered Chippewa Square, where they saw a few Union soldiers setting up campsites. This was not a massive camp like in the Old Colonial Cemetery, just a few tents for what would like be a sentry post. Other citizens and negroes were out and about, and no streets were closed or off limits. The occupation that had commenced only thirty hours earlier was, so far, largely peaceful.

Exiting the Square onto Bull Street, Abigale saw a carriage coming rapidly toward them. As it came beside Abigale and Polly the passenger instructed his negro driver to stop, and he got out. He looked to be in his fifties and was smartly attired in a three-piece suit, fedora and cravat. His dress, along with the carriage, indicated he was part of the city’s elite.

“Abigale Tate!” he said. “My, my, so nice to see you.” He spoke in a British accent, and took a deep and exaggerated bow after the greeting. He did not mention Polly, who stood behind her mistress.

“Mr. Green?”

LIBERTY STREET

“Yes, yes. Charles Green. I haven’t seen you in a while. How are you doing? Of course, I heard about Franklin. What can I say? I am so sorry. But you seem to be holding out well.”

“Thank you. Well, you seem to be in a hurry.”

“I am, I am. Haven’t you heard? General Sherman is in town!”

Abigale waved her hand toward the troops in Chippewa Square and said, “Yes, it seems so. Since yesterday.”

“No, no, he himself arrived only within the past two hours. He was in Port Royal when General Geary entered the city. He arrived back by boat last night. And I just met him at the Pulaski Hotel.”

“You met the infamous general?”

“Yes, yes, very nice man. He’s going to stay at my home! He’s agreed.”

“Your home? On Madison Square?”

“The one and same, that’s what I offered him. And he’s accepted. I’m on my way now to greet him when he arrives.”

Green was a cotton merchant, among the most successful in the city. As a British citizen he considered himself non-partisan to the conflict, though by virtue of owning cotton stored in Savannah, he was at risk for losses.

As to his house, it was by far the most expensive in the city. Built in the 1850s, by architect Charles Norris, in the “Gothic Revival” style, Green had spared no expense. The house even had indoor plumbing. Abigale had been inside twice before, for Christmas parties when her father was alive.

“And will your family be staying there as well?” she asked.

LIBERTY STREET

“My wife and children are safe in Virginia. I brought them up a few months ago, and returned to oversee my holdings. Can’t be too careful with this conflict.”

“Well, that is interesting,” she said. “May I enquire how you knew the general would be at Pulaski House this morning?”

“I learned from Major Howard yesterday that Sherman was coming back from South Carolina. I told him my plan, and he said Sherman would stop at Pulaski House as soon as he arrived. I think he was planning to stay there. So I went on my own initiative, introduced myself, and made him the offer. He is, quite frankly, desirous of some luxury after marching through our fair state.”

“And no cost to the Union, I assume?” asked Abigale.

“Free, of course. Though I do have a motive, which should be no secret.”

“Which is?”

“You’ll remember, the house is full of art and antiques from mother England. With Sherman there, the property will be protected. And I will feel safer.”

“You will be staying in the house, then?”

“Yes, yes. Just two rooms. The general and his staff will have the run of the place. That’s my plan and he’s agreed.” Green exuded glee, as if he had just closed on a successful business deal.

Abigale did not share his glee. “Franklin was killed near Atlanta last August,” she said, showing no emotion, simply stating a fact. Her severe non-sequitur seemed to catch Green off guard, as he frowned and cleared his throat.

“Yes, yes, I read that. That is indeed tragic. I am so sorry.”

“Thank you.”

LIBERTY STREET

“Well, I must be getting to the house. It was very nice seeing you again.” He bowed once more, climbed into the carriage and instructed the driver to proceed.

Abigale watched as the carriage moved down Bull Street and around the square. When it was no longer visible, she turned to Polly. “Was I nice to him?”

“You was very nice. Why you aks?”

Jane chose to visit Forsythe Park on her afternoon walk, a thirty acre expanse south of Liberty Street. The choice seemed sound. For one thing, she would not run into her sister who was headed north with Polly, toward the markets. And for another, if there was to be any large encampment in the city, other than Old Colonial Cemetery, it would be Forsythe Park. The southern end of the park, with its wide expanse of lawn, was always being used for military purposes by the boys in grey. Surely the boys in blue would now want to occupy it.

Forsythe’s northern end was a favorite of gentry, with its tree lined walkways and large baroque fountain. Jane stopped for a minute at the fountain, around which were several people standing and talking, or just staring at the spouting water. Then she walked around it and continued south toward the open field. Two bluecoats passed her by. As they did so one of them whistled, in the manner of men who see a pretty girl. For some reason—she wondered why—they did not stop to ask her any questions, but kept on walking. As did she.

The southern end of the park was indeed busy. Hundreds of soldiers were engaged, some drilling, others constructing tents and building fires, and still others sitting at various tasks: whittling, cleaning a rifle, playing checkers. A few men were busy setting up a perimeter, which

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consisted of stakes in the ground connected by rope, in effect a makeshift fence. Clearly, this half of the park was now coopted by the Union army.

“May I help you ma’am?” asked one of the fence builders.

“I was walking toward Park Avenue,” she fabricated. “Is the path blocked?”

“Afraid so, ma’am. You’ll have to go out to the street and continue south that way.”

She studied the soldier. He looked to be in his early twenties, thin with hollow cheeks, and unwashed. But not, she thought, unappealing.

“Could you make an exception? I am in a hurry.”

Just then his fence-building partner came up to join the conversation.

The first soldier explained, “This woman says she wants to walk through our camp, to get to the end of the park.”

“Miss—”

“Gordon,” she said, “Jane Gordon.”

“Miss Gordon, this is a new Union Camp. No civilians is allowed. And certainly no women.”

They don’t seem interested. What’s the matter with me?

“Oh, no,” she said. “I understand. But tell me, all of you are sleeping under the stars tonight? Here in Forsythe Park?”

Both men laughed. “Ma’am,” said one of them, “this is like a fancy hotel compared to where we been sleeping the past month.”

“Well, thank you for your time. I’ll be on my way.”

LIBERTY STREET

She made a slight curtsy and turned toward the fountain. It was only three in the afternoon, and she decided to look elsewhere. *If I cut across Gaston, I can reach Old Colonial, without running into Abigale. Soldiers must be camped there as well.*

Abigale found downtown Savannah most interesting – and depressing. Compared to her last visit, there were twice as many people out and about. Many of them were Union soldiers, and a large number of what appeared to her to be homeless negroes. They came with Sherman, she knew, from the plantations up north. Where, she wondered, are they going to live, and who's going to feed them?

Despite the new influx of humanity, there was peace and order, and commerce too. The markets were open, and the same amount of haggling as always. This time soldiers were also buying.

In fact, Abigale was surprised at the peace and civility. The soldiers were not behaving like a conquering army as much as one resting between battles. Considering all the fighting the troops must have experienced, she surmised they were just happy to have no imminent battle, no opposing army in their midst. She thought of asking a few soldiers about their march from Atlanta, but quickly decided against it. She fantasized meeting the man who killed her husband, though of course there would be no way to know from a simple greeting. Still, she decided against it.

After an hour of walking and sightseeing, buying a few items for the kitchen, and denying the outstretched hands of a few beggars, they headed home.

“What do you make of it all, Polly?”

LIBERTY STREET

“Make of what, Miss Abigale?”

“All this. The soldiers, all the negroes in town, the activity. We’ve been taken over by the Union army. Yet everything is peaceful.”

“Well, dat’s sure good. I didn’t know what to ‘spect, tellin’ the truth. They do seem a nice bunch.”

“What do your people tell you?” Abigale enquired. “About freedom and such? What do you hear?”

Abigale was aware that Polly had a loose news network, colored folk who would report on the latest information, whether it was Sherman’s imminent arrival, a church burning, or something more common like the latest marriage or death. In this way Polly was up to date on local affairs, at least those that affected her class.

“Nuthin, fo sure. Dis Gen’rl Sherman just getting’ here, so people waitin’ on him, I guess.”

“I see,” said Abigale, and she asked no further questions.

Chapter 13

— *Thursday, December 22*

Within an hour of taking up residence in the Green Mansion, Sherman had his first visitor: Mr. A.G. Browne, of Salem, Massachusetts, United States Treasury agent for the Department of the South. Browne had been waiting in Hilton Head until the city was seized by U.S. troops.

“What brings you here, Mr. Browne?”

“I am here to claim possession, in the name of the Treasury Department, of all the cotton and rice your men have captured. And may I say, magnificent march, General. Magnificent! The whole country is marveling.”

“Well, these items were fairly won, Mr. Browne, and I must say, I am first beholden to the army, so they can be fully provisioned.”

“I understand, I understand,” said Browne. “But these goods were won by the *United States* Army, and rightly belong to the treasury. I must assure that whatever is not vital to your army, befalls to the U.S. I’m sorry General, but that’s my job. I will of course defer to you in all things military, but must file my report soon.”

LIBERTY STREET

Sherman was not going to be outfoxed by a government bureaucrat. "I have marched 300 miles in thirty days, risked life and limb of 60,000 of our finest troops, and just arrived in town. I have 10,000 poor negroes to get fed and housed, and a civilian population that hasn't yet come to grips with their defeat, who may yet turn outwardly hostile. I am in possession of southern cotton and guns and god knows what else, and there is as yet no accurate inventory of all that. And the first greeting I get is 'give me all your goods'? Is that what I am hearing, Mr. Browne?"

"I *am* sorry, but I am just doing as instructed."

"Well, you *are* sorry, sir. I am not ready to surrender possession just yet. The quartermaster and commissary will manage these spoils for now. After proper inventories are prepared, whatever we have no special use for, I *will* turn over to you, but not before."

"Yes, sir" said Browne, deferentially. "What is your estimate?"

"Oh, I estimate that the warehouses store at least twenty-five thousand bales of cotton, and in the forts probably hundred and fifty large guns."

"You mentioned 10,000 negroes? I did not see many on my way in. Where are they hiding?"

Sherman laughed. "They're not hiding. I'm keeping them out of the city, in various locations. I could have had three times that many, from the plantations. We tried to stop them from leaving, but once they were freed they all wanted to follow my army. Now I've got to keep them fed. Just another responsibility."

"Well, your capture of Savannah is the main enterprise. I have an idea, as Christmas is upon us in a few days. The *Golden Gate* is this very afternoon to sail for Fortress Monroe, Virginia. If she has calm weather off Cape Hatteras, she will reach the fort by Christmas day. Might I suggest that you send President Lincoln a welcome telegram offering him as Christmas

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gift this bounty? He likes such peculiarities, you know. Once the ship reaches Virginia your message can be sent to Washington over the telegraph wire.”

The idea intrigued Sherman, and warmed him to this Mr. Browne.

“I like your idea.” Sherman sat at his desk and wrote out a brief message, offering the city to Lincoln as a “Christmas-gift.”⁵

“There, that should do it.”

Brown read the missive. “Splendid. Mr. Lincoln *will* enjoy this.” Browne pocketed the note. “Well, General, it’s been a real pleasure meeting you. I’m going to the ship now, and will see that this is handled with special care.”

With that, Browne left the mansion on his horse and reached the *Golden Gate* but an hour before she sailed.

When Abigale and Polly arrived home it was half past four, an hour from sunset. Mrs. Gordon was distraught.

“Where have you been?”

“I told you we were going to the walk around, go to the market, and such. You said you didn’t want to come.”

“Jane’s not with you?”

“You know she went out alone.”

“Did you see her?”

“No, not at all.”

“Well, where is she?”

LIBERTY STREET

“Mother, I fear we’re going in circles. She’ll be home soon, I’m sure.”

“I’m worried about her.”

As am I, thought Abigale. She really had no basis to reassure her mother. Anything was possible.

“Please, go out on the street, and see if you can find her.”

Abigale didn’t argue with her mother, though she felt a search was futile. Jane could be anywhere. Still, she put her coat on and left the house, walking first toward Barnard Street, and then back toward Drayton Street. There was no sign of Jane. Twilight set in and she returned home.

“Mother, we’ll have to wait and see. She’ll be home, I’m certain,” she said, while thinking the opposite. *I have no reason to be certain of anything with that girl.*

Fifteen minutes later came a loud knock on the door. Mrs. Gordon jumped from her chair and ran to open it. There stood Jane, accompanied by two bluecoats.

Mrs. Gordon hugged Jane and began crying. “Where have you been? Come in. Who are these men?”

“Pardon, ma’am, said one of the soldiers, I am Sergeant Hendricks and this is Sergeant Smithfield. Are you the girl’s mother?”

“Yes, who are you? Why are you with my daughter?”

Abigale came to her mother’s side. “Mother, invite them in. I’m sure they will explain everything. Please, sirs, come in.”

They entered the foyer, where the light was now much brighter than outside. Without a word, Jane walked into the living room, then ascended the stairs to her bedroom.

LIBERTY STREET

“Ma’am, we were ordered by our colonel to escort your daughter home. It seems there was some, uh, misunderstanding, and some of our boys got a little rowdy with her.”

“What are you saying?” demanded Mrs. Gordon.

“Sir,” said Abigale, in as stern a manner as she could muster, “please be specific. Tell us what happened.”

Sergeant Hendricks told the tale. Jane had started a conversation with one of the sentinels, reminding Abigale what she had done with Winston weeks earlier. Apparently it had been a friendly conversation at first, but when she showed no interest in leaving, and much interest in staying, the sentinel tried to sneak her into the camp, throwing his army coat over her shoulders as they made their way to his tent. They made it to the tent, but then all hell broke loose, when other men discovered she was there. They came into the tent also, or at least two of them did. There was hollering and hooting, and before long two officers, Colonel Ryan and his aide-de-camp, Captain Broderick, came by and discovered Jane inside the tent, at this point with several men.

The colonel ordered her out, and made inquiry as to who she was. She refused all identification, though it seemed, from her clothes and bearing, that she was well-bred. The colonel had to threaten her with staying overnight in the female prison if she didn’t identify herself. Just as he ordered her taken away, she spoke up and revealed her name and address.

“So he ordered us to bring her here, and not to leave until a responsible relative took charge. He said she looked awfully young, and had no business carousing with the troops. Sorry, ma’am, but that’s the full story.”

Mrs. Gordon looked him in the eye and asked, “Was...she...violated?”

LIBERTY STREET

“No ma’am, as far as our understanding is, this all happened very fast and she was not violated.”

“Thank you,” said Mrs. Gordon.

“Thank you,” said Abigale. “You have been most kind. Can we get you something to drink?”

“No ma’am. We do request that you sign this order, showing that we did bring her to the proper address. It’s army procedure.” He held out a piece of paper, with simple writing indicating Jane’s name and address as she related them.

“I’ll sign it. I’m her older sister. My name is Abigale Tate.”

“That’ll be fine Miss Tate. We do see that you live here as well.”

Abigale signed the paper and returned it to sergeant.

“Well, we have to be going. We need to report back to camp.”

“Again, thank you. Thank you very much.”

As soon as they left, Mrs. Gordon collapsed in Abigale’s arms, and begin sobbing.

“It will work out, mother. Don’t cry. It will work out.”

Chapter 14

— Friday, December 23

Abigale made up her mind. She would confront Jane with questions, and demand answers. She felt her family disintegrating, and not just because of Jane's loose ways. Her mother was a recluse. Her brother was god knows where, and always in danger of being killed by disease or bullets. She realized the basic problem. *Our men are gone. We are adrift, alone.*

She found Jane alone in the dining area, and sat down next to her. Jane turned to her older sister and gave a look that made Abigale uncomfortable, as if *she* was an intruder. But there was no turning back.

"I know you don't want to discuss this with mother, but I'm your older sister, you can tell me. What's this all about? At your age, I could not even imagine bringing a young man to the shed late at night and making love to him."

"I really don't want to talk about it."

"You must. I'm not leaving until you do."

Jane stared at her for a few seconds, then replied, "Where were we supposed to embrace? In my bedroom?"

LIBERTY STREET

“Jane, I understand. This activity would have been inconceivable were daddy alive. You would be too scared to even try something like that. Daddy might have killed him. No, I understand. Our anchors are gone.”

“I have a secret, sister.”

“What is it? You can tell me.” For a moment Abigale felt she might be making some headway.

“I like men.”

This was not what Abigale expected.

“So do I, but—”

“So, Franklin is gone. What are you doing about it?”

“About what?”

“Don’t you want a man in your bed? Don’t you miss him?”

“I miss him every day, you know that.”

“That’s not what I mean. Do I have to spell it out?”

“Please do,” Abigale said, fearful of what Jane might say next.

“Don’t you want a man caressing you, kissing you, inside of you!”

“Jane!”

“You said to spell it out. I’m not a child anymore! You and mother make me feel like I’m in a nunnery.”

“That’s your perception. We just don’t want you to be hurt.”

“And you didn’t answer my question.”

“Of course I would prefer to have a husband, and I will one day. But I won’t go around sleeping with every man who happens to occupy a street corner.”

LIBERTY STREET

“Not every man, just Winston.”

“And what was that affair yesterday? What were you doing in the tent of Union soldiers, for god sakes?”

“We were having fun, just joking around. Nothing happened.”

“Nothing happened because you were rescued. Why did they have to escort you home?”

“I was against Army regulations. They wanted to arrest me! Can you imagine? For talking to some soldiers?”

“Arrest you? That was just a threat because you wouldn’t tell them where you lived.”

“Well, that’s what they were going to do, so I told them.”

“You embarrass us, Jane Gordon.” *I shouldn’t have said that.* “I mean, think of mother. She’s so fragile. She doesn’t need a daughter building a bad reputation. Don’t you think of her?”

“I wouldn’t want to do anything to hurt her. But I can’t go on living in a nunnery!”

“This house is *not* a nunnery. Why do you keep saying that?”

“Because nuns, that’s what they do. Pray all day and never sleep with men. That’s what you and mother do. Pray all day that things will change for the better, and sleep alone every night. That’s a nunnery.”

“Where do you get these ideas? You’re only seventeen.”

“If I hear that one more time, I’ll scream.”

“How come you don’t have any friends, or at least you never bring anyone over here? What about other girls your age?”

“Are you talking about Brenda?”

“Well, she was your closest friend until a while ago. Where is she?”

“Married.”

LIBERTY STREET

“Married? To whom?”

“Some young boy in Augusta. Remember she moved there?”

“No, guess I forgot.”

“She found a boy who didn’t make it to the army. Has a limp or something. But he can perform in bed.”

“Jane, please, enough of this. How do you even know that?”

“She told me, in her last letter, couple of months ago. You want to read it?”

“Definitely not. I don’t understand your urges, I really don’t.”

“And I don’t understand why you don’t have any.”

“How do you know I don’t?”

“Do you?”

Abigale had not planned on a personal inquisition from her sister, and did not like the discomfort it engendered.

“Jane this is about you, not me. I wasn’t escorted home by soldiers. Can we have a truce?”

“You started it. I was just minding my business.”

“So Winston is gone, and the Union boys are not receptive. Now what are your plans, if I may ask?”

“Find another. That’s more than you are doing.”

Abigale held her head down in disappointment. “This conversation is getting us nowhere. We are at sea without our sails, nay, without our mast.”

“Now you’re the poet?”

“Just be careful. Please, for mother and me, please just be careful.”

LIBERTY STREET

With the arrival of Sherman and his 60,000-man army, there were suddenly two Savannahs: the military and the civilian. The former dominated in sheer numbers, triple Savannah's population (black and white), though most of the troops were camped outside the city limits.

For Sherman, it was an interlude from the fighting and pillaging. Now he had to regroup, prepare for the next phase of his army's march, which would be up the Carolinas. Preparation required orders, the first of which came on December 23; Special Field Orders No. 139 stipulated "possession of all public buildings, all vacant store-rooms, warehouses, &c, that may be now or hereafter needed for any department of the army." Private property – homes and goods – would not be affected.⁶

Chapter 15

— *Saturday, December 24*

The knock on the door came from a young black man. Polly opened the door and spoke to the man briefly.

“Who is that?” asked Abigale, from the parlor.

“It be message for me, Miss Abigale.”

Polly and the messenger talked for another minute, then he left and she closed the door.

“Who was that?” asked Abigale, as Polly returned to the parlor. “You look concerned. What’s the matter?”

“Benjamin be ill, very sick.”

“Benjamin?”

“He be my husband. You came to da wedding.”

“That’s right. I thought you were separated?”

“Dat be de case. But nevah divorced. They aks me to come.”

“Who asked you?”

“Be Benjamin hissself. According to Sebastian, who just come to da door. I gots to go, Miss Abigale.”

LIBERTY STREET

Polly married Benjamin Carter when she was twenty, he twenty-one. Legally she was Polly Carter, though the Tate-Gordon family never called her by any name but Polly.

Benjamin was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Lamar Casey. Slave weddings were common on the plantation, where a master may own dozens or even hundreds of negroes, who all knew each other. There, marriage did not present a logistical problem, unless the owner decided to sell one of the pair. City marriages were different, since the husband and wife were likely to be owned by different families.

When Polly and Benjamin wed in 1855, neither the Caseys nor the Gordons wanted to sell their slave to the other family, which meant the couple had to live apart. They could buy their freedom, but neither one had any savings, as they were not paid wages. However, as their owners' houses were only a few blocks apart, it was agreed they would have unlimited visitation to each other's quarters, where they could function as man and wife. As a practical matter, this meant they could sleep in the same bed four or five nights of each week, and spend most of their Sundays together.

The Casey house, on Habersham Street, was a much grander home than the Gordons' row house. Mr. Lamar Casey had been a banker before the war, and remained wealthy throughout the conflict. On the day Sherman arrived he owned an estimated ten percent of all the cotton in Savannah's warehouses.

The Caseys also owned four domestic servants, and considered Benjamin their most valuable. He tended to their horses in the barn, and was adept at fixing things, like carriage wheels and balky door jambs.

The Carter marriage seemed to go well enough the first two years, but then began to grow cold. Benjamin came over to be with Polly less and less, and she began to nag about why he

LIBERTY STREET

seemed to be avoiding her. He would always say “I gots work to do,” or “They keeps me very busy.”

Their domestic turmoil was *sub rosa* to the Gordons and the Caseys. As long as servants did the required work, and didn’t complain, the families had no reason to concern themselves with their servants’ personal affairs.

In the third year of marriage word came out that one of the Caseys’ slaves, a young woman named Corey, was pregnant with Benjamin’s child. There was no hiding the fact, and it bothered the Caseys not at all. Young women in slavery were expected to have children, who would then be owned by the family that owned the mother. So the Caseys kept on both parents, unconcerned that Benjamin and Corey were not husband and wife.

When Corey was four months along, Lamar Casey mentioned to Marshall Gordon, in a joking manner, that his Benjamin was fathering a child with Corey.

“What does your Polly think about that? Nigras is something, aren’t they?” “I know nothing about it,” was all Mr. Gordon could reply.

That evening Mr. Gordon asked Polly if it was true that Corey was carrying her husband’s child. His question arose out of natural curiosity, not just as a slave owner but also as a lawyer; he wanted to hear from the aggrieved party.

“Yes, it be true Mista Gordon,” Polly said, and then she immediately began wailing, so badly that Mrs. Gordon had to walk her down to the basement and have her lie down. Once in her room, in bed, Polly told Mrs. Gordon she’d be all right, and asked to be left alone. Polly was able to return to work the next day, and no one said any more about her predicament.

LIBERTY STREET

Shortly after Corey gave birth to a boy, Abigale asked Polly why she didn't get a divorce. Polly replied something about "too messy. Let him be. He be da boy's father, wedder I gots a divorce or not."

Hearing about this conversation, Mr. Gordon offered to do the divorce papers for free, but Polly never took him up on it. And Benjamin never asked either. So they stayed married, and fully estranged.

The knock on the door was the first Polly had heard anything about Benjamin in two years.

"I understand he's ill, Polly," said Abigale, "but shouldn't that other woman—I forget her name—be the one to comfort him?"

"Dat be Corey. She da woman."

"Yes, Corey. Now I remember."

"She no good, dat girl. I owes it to him to go see. He aks for me."

"Do you want me to go with you?"

"Be nice, for sho. Ifn' he gonna die, I gots to see him once. Lord knows where he gonna end up."

So around ten a.m., the day before Christmas, Abigale and Polly walked over to the Casey home. Abigale knocked on the gilded front door and was greeted by a servant, who said she could come in, but Polly must wait outside.

"We've just come to see Benjamin," said Abigale, and the servant directed them to the horse stables out back.

LIBERTY STREET

There they found Polly's husband laying on a bed of hay. Corey was at his side, along with a six-year-old boy, their son. Immediately Corey stood up. "He aks for you, why I sent the message. Says you gots to come. He wants to say somethin'."

Polly leaned down, rubbed Benjamin's sweaty forehead and held his hand in hers. His face was gaunt, eyes sunken and wide with the terror of fatal illness. On seeing Polly, he managed a faint smile.

"Benjamin, Benjamin," was all she could say. "Oh, Benjamin."

"Pol....ly. I'm, I'm....sorry. I just had to tell you befo I go to the Lord."

"What you be sorry fo?"

"I...I just wanted a child. I...I'm sorry. Forgive me."

Benjamin's words hit Abigale hard. *He wanted a child! Oh, my god, I'm going to cry. This is so painful.* She did her best to stifle the tears, then took a step back to distance herself from Polly and Benjamin.

"Don't you be sorry," said Polly, "jus gets well." Polly began sobbing, softly at first, then louder. She laid her head on his breast. Standing to the side, Corey pulled the boy toward her, so his back was to his father.

"We be goin' to the house," Corey said. "Stay here ifn' you want."

Polly didn't move. Abigale nodded, and Corey and her son left the barn.

A minute later, from outside the barn, came a loud call. "Abigale Tate, is that you in there with Benjamin?" Abigale was pretty sure the caller was Mrs. Casey.

"Yes. Mrs. Casey?"

"Child, you shouldn't be in there. He has the fever. No white folks should be in there."

LIBERTY STREET

“Polly,” said Abigale, “I’m going to speak with Mrs. Casey.” Polly nodded her head against her husband’s chest, indicating she understood.

Abigale knew Lucretia Casey as the second wife of Lamar and a prominent matron, now almost fifty. When Mr. Gordon was alive the family had attended parties in the Casey mansion. Mrs. Casey was still the neighborhood’s matriarch and influential in whatever social circles remained during the war.

Outside the barn Lucretia seemed mildly reproachful. “I didn’t expect to have you come with your servant. When Corey told me Benjamin wanted to see Polly, I sent for her. Didn’t know you would come too. He’s got the fever. You really shouldn’t go in there.”

“I see that,” replied Abigale. “He looks very bad. Has a doctor tended to him?”

“Child, we are not primitives. I had Dr. Smithers see him when he took ill four days ago, and he’s been back one more time. Says Benjamin has the typhoid, not much to do. We will miss him.”

Then, without warning, Lucretia put her arm on Abigale’s shoulder. “Oh, I’m so sorry. Do forgive me. I did hear about Franklin, and must express my condolences. I believe we did send you a note at the time.”

“Yes, that was kind of you. And how is Mr. Casey?”

“Involved as ever. Now he is in a turmoil, not knowing what this Sherman fellow is going to do about all the cotton in the city. And we’ve just learned one of the Union generals wants to billet in our home. All the generals are finding quarters in the city. They plan to be here for some time, looks like. Lamar says we have no choice, after Charles Greene gave over his house. It might actually help protect our property, so Mr. Casey’s not protesting. In fact the more he thinks about it the more he thinks it’s a sound idea.”

LIBERTY STREET

“I haven’t heard anything about that. No one’s asked to billet with us.”

“Perhaps you don’t have the room, dear.” Abigale chose not to take offense at this remark, snide though it seemed to her.

“Frankly, that’s not our major concern,” said Mrs. Casey. “The general and his staff—he may bring one or two aides—will be courteous, I’m sure. No, the major concern is the cotton. Lamar may be out of luck with this Union takeover. But we’ll survive. We are just thankful Sherman didn’t burn us down. You never know with these damn Yankees.”

Abigale wished to turn the conversation back to Benjamin. She did not know this Doctor Smithers, but had no reason to doubt his diagnosis. Still, she wondered, would not a second review be of some benefit? Perhaps there was some risk to the idea welling rapidly in her mind, but she had to try, for Polly’s sake. No, for her own satisfaction. Yes, that was it. *For my own satisfaction.*

“I would like Dr. Richard Arnold to examine Benjamin.”

“What? The mayor?”

“Yes. He’s a fine medical doctor.”

“Why, Abigale, I don’t believe that’s necessary. Dr. Smithers is a competent practitioner, and besides, dear, it’s the day before Christmas, I don’t think you will be able to engage the mayor. He has official duties, you know.”

“I would like to call for him, if you don’t mind.”

“I don’t want to seem impolite, dear, but I don’t think Lamar wants to spend any more on Benjamin. There is a limit to—

“I will pay Dr. Arnold’s fee.”

“Well, I, I— ”

LIBERTY STREET

“Please, Mrs. Casey, may I ask your servant to go to his office and home. They are in the same building, and if he is not there, then surely he will be found in the City Exchange.”

“You do seem determined. I will not stand in your way, if that is what you wish. But you must make it clear it is you who are making the request, neither I nor Lamar. I think a written note should be sent over your signature.”

“That will be fine,” said Abigale.

“Do not be surprised if he declines to come. There is not much imperative to attend a dying negro.”

“All I can do is ask.” *He will not decline a request from me, if it is in his power to come.*

“Very well. Come into the house. I will go fetch Sebastian and tell him to do your bidding, and a pen and paper to scratch out your note. And please, for your health and the health of your family, don’t go back in that barn.”

Abigale followed Mrs. Casey inside the mansion. She marveled at the wall tapestries, the art work and ornamentation. The rooms were not as richly decorated as in Green’s mansion, but sumptuous nonetheless.

Abigale was directed to an ornate writing desk. Using a dip pen, she wrote out the following note.

Dr. Richard Arnold.

Please, sir, come as soon as possible to attend to one Benjamin Carter, slave to Lamar and Lucretia Casey, 145 Habersham. He is very ill. I am here with his wife Polly, our house servant. I will cover all arrangements, and be forever thankful for your assistance.

Sincerely,

LIBERTY STREET

Abigale Tate, daughter of Col. Marshall Gordon

She thought the note well-crafted, promising nothing more than to “be forever thankful.”

If he considers that I may have some other obligation, the disappointment will be all his.

She folded the paper and gave it to Sebastian, along with the address of Dr. Arnold’s home and office. “And if he’s not there,” she told him, “then follow the path indicated by his servants.”

“Yessum,” said Sebastian, and he ran off for his second errand of the day.

Abigale found Mrs. Casey in the sitting room. “Thank you. I must go back and tell Polly what is happening.”

“Don’t you go in there,” she admonished once again.

“I will just go tell Polly, and then with your permission return here, to await Sebastian, with what news he may have.”

Abigale left the house and re-entered the barn. She had already been in once, she figured, and another visit wouldn’t make any difference. She found Polly still at Benjamin’s side, but now sitting upright, his hand in hers; they were conversing in low whispers. Abigale could not make out the words, and thought perhaps they were speaking Gullah.

“Polly, I’ve sent for a physician I know, Dr. Richard Arnold. You met him with me at the market last week. He may or may not come right away, there’s no way to know. Sebastian is delivering my note.”

“Dats right nice, Missus Abigale,” she said, without looking up from her husband. “You hear that Benjamin, they’s gettin’ a doctor for you? Youse gonna be fine.”

LIBERTY STREET

Abigale did not tell Polly about Dr. Smithers' prior visits or his dismal prognosis. "Polly, do you want to stay here? I asked Sebastian to return after he delivers the note to let me know the response."

Polly nodded.

"That's fine," said Abigale. "I will wait in the house with Mrs. Casey, at least until Sebastian returns. Then I will be going home. You may stay as long as you like."

Abigale returned to the comfort of the Caseys' sitting room. The two women chatted for a while, about the war and the occupation. Events of the day showed that not much had changed in the relationship between slaveholder and slave, but then again it was only two days since Sherman entered the city. Both women acknowledged that he would soon make some proclamation affecting their lives. "Then we'll see," said Mrs. Casey.

After fifteen minutes of idle talk, Mrs. Casey left Abigale to "attend to a few things."

In another half hour Sebastian returned, with welcoming news.

"Da doctor say he will come, but maybe not for a couple 'ours, he gots chores to attend to."

"Did he give you a note?"

"No ma'am, just told me to tell you dat."

"Did he say anything else?" asked Abigale.

Sebastian hesitated a moment, and smiled.

"Well, did he?"

"Yessum, he aks me to describe you."

"Describe me, how?"

LIBERTY STREET

“Yo age, your hair, yo face. He may think you not be you, I wondrin’. Well, I say a few words about what I see and he move his head up and down, den say, dat’s her, dat’s her. Yo must be good friends or somtin’.”

“Yes, Sebastian, we are friends. My father and the mayor go way back. Way back.”

Abigale thanked Mrs. Casey for her hospitality and allowing Sebastian to deliver the note. On leaving the house she passed by the barn and this time, from the doorway, told Polly she was walking home.

Polly did not return to Liberty Street until just before sundown. Abigale rushed to meet her in the foyer.

“What happened? Did Doctor Arnold come? Is Benjamin all right?”

“He be dade.”

“Dead?”

“Yessum.”

“Did Doctor Arnold arrive?”

“In time to tell us what we just knew. Put that thing on his heart and said, he dade.”

“I’m so sorry, Polly.”

“Be da Lord’s way, I rekon.”

“Was Corey there?”

“She be dere. Her son done took it real hard.”

“Did Dr. Arnold say anything, ask where I was?”

LIBERTY STREET

“He did. I told him you back to da house. He say give you dis note.” Polly handed over a folded piece of paper, which Abigale opened and quickly read. The hand writing was scribbled but legible.

My dear Mrs. Tate,

*Sorry I could not be of help in this unfortunate situation. Mr. B
deceased just before my arriving. There will of course be no charge.*

Your obedient servant,

RC Arnold, MD

Abigale was glad she had called for Dr. Arnold and felt better for it. At the same time she felt sad, sadder than she ever expected to feel from the demise of her servant’s estranged husband. *Is our household cursed?*

Chapter 16

— *Sunday, December 25, 1864*

Christmas came just four days after Union troops invaded Savannah. For the Tate-Gordon household, the holiday was anything but festive. They had a Christmas tree in the front parlor, a Georgia pine bought in the market, but it was sparsely decorated, with paper cutouts and ribbons. Underneath lay a few obligatory presents.

No one at 27 Liberty Street felt like celebrating, and except for these few artifacts of tradition, the day was like any other. Polly was off for the holiday, out with cousins in the area. She had no immediate family, but a large extended one in the Savannah area. In 1863 they had hosted their neighbor Joseptha Morgan for dinner, but now she too was away with relatives in Pooler.

Mrs. Gordon stayed in her bedroom much of the morning. Abigale used the time to play more Chopin. She tried a few Christmas songs, but did not feel the mood and returned to classical repertoire.

Jane stayed in her room, reading a book given to her by Winston, before he departed for South Carolina. It came with a brown paper cover, on which there was no printed title or words. Winston told her many soldiers kept a copy, which they liked to share with reluctant girlfriends.

The first printed page stated in small print:

The Art of Making Love.

For the Modern Woman.

Prince Philippe Gusteau, Paris, 1862.

Translated from the French.

The author was a pseudonym and *The Art* was no translation at all, having been written and published in New York, then disseminated under the counter to enlightened men and women in the northern states. This was Jane's second reading. From the introduction:

In my affairs with Parisian women I have learned much about the fairer sex. That this information is repressed and hidden by our society is unfortunate, but these pages are meant to unfold the truths of all womanhood. And make no mistake. Women are the same in London and New York and Moscow, as in Paris. Native cultures only alter the outward appearances, the dress perhaps, or the manners shown in polite society. Cultures do not -- cannot -- alter the inner soul of the intelligent woman, what they want and desire, how they behave in the uninhibited confines of the marriage chamber.

...women want to be held and caressed, which they sometimes mistaken for "love" or "affection." No! It is the physical

need to be held and caressed by a man that they want. Yes, it is true that the man must care for his woman in the personal sense, to be kind and gentle and considerate. But all the “love” and “affection” expressed in ways other than physical will not satisfy -- nor should it -- the modern woman.

The key is for the modern woman to understand that she has every much a right to physical satisfaction as her male companion, that she has the same physical needs as he does, and to work toward that mutual satisfaction. These pages will tell you how to accomplish that goal. For readers of my work outside Paris, I trust the translation will not stint on the details...

Without Polly in the house, the women had to prepare their own meals, which meant trips to the kitchen. There was talk about one of them cooking up a Christmas meal, but lacking agreement on who would do it, and Jane making it clear she wasn't interested, the women decided to fend for themselves. Thus it was that they met in the kitchen sometime mid-morning. All three wore their night clothes and slippers.

“Merry Christmas,” said Mrs. Gordon, as she hugged her two daughters. “At least we have each other.”

“Yes,” said Abigale. “Do you think Johnny is all right?” *How would mother know? Why do I even ask?*

“I'm sure he is, and he's having a very merry Christmas, fighting the Yanks.” Abigale did not think this was funny, and chose not to respond.

LIBERTY STREET

“I suppose we should open the presents,” said Mrs. Gordon.

The three of them walked to the tree and retrieved the gifts. They were wrapped in old newspapers.

“Here, girls, for you,” said Mrs. Gordon. Abigale and Jane dutifully unwrapped their presents: a hairbrush and pocket mirror for each.

“And for you Mother,” said Abigale. “Jane and I pitched in and bought this together.”

Mrs. Gordon opened her present: an ornately carved box. She lifted the lid and the box played a simple melody, *Fur Elise*, by Beethoven.

“Oh, a music box, how nice. Thank you. It’s lovely. Where did you find this in Savannah?”

“At the old B&B Pawn Shop,” said Abigale. “On West Broad. You remember Mr. Pritzer, the owner?”

“Oh, yes, he’s still around?”

“Still there. I went in last week, just to shop for something different, and saw it. Nice, don’t you think?”

“Yes, dear.”

“We’re glad you like it, mother,” said Abigale. *It’s Christmas. Why do I feel so sad?*

Around two in the afternoon there was a knock on the front door. None of the women was expecting a visitor or a message. Abigale instantly feared it might be another gift from Gustav or—God forbid!—the German himself. She asked her mother to open the door.

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The caller was Sergeant Hendricks, one of the two soldiers who had escorted Jane home three days earlier.

“May I come in?” he asked.

Mrs. Gordon did not answer immediately, and Abigale, ever curious what he might want on Christmas day, spoke up. “Mother, ask the soldier in.”

“Yes, of course, come in, sir”

What could he want now?

“May I speak with Miss Jane Gordon?” he asked.

“About what?” snapped her mother.

“I have a message from Captain Broderick, ma’am.”

“You may give me the message.”

“I see Miss Gordon,” said the sergeant, pointing to just a few feet away, where Jane and Abigale stood. “I was asked to deliver the message directly, ma’am. It’s a note, and I am to await a response.”

“Let me see that message,” said Mrs. Gordon.

“Mother!” interjected Abigale, “the message is for Jane. Let him give it to her. We will stay here. I am sure the sergeant won’t object.”

Mrs. Gordon motioned for Jane to come forward. “You heard my daughter. Please deliver your message.”

Jane approached and the sergeant handed her an official-looking note, folded and sealed with a bit of wax.

“Should I open it now?” asked Jane.

“Of course,” said her mother. “You will read it to us.”

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Jane did so, and began reading:

Miss Jane Gordon

27 Liberty St.

Savannah City

I would be honored if you would accompany me to a dinner party on Sunday, January 1, 1865, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Lamar Casey, 145 Habersham St. General John W. Geary, Military Governor of Savannah, will be hosting a private dinner party to celebrate the New Year. Upon your acceptance, I will arrange to escort you at 5:30 p.m. I hope you will be able to attend.

Yours,

Captain Jason Broderick

XII Corps., U.S. Army

“Yes!” exclaimed Jane, even before her sister or mother could make any comment.

“Jane,” said her mother, “Do you know this captain? Who is he?” By now Jane was swooning, speechless.

“Sergeant, I am her mother. She is not going to any party at the Caseys until I get some answers.”

Abigale, just as curious, was less demanding. “Sir, my mother simply would like some more information. Who is Captain Broderick? We have not met him. And why is the party at the Caseys?”

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“I understand ma’am. Captain Broderick is an aide-de-camp of General Geary, the military commander of Savannah while the army is stationed here. Both he and the general are billeted with the Caseys. He is having this dinner to thank them and several Savannah dignitaries for the smooth transition they have fostered.”

His answer did not satisfy Abigale. “How would the captain even know my sister? This is most unclear.”

“Abigale,” said Jane, “leave the sergeant alone. I can answer that.”

“Then please do.”

“He was at the cemetery, when I was escorted home.”

“He was going to arrest you, now he’s inviting you to a party?”

“No, no. He was with that nasty colonel.”

“Who is the colonel? I feel as though we are in some comedic farce,” said Abigale.

“Oh dear,” said Mrs. Gordon, now relegated to a bystander as Abigale took over the questioning.

“Ma’am, that would have been Colonel Ryan. Captain Broderick was with him at the time, on loan from the general, so that would be when they met.”

“So there’s a general, a colonel and a captain. And the captain is with the general?”

“Yes, Ma’am. He’s the general’s aide-de-camp, or one of them. Colonel Ryan is in a different unit.”

“Will he be at the party? Colonel Ryan, I mean.”

“Don’t know Ma’am.”

“Abigale,” said Jane, her voice raised, “Will you stop this inquisition? Please, enough.”

“May I ask how old he is?”

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“Who, Ma’am?”

“Captain Broderick.”

“Not sure Ma’am. My guess he’s in his early twenties.”

“Do you know how old my sister is?”

“No, Ma’am, I do not.”

Abigale sensed that a quick affirmation of Jane’s “yes” would be the wrong response.

“Excuse me a minute,” she said, then pulled Jane aside and motioned for her and their mother to come across the room.

Once out of earshot, Abigale spoke up. “Jane, you don’t even know this captain. What’s his interest in you?”

“Yes, Jane, please tell us,” said their mother.

Jane glared at her sister. “Read this.” She thrust the invitation in Abigale’s hand.

“You just read it to us,” said Abigale, who nonetheless quickly perused the invitation.

“It’s just as you read it.”

“He’s a nice young man,” said Jane. “He wasn’t at all cruel like that old colonel, what’s-his-name.”

“Did you speak to the captain when you were being escorted out of the camp?”

“We said a few words. Not many. They didn’t give me any time.”

“Don’t you think it’s premature that he now asks you to a dinner party?” asked Abigale.

“And he’s a Yankee,” said Mrs. Gordon.

“Why don’t you tell him you’ll think about this, that you’ll get back to him in a day or so,” offered Abigale.

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Jane looked hard at her sister, then her mother, then back at her sister. “Now listen to me, both of you. I am going. If you try to stop me, you will never see Jane Gordon again. Do I make myself clear? I have had enough of this nunnery life. This is an invitation to get away from here, if only for an evening. I am not a child any longer. You can’t stop me. Unless you want to lose a sister.” Then, without missing a step, she turned toward her mother and said, “Or a daughter.”

“Oh, I don’t want that to happen,” said Mrs. Gordon.

Abigale was beat, and knew it. Further argument was pointless. She turned around and walked over to the waiting sergeant.

“Yes, my sister will attend.”

“Excellent. I shall inform the captain.”

“A question, sir, if I may ask.”

“Certainly.”

“Will there be other women there? I mean, your army does not come with women. So I am unclear as to the guest list.”

“Yes ma’am. The Caseys will be there, it’s in their home. And it’s my understanding that local dignitaries will be accompanied by their spouses. How many, I do not know.”

“One more question, sir. Could you please advise what time we may expect her to return home?”

“I will not be attending, but it’s my understanding affairs of this nature typically end around nine thirty. So I would expect she should be returned home no later than around ten.”

“That will be perfect, sir,” said Abigale, feeling some relief. *At least she won’t be spending the night.* “My sister will be ready. Please thank the captain for the invitation.”

“Yes, ma’am.” And with that he turned and left. Abigale closed the door behind him.

LIBERTY STREET

“Well,” said Abigale, looking at Jane, “you seem to have caught the attention of another soldier.”

“Oh, dear,” said Mrs. Gordon.

Chapter 17

— *Sunday, December 25*

The *Golden Gate* arrived to Fortress Monroe in Virginia just after midnight, December 25th. The *Golden Gate*'s captain instructed the night adjutant to awaken the telegraph operator, as he had telegrams for the president: one from General Sherman and another from General Howard. Sherman's was the most pressing but they could be sent together. Sherman's handwritten missive was sent verbatim over the telegraph. It was promptly received by the war department's telegraph office and immediately transcribed in the hand of the receiving officer. The telegraph office was only a city block from the White House.

Sergeant Butler, on duty in the War Department, brought the message to the White House. He arrived to the front gate at 2 am and was received by the sentry on duty. Butler said he had a telegram for the president.

"Should I awake Mr. Lincoln?" asked the sentry.

Butler knew the contents. "Yes. It's a military matter."

Two aides later, Lincoln was awakened. He read the message, smiled and thanked his aide.

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Mary Todd Lincoln was now awake. “Good news, I hope?” There were times before, when the news interrupting their sleep had been of a most depressing nature.

“Yes,” he said. “General Sherman has Savannah, and he’s offered it to me for Christmas!”

“Oh, that’s marvelous,” she said, and promptly returned to sleep.

Lincoln had known about Sherman’s arrival to the vicinity of Savannah since December 12, from Navy messages sent from Ossabaw Sound. But he had not known the city was fully captured. What a glorious present! In the morning he would ask one of his aides to run down to the telegraph office and send Sherman’s telegram to the New York Times. He also thought of an apt reply, which he would pen later that day.

Christmas 1864 at the White House was more festive than any since Lincoln took office. He had been re-elected largely because of Sherman’s timely victory in Atlanta, and now Sherman had captured Savannah, and without bloodshed. Confederate John Bell Hood had been beaten in Tennessee by General George H. Thomas. All that really remained in the way of total Union victory was Lee’s army of Northern Virginia, and Grant was closing in. The war would be over soon, that was certain.

Lincoln had a number of visitors for Sunday’s Christmas Brunch, and he was glad to share the exciting news. He expected, as usual, to be buttonholed to do this or do that, and political battles were already looming about post-war reconstruction. The first three years had seen a series of less than competent Union generals come and go—George McClellan being the

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biggest disappointment—but now that he had Grant and Sherman in command, Lincoln was no longer second-guessed about military strategy.

The loss of life had been appalling, something neither side expected in 1861. But now Lincoln felt confident the war would soon end. Reconstruction was on his mind. Surely, rebuilding the South should not be nearly as difficult as fighting the war. His nemesis faction was the Radical Republicans, men who wanted the south punished for the war, and wanted the negroes to have instant equality. He would have to rein them in, and let the south gradually adjust to losing its economy and over 200,000 fighting men.

Lincoln was known for listening and weighing each argument, not being overly swayed by one faction or another. His cabinet had come to respect that quality, including the Radicals among them, or members who sided with the Radicals. Three of this group came for Christmas brunch: Salmon P. Chase, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and ex-Secretary of the Treasury; Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War; and William H. Seward, Secretary of State.

Just before the buffet opened, the men stood and talked in the intimate Green Room. Lincoln was ebullient. With evident excitement he showed them Sherman's telegram, and a draft of his reply. They did not share his level of enthusiasm.

Chase spoke first. "Mr. President, this is indeed good news. General Sherman has done a masterful job in Georgia, but what about the negroes? Have they been totally freed? And have any signed on to fight for the Union?"

"Excellent questions, Salmon. Sherman is a highly competent general. I think he appreciates the will of this administration."

Stanton guffawed, a not so subtle counter to Lincoln's confidence in Sherman.

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“Yes Edwin?” Lincoln acknowledged. He was used to the War Secretary’s disagreements, which made him a valuable cabinet member.

“I don’t think Salmon is questioning the General’s military ability, only his attitude toward the negroes.” Salmon nodded agreement, and Stanton continued. “Sherman is known to resist placing any of them in his army. And there is great concern that the negroes he *has* freed in his march may be wanting of life’s basic necessities. If we are ever to rehabilitate the South, with its four million ex-slaves, the time to start is now. Sherman has won a masterful victory, I agree, but that may be his only concern, not the position of the Southern black people.”

“Hear, hear!” interjected Chase.

Lincoln looked at Seward, to see how he might weigh in.

“Well, I agree,” said the Secretary of State. How can I not? Your Emancipation demands we do something beyond our military victory.”

“So there we have it, I suppose,” Lincoln replied. “I understand, gentleman, and I am well aware of your attitudes toward the issue. You would want all blacks to be equal at once, to vote, to have commerce with us. But let’s be realistic. They have a long, long way to go.”

“We must start somewhere,” interjected Stanton.

“Yes, and we have, with legal liberation. General Sherman has done that in Georgia, and will soon do the same action in the Carolinas, of that I have no doubt. But let us be realistic. True *equality* is altogether different than a legal proclamation. It does no good to legislate against human nature; then you have achieved nothing and lost the respect of the legislation. The sooner we win the war, the sooner we can begin the long road of rehabilitation. And, at some point, equality. I am afraid it will not come in our lifetimes. Don’t you agree?”

LIBERTY STREET

“Yes, Mr. President,” said Seward,” but perhaps you could send Edwin to talk to General Sherman, to see where he does stand. We know he’s going to South Carolina very soon, and I’m not suggesting replacing him, of course not. But we need to make sure he is not alienating the very cause for which we have fought so hard.”

“It’s my understanding,” replied Lincoln, in a tone of exasperation, “that the very cause was and is preserving the Union. We did not go to war to end slavery. The South went to war to preserve it. That’s altogether different.”

There was no response and the president continued. “Edwin, perhaps you should go to Savannah, talk to General Sherman. Would that be feasible?”

“Yes, of course, Mr. President. I could use a touch of warmer weather for my aching bones. I shall make the arrangements. It will have to be by sea, of course.”

That night Lincoln finished his reply to General Sherman, which he would post the next day, and also sent a copy of Sherman’s telegram for publication in the New York Times.⁷

In his thank you note Lincoln also acknowledged the December 1864 Union victory by General Thomas over General Hood’s army in Tennessee.⁸

Chapter 18

— *Monday, December 26*

Abigale's appointment with Reverend Simms was scheduled for three o'clock and she was on time. The large masonry structure housing the First Ogeechee Colored Baptist Church was near the city's main market. In front of the church she noted a small group of soldiers on the front lawn, seated in between two tents, talking and playing board games. She assumed they were assigned to protect the church from whomever destroyed Third Baptist.

Polly had instructed her to go to the pastor's office in the back, and not use the front entrance. Abigale was glad for this direction, as she didn't want to engage with any of the soldiers. Behind the church she saw a lone soldier, but he seemed more a sentry for the whole rear area than a specific church guard. She walked up a brick path directly behind the church, past a small garden and came to a door marked "Pastor."

She knocked. Simms unlocked the door, opened it and welcomed her with "Come in, come in. I was expecting you." He relocked the door and showed her to a comfortable couch, then moved to his chair behind a large mahogany desk.

Well, this is a much nicer office," she said, noting a Persian rug on the floor and two walls lined with bookshelves.

LIBERTY STREET

“Yes, but of course it’s not mine. It does belong to First Ogeechee Colored Baptist Church, Pastor Clarence Patterson presiding.”

“So he lets you use it?”

“Only on Sunday afternoon and Monday. I hold my service Sunday afternoon, and after the service come in here to meet with parishioners. And since Pastor Patterson is off on Mondays, I can use it then as well. I’m here today to finish paperwork.”

“So I am paperwork?” joked Abigale.

“As I recall, Polly said *you* requested a follow up to our previous discussion. I was happy to oblige.

“That is true. Christmas was not a time of merriment in our house, as you can imagine. On top of everything else, Polly’s estranged husband died on Saturday. I walked over with her to see him just that morning. She was alone with him that afternoon, when he passed. There is much sorrow in our household.”

“I understand. Polly came here this morning and told me about Benjamin, but her concern was really more about you. She insisted I speak with you. Though you are not a member of our church, as Polly’s mistress I count you as one of our flock.”

“Is that like a flock of birds?”

“You do have a sense of humor, I must say.”

“Sir, it is a sense of cynicism, I believe. Born of the times.”

“You educated well,” Simms replied. “Few of my congregation can even read.”

“The Drayton Finishing School. I did complete the final level. And my father was an attorney, so I am used to having books around.”

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“And yet you retain that lilting southern accent, those drawn out words. So different from the north. I am not offended.”

“Offended? I don’t understand? Why should my accent offend you?”

“It does not, coming from your lips. But from the lips of others, it often portends a degree of bigotry. Of ignorance. Forgive me, it is an association hard to part with. But in you, the accent is somehow becoming. Charming is a better word.”

“Well, thank you. That is fortunate, because I have no intention of changing, even if I could.”

“And I would not want you to. As to books,” said Simms, “Pastor Patterson has quite a few.” He pointed to the bookshelves. “Feel free to browse, if you wish.”

“Thank you. What are your plans for Third Baptist?”

“Did you come to inquire about our rebuilding?”

“Among other things.”

“We are planning to rebuild, and quickly, I might add. That will be my next construction project. Savannah’s negro ministers have volunteered to help in fund raising, and the Union government will be providing assistance with security. I trust you saw the soldiers camped in front?”

“Yes, most surprising.”

“After we explained the burning to General Sherman, he was appalled. He has positioned soldiers around all the black churches. We are unlikely to be assaulted again, at least not while Sherman is here. As for my own church, we should start rebuilding soon.”

“Is Mayor Arnold investigating the culprits? I understand it was arson.”

“Ostensibly.”

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“Ostensibly it was arson?”

“No, no. You are very quick, madam. Ostensibly he, or rather the police, are investigating. I imagine the mayor has more pressing matters at this point, with the occupation. I have met with police authorities, but do not expect any justice. A proper investigation would require many questions of people not sympathetic to a colored church.”

“I heard the perpetrators wore hoods.”

“Yes, in the manner of cowards.”

“Any idea who they were?”

“None, as to specific names. Since they rode quickly, like young men, and carried rifles, my hunch is they are rebel deserters, hiding out somewhere.”

“Well, the times are certainly favorable for rebuilding, with General Sherman in town and the other ministers behind you. Your congregation has followed you here, to First Baptist?”

“Yes, those who can make it, and you are welcome to come as well. For the near future my services will be held Sunday afternoons at two, so perhaps not as convenient.”

“The time is not inconvenient, though we did remain housebound yesterday. In your sermon, are you still preaching the light is coming?”

Simms let out a laugh. “No, the light has arrived. I do remind them that they must be patient, that new laws will be written and they must wait. It’s too soon to know how the change will evolve.”

“And do you still speak in Gullah?”

“Only the first part. I grew up learning Gullah, and many of my congregation do understand the dialect.”

“I almost walked out when you started that way.”

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“Well, I am glad you did not.”

“Did you mean those things you said at Third Baptist, when I was there?”

“I said a lot of things, Mrs. Tate. The people are largely uneducated, and I speak to them in a way they can understand. But I don’t believe I misspoke. Anything in particular?”

“Yes, you said war widows and war mothers and war sisters have all suffered, together with negroes. That we are all children of God, something like that.”

“Yes, have we not suffered together?”

“Well, white folk are born free, as are very few negroes. And most of us do read and write. Why did you include our suffering with the negroes?”

“Why not, if I may ask? Your dead are as dead as our dead. We are all human, of the same flesh and bone. When Polly first told me of your losses, I cringed. I felt the pain you must feel every day. The killing is so senseless. So utterly senseless. Doesn’t matter if it’s negro or white in the grave. We all have family ties, kinfolk that help define who we are. In some ways, white folks’ losses are more severe.”

“Why is that?”

“Slavery as an economic policy is not sustainable. Your losses are for a lost cause.”

“Policy? Sir, I am not an expert on these matters, as you may be, but we don’t think of it as a policy. I do believe it is written into the constitution of the country we were once part of.”

“Mrs. Tate, you are the smartest woman I have ever met.”

Abigale blushed. *That’s exactly what Susan Tate told me. The same words! Why do I come across that way?*

His comment brought back memories of dinner table conversations with her father, when he would give some viewpoint, and she would take the opposite one, and they would spar in a

friendly manner. Her younger brother seldom took part. All her family knew, but never stated outright, that she was the smarter one. If not a woman, she could have been a lawyer. The thought nagged at her but she quickly put it aside.

Simms continued. "Call it what you wish, slavery's basis is economics. Free labor. Yet for so many young men to die trying to maintain the institution makes no sense. The northern states gave up slavery years ago, and they still operate under the very same constitution. Europe abandoned slavery decades ago. The world is changing. Slavery could not be sustained indefinitely in the South."

"Why not?"

"Do you really want this discussion? I am happy to oblige, but have fear of boring you."

"You are decidedly not boring me. Do you want me to return the compliment? I will. You are the smartest negro I have ever met. Please, continue."

"Very well. If there was no Civil War, and the South went about its business as usual, slave economy and all, it would have fallen further and further behind as the North continued to grow in population and prosperity. Held a decade or two later, a war that has taken four years would probably be over in four months, so great would be the disparity between the two sides. Have you been to New York?"

"I have not been out of Georgia, except once to South Carolina."

"It is an amazing city, forty times the size of Savannah. So energetic. Factories and warehouses everywhere. New York trades with Europe, and has more ships in one port than all of the South had before the war. Slavery makes southern white men lazy. They lollygag while their brothers in the north use paid labor to build factories and buildings and, dare I say,

weapons, the likes of which the South could never match. The past four years, the South has been fighting to maintain the unmaintainable and—” Simms stopped in mid-sentence.

“Yes?” she asked.

“I apologize. I must sound so strident about the futility of the fighting, and that is disrespectful of you, and your losses. Very sorry. Forgive me.”

“You speak ... you speak like you attended school up north. Such big words. I have not met many men who speak so clearly. I don’t understand how—”

“How I came to sound so educated?”

“For want of a better word, yes. You belie what I was taught to think of the negro.”

“We are not all illiterate. As I explained before, I had the advantage of educated and loving parents. I was reading the Bible at age five. The newspaper of our little island when I was six. I read any books we could find. Did you ever hear of Frederick Douglass?”

“No, can’t say as I have.”

“He’s probably the most literate negro in America, a free black from Maryland, though he now lives in Washington. He has called for the abolition of slavery for years, written essays, and even advised President Lincoln in the White House. And he’s not that old, in his late forties. Douglass writes and speaks clearly. I heard him once on a trip to New York. It was eye opening for me, that a colored man could be so eloquent and inspiring. I introduced myself afterwards and shook his hand. You know what he said?”

“Probably that you should leave Savannah.”

Simms laughed. “I wasn’t in Savannah then, still on Jekyll Island. He said, ‘Rufus, don’t give up. We shall prevail. Don’t give up.’ His words have guided me ever since.”

“Your parents, are they still in Jekyll?”

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“Sadly, they are deceased. Natural causes.”

“So they were not slaves?”

“No, both free. My grandfather was white.”

“Really?”

“A plantation owner. My grandmother was one of his slaves. Their child was my mother, a mulatto. When she was of school age, he saw to it that she be taught to read and write. I admit to some advantage there.”

So that explains it! “And she married a free colored?”

“Yes, now I believe you know the whole family genealogy.”

“Did you ever meet your grandfather?”

“No, he died when I was an infant.”

“If I may ask, why did you stay in the South? Why not migrate up north, to be with Mr. Douglass and his kind.”

“A fair question. This is my home, in spite of the war and the way our people have been treated, I feel comfortable here. In the north I would feel uprooted. And here I can have a more positive effect on my people.”

“A missionary among your own people.”

“Never thought of it that way. There is something of the poet in you, Abigale. May I call you Abigale?”

She nodded.

“And you may call me Rufus.”

Abigale felt a need to shift the conversation back to the present situation. “Do you really think things will change now that the Union looks like they’re going to prevail?”

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“Not right away, no. The South won’t give up its traditions so easily. They will lose the war because they’re tired and worn out, weary. There are just not many men left to fight. But the poison, it’s still there, and will be for a long time. Of that I am certain.”

He is so self-assured. Father was like that.

“It’s just tragic that you and other white folks have had to suffer these losses over and over. Polly said you had the melancholy. She didn’t use that word, but her description fit my understanding of the condition. I have studied the melancholy, and know how it can affect people. I try to mollify it when counselling some of my parishioners.”

“The melancholy? Yes, I have heard that term also. I would call it a feeling of despair. Have *you* ever had that feeling?”

She didn’t expect to be asking so many personal questions. Family history, yes, but not inquiry into his soul. Did she have the right? Yet the question came easily. How would he answer?

To her surprise he just stared at her, then turned around to gaze out the room’s solitary window behind his desk. Ever curious, Abigale waited for a response.

Turning back around, he said, “Yes, I have.”

His face had changed. Now it showed sadness, a certain pensiveness, and perhaps, she thought, he was even close to tears. She would ask no more.

“Two sons, deceased,” he said.

“Oh my God! I’m so sorry.”

“Thank you. I often do not understand God’s way, and for a long while did think Him to be evil. But I’ve reconciled.”

“They passed from illness?”

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“One son, Rufus, Jr., when he was less than a year old. And the other when he was nine. Both ill with the fever.”

“So you have tasted despair.”

“I have drunk fully from the cup, yes.”

“Then you *do* understand, perhaps.”

“Life is short, and we must take what comes.”

“And now your wife is ill?”

“Not ill, as with fever, but weak. She is able to do some things, but not everything a wife normally does.”

His wife is no longer his lover? Will he reveal more? “You are opaque, Rufus.”

“I have already divulged more than I should. These things are not a secret, but a pastor’s personal life should never intrude when counseling others. It is a matter of ethics.”

“Ethics?” Abigale let out a small laugh.

“Why do you find that funny?”

“Sir, you are too formal. I have lost a husband and father. And did I neglect to mention, a child aborted in my womb but two years ago, when my husband was at away at war, and therefore no chance to have another until he returned. Which he never will.”

“I am sorry. I knew nothing of that situation.”

“You have lost two sons and, if I may be so bold, perhaps a wife’s affection. Now I see we are both sufferers of the melancholy. You have no doubt heard the phrase, ‘Misery loves company’?” She laughed once more, a forced laugh.

“I came here to help ease my pain,” she continued, looking him hard in the eyes. “Now I see you are perhaps also needful of such help.”

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“Your boldness is astonishing, Abigale. And refreshing, I will admit. But the truth is, I am no longer miserable. I have reconciled. Which you should do as well.”

“How?” Before he could answer she added, “So you met with General Sherman?”

His eyebrows arched, reflecting surprise at her pivot. Abigale sensed he welcomed a change in topic.

“Yes, very briefly, as I mentioned earlier, about the church. I met him along with some of our negro ministers, this past Saturday, just two days after he arrived. He is approachable, and understands the concerns of our race. I do believe Mr. Lincoln wants to right the wrongs my people have suffered, and Sherman is one of his emissaries.”

“It is difficult for me to be dispassionate about the man. While Sherman was attacking Atlanta his soldiers killed my husband.” *Let him justify that fact.*

“And if you were to confront him, he would not deny your allegation. He would not boast of it, but would not shy away either. This general is very single-minded. His goal is to end the war and preserve the Union. He would have much preferred there *be* no battle for Atlanta. I am sure he would rather be home with his own family than sitting in Mr. Green’s mansion, plotting his next move through the Carolinas.”

“That helps me not.”

“I understand. But talking about the losses does help most people. It is a matter of showing not sympathy, but empathy.”

“Empathy?”

“Putting yourself in someone else’s shoes, then showing them you understand their situation. No amount of talking can bring back the dead, but those who feel what you call despair can learn to cope. They have to be counseled, which is what I do.”

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“Then I will stop being a wiseacre child. You may counsel me.”

“It takes time. Do you read the Bible?”

“Not any longer.”

“There are verses in there that can help most folks. However, I sense you may be skeptical of what the Bible has to offer.”

“Try me.”

“‘The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.’ That is Deuteronomy, thirty-one eight. There are many other such uplifting passages.”

“You would do better with my mother, who reads the Bible regularly.”

They both gave a low chuckle.

“And she has the melancholy?”

“I suppose she does, as well my younger sister Jane, who doesn’t read the Bible at all.”

“Abigale, the despair you describe, or what I call the melancholy, is natural. People who don’t have despair over something like this are not fully human. You are human. You are a most sensitive soul, if ever I met one. A beautiful and intelligent woman with a full life ahead of you. You have everything to live for.”

His insight gave her a warm feeling, and she sensed some lifting of her despair and cynicism. Perhaps there is some solace in the Bible, she thought, at least when quoted by this man, who seemed to be wise, patient, and understanding. Could she continue meeting him here?

There followed a lull in the conversation and they simply looked at each other, one gaze more piercing than the other. Then a new feeling came upon her, one she tried to suppress:

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physical attraction. The realization was sudden, and scary. *This is most unnatural. I should leave now.*

After a full minute of silence, she said, “You are most kind, Mr. Simms.”

“Rufus. We agreed, remember?”

She started to cry. *I don't like this feeling. I should leave.*

Simms got up and closed the window curtains, turning the brightly lit room into a dusky twilight. He pulled out a handkerchief, walked over to the couch and sat beside her.

“Most kind,” she repeated, between quiet sobs. She took his handkerchief and dabbed at her tears.

He took her hands in his.

“I really must be going,” she said, half-heartedly, her head bent down.

“I would like you to stay.”

“Why?”

“Look at me, Abigale.” She did, and began shaking, as if a chill had just entered the room.

“I will not force myself on you,” he said. “That is not the Lord’s way. That is not my way. You must be strong, and be sure.”

Simms pulled her toward him and gently moved one hand up and down the back of her neck. “You have the nicest hair.”

She did not move away, nor show any reluctance. Then he kissed her, lightly at first, and she did not resist. He kissed her again, harder, more passionately. She relished the sensation, of being held by a man, and returned the kiss and the passion. Then he moved her hand to his thigh and she felt his hardness.

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What am I doing? This is so wrong. He is not my kind. My kind? What is my kind? He is a man and I am so in need of love. Oh God, help me!

She pushed away and stood up.

Simms stood also, now a foot away, his eyes on hers. “What’s the matter? I trust you are not offended.”

“Offended? Not at all. I am flattered by your attention. I need some time to think, to reflect on our discussion.”

“I know this, Abigale. You desire me as much as I do you. No matter my color. You want what I can give you.”

“Sir...Rufus...I am...I am just not ready for intimacy. I am still in mourning. You are married. You are...” She paused, not wishing to finish the sentence.

He finished it for her. “A black man.”

“I must go, really I must,” she said, and walked toward the door.

“Wait, I’ll unlock it.” He opened the bolt. “Will I see you again? Ever again?”

“Please, I need some time to think, to reflect.”

“My door is always open for you. Do not think me presumptuous, please. We can help each other.” He leaned over and kissed her on the forehead.

She opened the door and he stepped back, so as not to be seen from the street.

“You will return,” he said.

Now in the doorway, Abigale replied, “Was that a question?”

“No.”

“Goodbye, Rufus.”

Chapter 19

— *Monday, December 26*

Savannah Gardens was always open, but its main business did not typically start until after 8 p.m. That's when the local men showed up to pay three dollars for a stint with one of Gustav's ladies. Now almost all his customers were Union soldiers, except for a few Confederates unfit for military duty or who, through cowardice, deserted Hardee's army before it evacuated.

One of those cowards was Ignatius, whom Gustav first met two days after Hardee's army skedaddled from the city. Being a new customer, Gustav asked for his name.

"Just call me Ignatius. You don't need my last name."

"What you do here? You are young, strong, have Savannah accent. I smell a Confederate soldier," Gustav challenged. "You should be with your troops in Carolina, Yes?"

The not-too-bright Ignatius replied, lamely, "I was sick that night. Couldn't go."

"Yah, yah, I understand," said Gustav, feigning the understanding-uncle routine he liked to use on dumbbells. "You know, Mr. Ignatz—"

"Ignatius."

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“Yes, Ignatius. You know, the Union army doesn’t like deserters, whether they wear your gray or their blue.”

“I ain’t no deserter, Gustav. Watch your tongue.”

“Of course not, of course not. I think in all honesty you are a smart young man, and perhaps could use a few extra dollars, is that not so?”

“What you talking about, you old Kraut?”

“I have a proposition.”

“Let me hear.”

“First things first. Tell me, do you have any schooling? Can you read, write?”

“I ain’t illiterate, if that’s what you mean. Did the eighth grade.”

“Good, good. My proposition requires an educated man, just like yourself. Not difficult job, but must have what we in Europe call “Gehirnen.”

“Greenin’, you say?”

“Smarts. Brains. Ah, sometimes my English not best way to say things, I use German.”

“I get your meaning.”

“Good. I need you to scout a certain individual, without being noticed, and report back to me her movements about the city. I will give you the home address. I want you to watch the house until she leaves, then follow wherever she goes and report back to me. Of course, if you are noticed and questioned, you will say nothing about me. At the same time, I will know nothing about your illness the night of the river crossing. We have a deal?”

“That ain’t no proposition. I got to watch this house all day. For what?”

“Ah, yes, I forget sometimes these important things. Bring me useful information and I will reward you with three dollars. Or one of my lovelies. Your choice. But don’t come to me

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with nothing. I want to know her whereabouts, as well as you can follow. Without of course, being discovered.”

“That’s more like it. She one of your honeys? Looking to see if she’s cheatin’ on you?”

Ignatius let out a laugh and Gustav smiled.

“Ah, yes, as I said, you are a very smart man, Ignatius. Remember, you know nothing about me or our agreement, if ever asked, under any circumstances. And I will know nothing about you. On the other foot, as you people in Savannah like to say, if I hear you’ve mentioned my name, well, General Sherman is my good friend. He would like to know we have one of Hardee’s boys who missed the bridge. I do believe he is still at war with your countrymen.”

Gustav loved his veiled threat, thought it most clever, but noted Ignatius seemed puzzled.

“Voar?” Ignatius asked. “Oh, oh, *war*. That’s some accent, man. Yeah, we’s still at war.”

This fellow is a dunce. He does not think to ask how Sherman, who only just arrived, could be my good friend.

“So, Ignatius, we have a deal?”

“Well, right now, I ain’t got nothing better to do during the day, so give me her name and where she lives. I can find some work on her street, I guess, make it look like I’m busy.”

“Excellent. We’ll give it a few days. This is a busy time of year for her and she should be out and about.”

Gustav provided the relevant information, careful to distinguish between Abigale and her younger sister, a difference he hoped Ignatius could discern from a suitable distance. He liked the teenage girl also, but his interest was in Abigale. He harbored a vague suspicion – so far without any evidence – that she must have a secret lover. Someone so secret that she would not

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want anyone to find out. He liked knowing such secrets, especially if they could provide information for *erpressung*: 'blackmail'.

The deal consummated, Gustav congratulated himself on maneuvering the witless deserter to do his bidding.

Four days after General Sherman entered the city he issued Special Field Orders No. 143 for 1864. They made clear, in case anyone doubted, that he was in full command of the city.⁹

Chapter 20

— *Monday, December 26*

Polly's sister lived on Lowry Plantation, only six miles west of West Broad Street. Benjamin's unexpected death interrupted Polly's plan to leave Savannah December 24, on the plantation's hay wagon. There was no transportation Christmas day, so she got a ride the next day, leaving around two p.m. That gave her ample time in the morning to visit Reverend Simms, and explain Abigale's need to see him.

Lucy, her husband Digby and son Sam lived in one of the Lowry's slave shacks adjacent to the rice fields, which were now flooded and non-productive. The Confederates had opened the flood gates just days before Sherman's troops arrived, as one way to slow down the invasion.

The plantation held forty slaves at its peak but was now down to just twenty, the rest having run away, to where no one really knew. From contact with the hay wagon driver in early December, Polly knew Lucy was still around. "Tell her I'll be dere Christmas week," she said.

The hay wagon pulled into the slave quarters just as the sun was setting. Lucy, now twenty-six, was home but Digby was not. Digby wasn't really her husband, not in the eyes of legal Georgia, since no marriage certificate had ever been issued. They had had a slave ceremony

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a few years back, jumping over a broom and singing a Gullah hymn, which meant they were married in the eyes of the other slaves.

Lucy cried out on seeing Polly and ran to hug her. “I so sorry. I heard about Benjamin.”

“Nuthin to be sorry for. Da Lord took him, just like he gonna take me and you one day.”

“You always was a strong one, Polly. Come in.”

Sam held tight his mother’s skirt. Polly picked him up and gave a big hug. “Sam, you is getting’ big. You treatin’ your momma nice?”

“I is four,” he said. She carried him inside the shack.

Inside was a 400-square foot space, its floor raised on bricks to keep out snakes and other vermin. A stove and chimney occupied one corner, and two beds lay against a side wall, with a small table and chair in the middle of the floor space. Polly had stayed here before and knew what to expect. She was always happy on arriving, to be with her sister, and always happy on leaving, to return to the luxury of Liberty Street.

“Where be your Digby?”

“Lord knows dat,” said Lucy. “He keep a talkin’ about joining dem Yankee soldiers, spending lots of time w’ dem. Sleeping in da’ camp, tending dere horses and such. Ain’t seen him since yesterday morning.”

“He wasn’t home fo’ Christmas?”

“Just da morning. Said da Yankees needed him for cookin’ and servin’. Dey’s celebratin’ Christmas too.”

On previous visits Polly had slept on a corncob and Spanish moss mattress laid on the floor. She saw no mattress this time. And no Christmas tree. Liberty Street always had a Christmas tree. She did smell the sweet aroma of soup cooking over the fire.

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“I be sleepin’ here?” she asked.

“Heavens no. We got you your own place. Half the black folks done left. You gonna be next door. Empty now, but dere’s a bed and stove inside. Hope you ain’t gonna be lonely over there.”

Polly was thrilled. She didn’t expect any privacy during the week. “Where’d they all go?”

“Lord knows. When da Yankees come close, they just took off, figured no one gonna stop ‘em. They’s right, too. Digby thinkin’ of leaving, but don’t know where we’d go. We’s gonna wait it out, see what happens. All kinds of noise and talk and such.”

“Same thing in Savannah. No one knows much. But I see you gots what to eat, dat’s good.”

“We gots food. The Yankees don’t mess wi’ us. True to tell, dey don’t seem to care much about us.”

“What’s happenin now? You workin’ the fields?”

“Ain’t no fields to work. Dem all flooded. Truth to tell, sister, we is freer now den ever. But don’t know what’s happenin. Jus don’t know. What ‘bout you? I heard Miss Abigale’s husband done got killed.”

“Mighty sad, mighty sad. They’s a sad bunch, they is. Still treat me good, but the house is cold. I gots her to go see Reverend Simms, to cheer her up.”

“Ummm.”

“I walked over dere with her. She sat through the service. And she been back, too. She don’t much care for the sermons, though. He keeps a talkin’ about the light and such, how we gonna be free.”

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“So she burned the church down?” Lucy let out a big laugh at her joke. Everyone on the plantation knew about the fire.

“Taint funny, Lucy. The next mornin’ I took her to look at what’s left. Taint funny. They could a killed somebody.”

“Well, it would be us niggers they be killing, if anyone. Thank the lord the Yankees done got here, or we’d be all gone. What else you got there?”

“Where?”

“Back in Savannah. That nigger hater ain’t back home, is he? He’s the one ought to have been killed.”

“You mean Johnny Gordon?”

“Dat be the one.”

“Ain’t heard nothin’ ‘bout him. Still fightin’ I guess. Just me and the women. The mother, and dat brat of a sister, Jane.”

“You got yo’ hands full, taking care of dem. What you gonna do now youse free?”

“Free?”

“As a bird, sister. It be the law of Mr. Linkum, and the Yankees here to make it so.”

“Don’t mean nothin’. Everyone seems to be just talkin’. Even Miss Abigale aks me that same question. Jus like you said, where I’m gonna go? Where you and Digby gonna go? We gots no schoolin. No money. What free be to me and you?”

“Soup’s ready, sister. Let’s eat.”

Polly found the soup delicious and they consumed every drop. Sam practically drank his bowlful like a slurping dog. A little rice was thrown in to give bulk, but after the meal Polly still

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felt a bit hungry, and wished Lucy had served some bread. *But I don't need no more food. Be good to lose a few pounds this week.*

There was a knock on the door, and a voice outside. "Singin' beginnin' now, Miss Lucy."

"What's that?" asked Polly.

"It be Christmas, we go sing outside, until the cold run us off."

The women and Sam left the shack and gathered with half a dozen other negroes around a brisk log fire. The air was a crisp fifty degrees, but no wind. Without printed music, or accompanying instruments, they sang many songs, including *Silent Night, Oh Come All Ye Faithful, Deck the Halls*, and *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing*. Polly knew some of the words, and hummed what she didn't know.

That Lucy, Digby and Sam remained together through the war was a matter of luck, and laziness. The slave trade, or rather the price of slaves, had plummeted with each Yankee victory, and by October it was almost zero. No one wanted to buy slaves if they were going to be emancipated soon.

The laziness was on the part of Master Lowry, an old man who did not delegate, yet was himself too frail and disinterested to start wheeling and dealing slaves. "That's for the younger men," he was heard to say on more than one occasion.

So Lucy and Digby stayed in the plantation's rice fields, at least until shortly before Sherman arrived. Now it would be weeks before the fields could be drained, replanted and harvested.

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In fact, Polly arrived at a most unusual time. The principal crop at Lowry's was now Union soldiers. At least 1000 were camped on the 700 acre property, mostly around the homestead and available dry land, and there was nothing Lowry could do about it.

The soldiers awaited orders. The slaves awaited their emancipation. Mr. Lowry and his family awaited deliverance from the uncertainty of having their property temporarily confiscated. The one good thing about it being Christmas was that no one expected much to happen during the holidays. They could sit back and relax, enjoy the quiet period.

The next morning Polly awoke later than usual, around 7 a.m. She dressed, found the outhouse and after cleaning up walked over to Lucy's shack.

"How'd you sleep, sister?" Lucy asked.

"Good 'n deep. Tired from yesterday."

"Well, we got some vittles for you. Genuine grits."

Polly didn't much care for grits but, being hungry, did not complain.

"Got word Digby's on his way back from da' Union camp," said Lucy. "Dey got runners to deliver da news. Don't know what time but afore lunch I'm told."

"Were you expecting him?"

"I don't expect nothin'. He comes when he comes. As I said, he does work for da' troops. If dey tell him to skat, he skats, comes home."

"Is he joining the army?"

"Don't think they take black folks. That's what I hear from da others."

The two woman and Sam sat around the small table, consuming their grits and some small biscuits.

LIBERTY STREET

“Didn’t know you had bread in da’ house,” said Polly. “Could a had some last night.”

“Just a little. I saves it for—”

The front door burst open, as if by a strong wind. Polly jerked around to see the figure of Digby, filthy in overalls and bib, exuding a strong barnyard smell. He carried a canvas bag in one hand that appeared to be heavy from the way it stretched to the floor boards.

“Digby!” Lucy screamed. “You scared the bejeezeus out of us, jumping in like that. Which you got in the bag? Say hello to Polly.”

“Daddy!” Sam jumped up from his chair and ran to his father’s legs. “Is this for me?”

Digby dropped the bag, lifted his son and gave him a hug. “This is for all of us.” He put Sam down, carried the bag over and placed it on the table. “This is gen-u-wine pig. Courtesy of the third Union Cavalry.”

“Lord a’ mighty,” cried Lucy, “we eats tonight. What else they pay you with?”

“Just this.” He reached in his pocket and pulled out a silver dollar.

“We is gonna get rich off them Yankees, we is,” said Lucy. “Is you joinin’ up?”

“They don’t take colored soldiers. Orders of Gen’l Sherman. I knows our kind fights up north, but this general, he don’t want any. But they’s lookin’ for laborers. I just might get a chance to go with ‘em to Carolina.”

“Jus’ you?” asked Lucy. “What about us?” She pointed to Sam.

“Too soon to know much mo’. But marching with the army no place for a woman and child.”

Polly could sense tension over the subject, but said nothing.

“Come, have some grits,” said Lucy. “You must be hungry.”

“I got vittles at the camp before leaving. Got to go roast this pig, salt the meat away

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for later. We'll have some tonight. How you doin', Polly? Haven't seen you in a long time."

"I'm doin' fine, Digby."

"We got lots to talk about," he said, then picked up the pig and went outside.

Polly could only wonder what he meant by 'lots to talk about'.

Chapter 21

— *Tuesday, December 27*

Another knock on the door, another message for Abigale. She thanked the messenger, a young black boy who looked to be about twelve.

“I was asked to wait for a reply, Ma’am.” He stood on the porch, just outside the doorway, while she opened the envelope and read the note:

Abigale Tate

27 Liberty Street

I respectfully request the honor of your company to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Lamar Casey, Friday, December 30th, 6 pm. A dinner party hosted by General John W. Geary, Military Commander of Savannah. Please affirm and I will make all arrangements for your safe travel, etc.

Your obedient servant,

Mayor Richard Arnold, M.D.

LIBERTY STREET

This is the same dinner party Jane was invited to. What is going on here? I will decline, of course.

Before saying no, she first decided to learn more about this party and that meant going to the source.

“I will have a reply shortly, within a day’s time,” she told the messenger, trying to hide any indication that she might accept or reject the invite. “I must check on some things.”

The boy nodded and returned to the street. She closed the door, retrieved her coat from the closet, then yelled up to her mother that she was going for a walk. Within minutes she was on her way to the Casey residence on Habersham Street.

She noted a white fellow cleaning the street, his face covered with a scarf against the cold. But it wasn’t that cold, so she figured the scarf was to keep from inhaling dust, and thought no more about it. She reached the residence in about fifteen minutes.

Fortunately, she found Mrs. Casey at home. “Come in, come in dear,” said Lucretia. “What’s on your mind?” She ushered Abigale to the living room and a comfortable chair.

Once seated, Abigale wasted no time explaining her reason for coming. “Over the last two days we have received invitations to a party in your home, one from a young captain inviting my sister Jane, and one from the Mayor, inviting myself.”

“The mayor’s invited you?”

“Yes.”

“You are half his age. No, less than half.”

“He was close to my father, as you know.”

“Well, dear, I assure you it’s nothing more than a social invitation. I doubt he has designs. Since his wife Margaret died in 1850 he could have married a dozen women, but chose

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not to. He is very devoted to his politics, and to his medical practice when he's not running for mayor. Anyway, it's a party Lamar is throwing for our new house guest, General Geary, plus the mayor and his council."

"General Geary is your house guest?"

"Yes, I thought I mentioned it to you last Saturday, when you were here."

"You said a general, but didn't give his name.

"Oh, then that's because I didn't know at the time. He's the general in charge of the city."

"Yes, I know. The one our very mayor surrendered to."

"The same. Now our dear military commander. And he's staying in our home."

"At the point of a gun?"

"Oh no, no, nothing like that. You are a bit dramatic. These Union men, they are gentlemen. No, by request, though if we had refused, who knows?"

"And this Captain, Broderick, I believe his name is?"

"A fine young man, from Pennsylvania of all places. He is the one inviting your sister?"

"Yes."

"Well, Captain Broderick is the general's aide, so I suppose he's entitled to come and bring a guest. He is staying with us as well. It's Lamar's idea to have the party, so the general and our civic leaders can meet in a more social setting."

"What does he hope to gain, if I may ask?" *He wants his cotton saved, I'm sure.*

"He just wants to be on the good side of both sides, if you know what I mean. The occupation promises to be peaceful, and he wants it to stay that way. Come and join us. You will have a grand time."

"You know I cannot."

LIBERTY STREET

“Oh? Why not?”

Abigale thought carefully before answering. “Because I am still in mourning. It is too soon to celebrate, let alone celebrate a Union victory, and with a man twice my age.”

“Arnold’s wealthy, you know. A doctor and a politician. You cannot best that combination.”

“I’ll send mother.”

“Henrietta? Your mother?”

“Why not? She’s forty four, much closer in age to the mayor.”

“Dear, whomever the mayor wants to bring is fine with me. And I don’t want to be too personal here, but I don’t think Henrietta has been out of her house since your father died.”

“I’ll ask her. Now that I have a better understanding. If she agrees I will ask the mayor. I should hope it would make no difference to him. This is a better idea the more I think about it. Mother can keep an eye on my sister.”

“Your sister needs an eye kept on her?”

“In a manner, yes. We know nothing about this young captain.”

“As I said, he’s a nice man.”

They talked some more, nothing substantial, and all the while Abigale plotted something bolder than just sending her mother to the party with Mayor Arnold.

“Oh dear,” said Mrs. Gordon. “Lucretia wants me to attend her party? I haven’t been to their house since before your father was killed. What will I do there?”

“Mother, there will be solders at the party, including the general in charge of Savannah. I will find someone to escort you, if you agree to go.”

LIBERTY STREET

Abigale considered the possibility Arnold would balk at taking her mother and so was careful not to mention any specific name. If her plan didn't work out she would just say all the soldiers were spoken for, and her mother would lose nothing. However, that would wreck another part of her plan, so she needed to act quickly and carefully.

“And besides, mother, Jane will be there. Don't you want to keep an eye on her?”

“Yes, dear, that is true. Well, if you can work out the details, then I will go.”

“Excellent, mother. Give me a couple of days. I will let you know.”

Abigale could not trust the next step to a written note. She would have to see the mayor in person. *He should be in his City Exchange office, working on occupation policies. Getting in should not be difficult.*

Abigale stopped before the stone-faced Exchange building. Along with the Customs House and Christ Church, it was one of Savannah's grandest structures. She walked up to the second floor office and in the outer room encountered a male secretary.

“Who should I say is calling, Ma'am?”

“Mrs. Abigale Tate.”

“Do you have an appointment?”

“Yes, but it's probably not recorded. He sent me a note, said to come right away, so he's expecting me.”

“Let me see if he's busy.” The secretary knocked, then entered the mayor's office and closed the door behind him. In less than half a minute Arnold was out to greet her.

“Abigale, what brings you here? Come in, come in.” He motioned his secretary to return to work and ushered Abigale into his office.

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She gave a quick look around the room. Fourteen foot high ceilings, molded cornices, a picture of George Washington on one wall and a large map of Savannah on another. And something else caught her eye, sitting upright on its own floor stand. “I’ve not seen your office here before, but I notice the United States flag. Is that new?”

“Yes, yes, we have an agreement. We are now under the command of the United States, so all artifacts must reflect that position. I must say, you are very observant. I trust you got my invitation?”

“Yes, that’s why I came to see you.”

“Good. General Geary will be there, so this is a very important gathering. The Caseys have invited me and my aldermen and their wives, plus I believe his aide de camp. A small party. I understand your family knows Lucretia and Lamar, so it will be very cordial.”

“Richard – may I call you Richard?”

“By all means, by all means.”

The mayor sat on the front edge of his large oak desk while Abigale stood in the middle of the room. She planned for a quick visit.

“I do appreciate your thoughtfulness, Richard, but wanted to explain in person. I am still in a period of mourning. True, I don’t wear black, as you know, but I fear it is way too soon to participate in festivities such as a party with the Union general. Especially considering the circumstances of Franklin’s death. I hope you will understand, and I wanted to tell you in person.”

She could see true disappointment on his face. Lest it gain momentum and lead to her eviction, she quickly added, “But I have an idea.”

“You do?”

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“Yes, mother would love to go. She has not been out of the house for quite a while, and though you have not seen her lately, she is quite the woman when dressed up. I think you will find her very attractive and entertaining, and you two have so much in common.”

“Please, please sit down.” Richard motioned her to a high-backed, thickly upholstered chair. He rubbed his chin, which to Abigale meant her proposal was under consideration.

“Just so you know, Richard, I have discussed this idea with mother and she will be delighted. And of course I will forever be in your debt for such a gallant action.”

“To be honest Abigale, I have been lonely since my wife died. I was planning to go with or without you. I fully recognize our age difference, but find you compellingly attractive, and thought you would enjoy a night out at the Caseys. But I understand your concern and will honor your wishes. I will be delighted to escort your mother. You may tell her so.”

“Excellent!” Abigale was ecstatic. “You are wonderful, Richard, I shall be ever so grateful. I will await mother’s report of this grand affair, and only wish I could participate freely and happily. But perhaps another day.” *I will give him something, without giving him anything.*

The pieces of her plan were coming together nicely, but there was more work to do. *I will see this through, but where to find Rufus?*

As it was Tuesday, she assumed he would not be at Pastor Patterson’s First Ogeechee Colored Baptist church. But what about his own church, Third Ogeechee Colored, or what was left of it? She would take the chance.

The church site was about a mile from the City Exchange. Her legs felt strong and she found walking the city invigorating. In fact, it was somewhat of a novelty, for now there were so many more people in the business district compared to a week before. Many were wandering

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negroes, from the plantations, who somehow managed to find shelter at night and food during the day. Others were soldiers in blue. Still others were well dressed white folk she didn't recognize.

And something else new caught her eye: tall ships docked on the river. With the river cleared of debris and the blockade lifted, shipping was quickly returning to the port, at a rate quicker than she thought possible. And now new people – not just soldiers and plantation slaves – were coming in. Would Savannah begin to prosper with the Yankee victory? Perhaps so, she thought, perhaps so.

She walked quickly over to Williams Street. When near where the church used to stand she noted several workmen around the charred foundation. Was he one of them?

Yes! Oh good fortune.

Like the others, Rufus wore carpenter's overalls. He held a saw in one hand and seemed to be examining a pile of lumber. Now came the difficult part: getting him over to her, speaking with him privately while out in the open, and without raising the slightest suspicion among his co-workers.

Abigale stood on the sidewalk in front of the church and approached the first workman she encountered.

“Would you please ask Mr. Simms to come see me for a moment? Please tell him it's to enquire about his work on my horse barn.”

The message delivered, he came promptly over to her. Now they were out of earshot of the other workers.

“Hello, Abigale. Horse barn?”

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Abigale moved her arms as if measuring a shelf or a dresser. But her words were not about shelves or furniture or carpentry. She spoke quickly, explained her plan, her idea for a meeting, the exact time and circumstances. It was a one-opportunity circumstance, she explained, but a grand opportunity, one he should most welcome.

If he did not agree – or perhaps he had an unbreakable commitment for that day and hour – there would be no meeting. Then she would be alone, at home, during the Caseys' party.

He had a few questions, a few doubts, a few what-ifs. She addressed them all.

Yes, he could do the carpentry work. Yes, the date and time were acceptable. Yes, he would follow her instructions.

Chapter 22

— *Tuesday, December 27*

Lucy and her family indeed ate well thanks to Digby's enterprise: roast pig, potatoes, and some cider he also managed to sequester from the army camp.

"We is so stuffed," said Polly, "I wouldn't a know'd we is slaves. Look at lil' Sam playin w' them bones. He is sure a cute one." The boy was banging pig bones on his plate, to some innate rhythm.

"Sam, cut that out," yelled his mother.

"No, let him be. Dat's good," said Polly. "He got rhythm, be a musician some day. Keep banging Sam. I likes it."

The boy obeyed.

"Glad you liked the pig," said Digby. "Gots more salted away for later in week."

"Yeh," said Lucy. "Gots what to eat, dat's for sure. But we still be slaves, sister. These be strange times. Massa Lowry hisself a prisoner I hear speak, or at least he ain't a running things no mo'. But dese troops, dey ain't staying forever, ain't dat right Digby?"

"That is right. So right. They don't give a rat's ass about us, north or south. When they leave, who knows what will be? One thing sure, tho."

LIBERTY STREET

“What dat be?” asked Polly.

“As soon as they can get them rice fields drained, we’ll be back at ‘em. Unless we leaves out of here.”

“You keep talking, and I keep saying, where we gonna go?” asked his wife.

“Same place as the other coloreds what followed Sherman here. I hear tell thousands left their plantations, now they scattered around Savannah.”

“Are they goin’ with him when he picks up and leaves?”

“Could be. We’ll see. If they do, I might go with ‘em.”

“You said that yistaday. What about me and Sam? He’s too young to be a marchin’ in the winter.”

“I’ll think of somethin’.”

“Let’s me know before you done go off again.”

Digby did not reply, and Polly filled in the lull. She remained curious about his comment the day before. “Digby, which you want to talk to me about?”

He paused before replying. She figured maybe he was thinking about what to say.

“Polly, what you gonna do, now that you are free?”

“I sure ain’t a gonna go marchin’ to Carolina with a bunch of them Yankees.”

“You staying with that family of yours, then?”

“They been good to me. Why not?”

“What they paying you?”

His question caught her off guard. She knew he knew the answer – zero in dollars – and sensed he might be trying to provoke her. She didn’t feel like arguing with her sister’s husband, but needed to offer some response.

LIBERTY STREET

“Don’t get no wages, you know that.”

“Then you ain’t nothin’ but a house nigger.”

“Digby! Watch yo’ tongue. Don’t talk to my sister like that.”

“Shut up, Lucy. Don’t mean no disrespect, Polly, but you act like a slave, that’s how they gonna treat you. You need to go back and demand your wages.”

“Yeh, you knows what happens then,” said Lucy. “Then they wants you to pay for your bed and vittles, and you end up the same – dead broke. That’s what I hear gonna happen when we go back to the fields. Lowry gonna pay and take it right back for this shack and what we eats. The white folks, they gonna get you, one way or t’other.”

Polly had not thought much about the economics of slavery, but now her sister seemed to make sense. “So what’s the use?” she asked.

“I’ll tell you the use,” offered Digby. “They pay you, and like Lucy says, then they take the money fo’ your food and such. But then you ask for more, see? They say no, then *you* say you gonna pay *less* for your bed and food.”

“You mean argue money with da white folks?”

“Dat’s what I mean.”

“And if’n they still say no?”

“Then you walk.”

“Walk? To where?”

“I mean leave, go find a job somewhere else.”

“What you mean, Digby?”

LIBERTY STREET

“If you never gonna demand your freedom they ain’t gonna give it to you. No proclamation, nothing, don’t matter. Now with Sherman here, they can’t lock you up or keep you from walkin’. They still gonna need you, you house nigger.”

“Digby!”

“That’s all you are. Sure, they treats you nice now, maybe, but wait til that brother gets his ass home. He ain’t gonna treat you any different than befo’ the war, probably worse. You know why?”

Polly shook her head.

“Cause he lost the war! His side lost. And he’s gonna blame it right on you and your colored face. He’s gonna blame the colored. You just watch out. He ain’t gonna be friendly. If you are lucky he will take a bullet wherever the hell he is.”

Polly started to cry. Cry because she knew there was some truth in his words. Cry because she just lost her husband, estranged though they were. Cry because Liberty Street, with all its luxury compared to the Lowry slave shack, was a fountain of moroseness. Cry because she was ‘free’ and it didn’t man a damn thing; if anything, it gave choices that bewildered her.

What’s gonna be?

“Digby, see what you done?” admonished Lucy.

“I done nothin’ but told the truth. I ain’t gonna stay around this plantation and be treated like a slave no more.”

Chapter 23

— Tuesday, December 27

“You back already?” asked Gustav.

“You got my money?” replied Ignatius.

The two men stood in the foyer of Savannah Gardens, close to 8 p.m.

“If you have some information to tell me?”

“A day’s worth,” said Ignatius. “Your honey sure do like to walk. Nearly wore me out.”

“Tell me.”

“Let me see the money.”

“I said the money or one of my girls.”

“You said “my choice, Gustav. “I had one of your girls last night. Now need the money.”

Gustav unlocked a drawer, removed some coins, then relocked it.

“I have the coins,” he said, and showed three silver dollars to his spy. “Now, tell me.”

“She left the house and walked over to this address, a fancy mansion on Habersham.” He handed a slip of paper to Gustav. “She stayed about half an hour.”

“Just a half hour?” *Not enough time for a lovers’ tryst.*

“No more, just as I said.”

LIBERTY STREET

“Good, will be easy to see who lives there. Someone of wealth, for sure.”

“Then she walked downtown to the City Exchange. I stayed across the street. Again, there about a half hour.”

“Umm,” said Gustav. “That’s the mayor’s office. Also keep property records there. Please, continue.”

“Then, and by now my legs is getting tired—”

“Maybe that’s why you didn’t walk across the bridge,” said Gustav, and immediately regretted his comment. *Dummkopf! Let him speak, don’t stop him with insults.*

“Ain’t funny, you old Kraut. Her next stop might interest you.”

“I do apologize, Ignatius. Please, please continue.”

“She walks over to where they burned that church last week, Baptist something or other. You know, that nigger church.”

Gustav’s eyes widened in anticipation. “Yes, I am aware of it. Please, go on.”

“They had a bunch of darkies doing some construction there. She goes up to one of them, says something, and then he goes and fetches another darkie, who comes over to her. They talk maybe ten minutes. She uses a lot of hand motions, like she’s describing some piece of furniture or something. Then he gets back to work and she leaves and walks home.”

“Are you sure she went home?”

“Sure as my name is Ignatius. I followed her from a distance, saw her enter the house. Just where she started in the morning. Twenty-seven Liberty Street.”

“Good, good.”

“I ain’t done yet. I’ll show you I earned my dollars. I walked back to the church and played dumb.”

LIBERTY STREET

Not hard to do, thought Gustav, though he had to admit Ignatius was delivering.

“What did you do?”

“I asked if there was any job I could do, that I was looking for work. The first darkie I asked told me to see another one – the very man who your woman talked to for ten minutes. I walked over and introduced myself, and asked his name. He said he was Rufus Simms, pastor of this burned down church, and how could he help me. I’m looking for work, I said, which was not untrue.”

“What did he say?” Gustav could not believe his good fortune in finding Ignatius, and assigning him at the right time to this task.

“He said he was sorry, but all the men there were volunteers, and they had no money for wages. I sort of figured as much. Then he asked me if I had any information about who might have scorched his church. I said I was sorry, I had no idea, which is also true, and I thanked him and left. Stopped to get some chow and now I’m here.”

“Very good job. You do deserve your dollars.” Gustav deposited the coins into Ignatius’s outstretched hand.

“Do you want me to keep following her? At some point she may get suspicious.”

“Good point. Let’s hold off for a while, let me think on it. Umm, if you happen to see her out and about, maybe see where she goes, but don’t spend your day waiting at her house. If you have some information obtained this way, let me know, we negotiate.”

“Negotiate?”

“Not three dollars every time. No, no. But maybe a little something for more information. Very informal. Savannah is a small city, you see her, where she goes, yes, I would like to know. But do not be noticed.”

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“I don’t think she noticed me at all.”

“Good, good. Now, would you like to spend those dollars on one of my lovelies this evening?”

“No thanks. I’m going to get me a beer.”

— *Wednesday, December 28*

Unlike any Southern city so far invaded, Savannah had fully capitulated, ensuring peace if not immediate prosperity. This result could be attributed to the confluence of two remarkable situations: General Hardee’s complete evacuation of troops, and Mayor Arnold’s attitude and level of cooperation. Though some damned the mayor for cozying up to the conquerors so readily, he had an easy reply: “Where resistance is hopeless it is criminal to make it.”

To facilitate a return to normalcy and set an agenda for the coming months, Mayor Arnold arranged a special town meeting the evening of December 28. Among the resolutions passed were a formal acknowledgment of Union victory, specific praise for General Geary, and a request that Georgia’s governor convene a constitutional convention to reverse the call for secession.¹⁰

Chapter 24

— *Friday, December 30-evening*

Jane felt giddy on entering the Caseys' spacious home. A real party, she thought, with guests and food and servants to wait on us. And no gloom. She hated the moroseness that hung about her own home. Yes, the party was on behalf of the 'hated' Yankees, but so what? Her escort was a Yankee, a rather handsome one at that.

She had visited the house years ago, and remembered some of the rooms and furniture, particularly the giant oak table in the dining room. It seemed impossibly big back then, but now she thought it merely large. It sat the fourteen guests comfortably—eight men and six women.

The women included herself, her mother Henrietta, Mrs. Casey, and wives of three aldermen. The men included General Geary and Lamar Casey seated at opposite ends, and along the sides, intermingled with the women, Captain Jason Broderick, Mayor Richard Arnold and four aldermen. Two black servants stood behind Lamar, ready to serve the guests.

Lucretia Casey arranged the seating. Thus did Henrietta sit between Mayor Richard Arnold and Jane, Jane between her mother and Captain Broderick.

“Let me propose a toast,” said Lamar, standing with wine glass in hand. “To our own Mayor Arnold and General Geary, for the way they handled the situation last week. I won't

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mince words. Working together, they saved our city from destruction, needless destruction. No one is happy with this war, and anything we can do to lessen the carnage, the better off we'll all be."

Glasses clanged and clinked.

Jane cringed but tried not to show it. *I'm no dummy, no matter what mother and Abigale think. I've lost my father and brother-in-law to this war. Let's not kid ourselves, Mr. Casey. And why is mother smiling? Is it for show? Is she not bothered being in the presence of these Union soldiers?*

Geary rose to speak. He came dressed in full uniform, as soldiers did not go to battle carrying civilian clothes.

"My goodness," whispered Jane to her date, "he is tall."

Broderick nodded, then whispered, "Yes, six feet five inches. Taller even than our president."

"Let me second that, Lamar," said General Geary. "War is hell, as my commander likes to say, and to be feted in your fine home a week after we arrived, is probably a first in the annals of war. I too wish it were all over. I would much rather be with my wife, to know her comfort, and be free of this conflict. I am not here to make any speeches, but want you to know we do appreciate your hospitality, and will do everything possible to make our stay short and unintrusive."

More clanging of glasses. Jane took a small sip of wine. *He does not look at mother or me. Does he know about father? About Abigale's husband? Did Mrs. Casey tell him? She decided to let go of these thoughts, and enjoy the evening. She, too, would have wine, drink freely, unless her mother tore the glass out of her hand.*

LIBERTY STREET

Geary and Casey took their seats, and Mayor Arnold immediately stood up. “Well, I’d like to say a few words.”

“Just a few,” said Alderman Henry Brigham, a comment that brought laughter around the table.

“Thanks, Henry, I’ll get you later.” More laughter. “This is serious business, this war, and I, too, am thankful Savannah has been spared the destruction that has befallen Atlanta and other southern cities. General Geary was receptive to our entreaties when we met in the middle of the night last week. And General Sherman has continued a policy of rapprochement, so we are optimistic. I say, let’s toast to Savannah’s bright future!”

Applause, and shouts of “Hear-hear!”

As soon as the noise died down, and the mayor took his seat, Lucretia Casey rose. “You men aren’t going to get off so easily. Now it’s a woman’s chance to speak.” All were silent.

“I say...let’s eat!”

“Hooray!” someone yelled. The servants retreated to the kitchen and in a few minutes returned with the first course.

Jane enjoyed the food, the mingling and most of all the red wine. Her mother didn’t seem to notice, or if she did, chose not to comment. Mostly Henrietta talked with the mayor, and across the table to Alderman Brigham and his wife, a comely woman who looked older than her spouse by ten years.

Jane and Broderick started off with small talk, as befit a first date. Inevitably, the question arose from the captain. “You said your brother is in the army. How about your father, what does he do?”

LIBERTY STREET

“He’s dead. A colonel with Robert E. Lee. Killed at Gettysburg.”

“Oh. I’m sorry.”

Your army killed him. “Thank you. You weren’t at Gettysburg, were you?” She sincerely hoped not.

“No, fortunately. I was in Virginia that summer, in the Shenandoah Valley. My regiment never got orders to march to Pennsylvania.”

Strange, she thought, she didn’t feel animosity toward him over her father’s death. He’s a soldier. Daddy could just as well have killed him in some god-forsaken battle.

With the succession of courses – soup, chicken, a rice dish – conversation between the captain and his teen-age date grew freer, not war talk but personal information. He grew up in Scranton, went to a military academy, has two sisters. Jane is the youngest child, has one brother and one sister, and so forth. She gave her age as eighteen – not quite true, but almost – and he gave his as twenty-two.

He is smart, courageous, handsome.

She fell for him, she wanted him, a feeling that felt natural.

Same as I felt with Winston, this yearning. I know this is a normal desire. It is mother and Abigale who are not normal.

The wine helped. She felt a slight bit tipsy, so when Broderick told a funny story, it seemed natural to touch his arm, and say, “Oh, that’s funny!” Just a light touch, but a message clearly stating ‘I like you’.

There were other brief touches during the meal, eliciting no notice by the other diners. At the height of the wine’s affect she let her hand fall on his thigh and rest there a moment. Their eyes hooked, conveying in her mind desire, both ways. *I know he wants me.*

LIBERTY STREET

Jason caressed her hand under the table, then gently removed it from his thigh, all the while looking into her eyes. He leaned over and whispered: "You have lovely eyes, Jane."

"Thank you." *We have communicated. I have him. But when. Where? Oh, I hate this stuffy dinner party!*

"Let me see how my mother is holding out," she said, and turned her attention to Henrietta and Mayor Richard Arnold.

"Is your meal good, Mother? This is the best we've eaten, I fear, in a while."

"Yes," Henrietta replied. "Mayor Arnold was just reminding me of dinners we had when your father was alive, with food this good."

"Agree," said the mayor, his voice slightly raised, so Jane could hear above the table chatter. "You were just a little girl back then, maybe seven or eight. Cute as a button, I might add."

"You flatter me, Mr. Mayor," said Jane.

"Oh, you can call me Richard."

"Oh, well," said Jane, "I will, then. Richard, I do have a question I've been meaning to ask you."

"Go ahead."

"Do we allow brothels in Savannah?"

Heads turned, at least the few that could hear her question.

"Jane! What kind of question is that for Mayor Arnold?"

"Mother, he said I could ask a question. He's the mayor, he should know."

"Richard," said Brigham from across the table, "the young lady has asked a question, a not unreasonable one I might add."

LIBERTY STREET

By now everyone turned to look at Jane, though not all heard the preamble.

“What’s that?” someone called out, from four people away.

“This young lady has asked our mayor if we allow brothels in the city of Savannah,” explained Brigham. “And the mayor is about to answer.” All heads turned to the mayor.

“As we are now under military command,” proclaimed Arnold, in a faux-speechifying voice, and looking toward Geary’s end of the table, “I will defer to the military commander on matters of morality.”

“Not so fast, Richard,” replied Geary. “I’m not getting involved in that one. I will say, though, that our soldiers are forbidden to visit houses of ill repute. That’s the official policy. On the other hand, I will also say we do nothing to stop them, or to punish our soldiers who go to these places, unless they miss roll call. So, Mr. Mayor, the question remains for you to address. Please, you may leave me out of it.”

Jane had started something that now had a momentum of its own. Had she suddenly disappeared, or taken leave to attend to personal hygiene, the question would still be hanging above the table, wanting an answer.

“Well,” said Arnold, “I see I am on the docket for this one. Like the good general, we have an official policy as well. Brothels are illegal. But, also like his army, we cannot police every establishment year round. So, truth to tell, if there is such an entity in our city limits, I would not be surprised. I hope that answers your question, young lady.”

Applause. “Spoken like a true politician,” someone offered.

Mayor Arnold leaned across Henrietta to speak in a whisper to Jane. “Why did you ask that?”

“Abigale says Mr. Gustav Heinz runs a brothel. Does he?”

LIBERTY STREET

“We’ll talk later,” Arnold replied, and he returned to his upright position.

“Oh my,” said Henrietta.

“Henrietta,” asked Arnold, “where *is* that other lovely daughter of yours tonight?”

“Home alone, I’m afraid. Still mourning. Poor child.”

Chapter 25

— *Friday, December 30-evening*

Rufus knocked on the back door at twenty seven Liberty Street and Abigale quickly opened it.

“Come in. Did you have any trouble, anyone see you?”

“Not as I know. Left my horse two blocks away at Gideon’s Stable, just as you suggested. I take it no one is home.”

“Mother and Jane left about forty-five minutes ago. That’s when I placed the lantern in the back. This is all very clandestine. And working too well, I fear.”

“Why do you fear?”

“Just an expression, Rufus. I hope for the best and expect the worst.”

“And I hope for the best and expect the best. A better philosophy.”

“Here, give me your coat. How far did you have to travel? I don’t even know where you live.

LIBERTY STREET

“About a mile from here, actually. In Yamacraw. You ever been to the Free Colored District?”

“No. No reason to. Strange, isn’t it? Never even thought about where the Free Colored live.”

“We have houses like you do, though not nearly as fancy. Frame construction, just two rooms. Mine’s right on corner of Zublely and West Boundary Street. You should come visit sometime.”

“And meet your wife? No thank you.”

“I believe we are starting on the wrong foot.”

“Agreed. Did the men at the church suspect anything?”

“No, your performance was brilliant. Told them you hired me for a small carpentry job.”

“And your wife? What did you tell her, if I may ask?”

“She is used to my going out at night, to see parishioners, or work late in the church. I have not told her anything.”

“I suppose there is nothing to tell. It is all very platonic.”

Rufus did not respond.

“Come, let’s sit down. You comfort me with your conversation. I fear going crazy without someone to talk to, someone who understands and can sympathize.”

“Remember, it’s empathy, not sympathy.”

“Yes, of course. Empathy. Empathize. It rhymes.”

They moved to the couch, but as soon as Rufus sat down Abigale pivoted to a side chair.

“Abigale, did you invite me over just to talk?”

LIBERTY STREET

“Yes, and because I trust you. I do not fear you, though you are a man, and could, I suppose, overpower me. I do not fear that.”

“Then you know my wish is to have you.”

“Please, that is not my purpose. I wish you to accept that for now.” She regretted saying “for now.”

Rufus did not question what she meant. “So it is more of therapy, for the melancholy?” he asked.

“No. It is more of two like-minded friends helping each other through difficult times.”

He laughed. “Like-minded? I don’t think there could two more un-like-minded creatures in God’s universe.”

“Why in heaven’s name do you say that?”

“Why? Just look at this situation. First, man and woman. The two sexes don’t think alike. Men create war, women create life. Big difference, there. Then there’s race. I’m of the slave race, you are of the master class. How you came to accept someone like myself on any equal footing remains a mystery.”

“A mystery to me as well,” she said. “I felt repulsed by your sermons, at least at first. They were alien to my culture, the way my parents raised me. The war has upended all that. Upended everything.”

“All to the good.”

“Yes, I can appreciate you have a different perspective.”

“You use such big words.”

“Sorry. Around you, I tend to get pedantic.”

“There you go again. Platonic, perspective, pedantic. You do like your p’s.”

LIBERTY STREET

They both laughed.

“Here’s another P for you,” she said. “Polly. Now she is free, though what that will mean I don’t know. She doesn’t read or write. What will she do? Strange, though, as I think about her.”

“What?”

“Until her husband died, and I saw her at his deathbed, I always thought she was happy, certainly happier than us Gordon girls. Now I have my doubts. His death brought out something in her, an inner misery I never before appreciated. Now I wish she could be free in ways other than what’s written on a piece of paper, but I fear that’s not possible.”

“You mean free to take care of herself, to be her own person?”

“Yes, you put it well. Would you like some tea?”

“Yes, that would be nice.”

Abigale set a kettle in the fireplace to boil water. “Mother made some Christmas cake, I’ll go get some.”

She returned from the kitchen with two pieces.

“I think we may be leaving crumbs as evidence,” he said. “And you will have to explain why you ate such a big piece of cake.”

“Oh, that won’t be a problem. Mother knows I love her cake. And I of course I will clean up any crumbs. They won’t be home for at least two more hours.”

“And what if they return early?”

“You are here to measure for shelving in the barn.”

“At night?”

“You work all day to rebuild your church.”

LIBERTY STREET

“You think of these things, I suppose. I would prefer to be long gone when they return. I think you are naïve in these matters. Very naïve, in fact.”

“How so?”

“A colored man alone with a white woman of the upper classes, in her home, at night? My brethren have been lynched for far less. I would rather not make myself vulnerable. A word from you that I forced myself in the house, or assaulted you, and I would not see the morning sun.”

Abigale did not respond, but thought on his comments. He had a valid point, but at the moment she held a more pressing thought: how to end the evening. By giving herself to him? Or by keeping her distance, an evening of dialogue only?

The former would separate her forever from her heritage and culture. She might as well move up north and join a congregation of abolitionists.

The latter would deny her true needs, for love and affection, especially the affection of a person she admired more by the passing minute. And if family came in while they were embraced? Yes, the noise of their arrival should give Rufus time to exit through the back alley. But what if they heard no one approach, perhaps due to their own lustful sounds, and Jane and her mother entered with their escorts? He could be killed, she banished or worse. All these thoughts came in an instant. *Was it right to invite him? I am so lonely.*

“You seem deep in thought, Abigale.”

“You scare me with your comments, Rufus. Not seeing the morning sun if we are discovered? I am not that kind of person.”

LIBERTY STREET

“Of course not, which is why I came at your invitation. But others can contrive, invent, anything to damn the colored. You are a like a child playing with fire, putting yourself in my sphere.”

“Your sphere? Whatever do you mean?”

“You are like an innocent girl who has come upon a swamp, and is oh so curious to wade into it, to see if it’s really full of snakes and scorpions and alligators. You are totally unprepared for what may happen, but your curiosity is getting the best of you. So you wade in.”

“My, you do have a literary bent, Rufus. Perhaps I am not so innocent. Perhaps I enter with full armor.”

“Or none at all.”

“The tea is ready.” She poured the boiling water over tea leaves in the cups, and handed one to him.

“Thank you. This is good and hot.”

Abigale remained standing, and walked over to the fireplace. “It is true this meeting would have been inconceivable until recent events. Something has changed, and now it doesn’t seem so strange after all.”

“But you are anti- negro at heart, no matter your opinion of me. You would subjugate us, whip us, destroy us, you and your countrymen.”

“Why do you lump me with them? You are being most unkind.”

“I am only speaking the truth. I have no illusions. The one thing that binds us, maybe the only thing, is that we are man and woman, with physical and emotional needs. You have so much as admitted that. But look what must be overcome! Centuries of white attitudes about slavery, race, economic servitude.”

LIBERTY STREET

“Rufus! Stop lecturing me. And stop blaming me for all that. I don’t deserve it. And I have changed. I am changing.”

“True. Your invitation speaks to that. And also, I might add, your concerns about Polly. But it is not so easy to undo what one has learned from childhood.”

“You want to label me a negro-hater, no matter what I say or do?”

“No. No. I only want to make you aware of how deeply rooted are the prejudices we – my race – must overcome. Even by people as enlightened as you are.”

“I am more enlightened now, as you put it, than before I met you.”

“But still shackled by your culture. Hence the ruse to get me here. The back door entrance. The fear of being found out. All necessary because of the prejudices.”

“I don’t deny that. But now that we are alone, I feel liberated from that culture.”

“Then come over here.”

“What?”

“Come over here,” he said. “You are a woman, I am a man. By your words, alone now, race is not an impediment. Please, sit next to me. Let me hold you.”

“No. I fear that will repeat last week, in your office.”

“Yes, of course. Come over here. Now.”

“Please Rufus, don’t command me. Please don’t.”

“It is not a command, but a request. Come here, sit beside me.”

She did not move, except to put her cup on the mantle lest it fall from her hands.

“Rufus, don’t do this.”

“Then ask me to leave.”

“I don’t want you to leave. Not now.” *Why does he challenge me so?*

LIBERTY STREET

“Abigale, go open the back door and I will walk out.”

She did not move.

“No? Then come, sit beside me.”

She kept her position, stared at him, knowing full well she revealed indecision, borne out of fear and desire. Fear *and* desire. *He knows it!*

He stood up, walked to the fireplace. She did not move, nor flinch.

“Look at me, Abigale.” She raised her head and he kissed her. She did not push him away, nor resist. She could have, but did not.

He put his arms around her and kissed again. He put his tongue in her mouth and she accepted it, relishing its smooth sensation. She shook and he held her, and she felt his manhood.

I can stop this now, I should stop this now. O Lord, help me to decide. Help me to decide.

Henrietta and Jane returned home together in one carriage, accompanied by Captain Broderick. Mayor Arnold stayed behind at the Casey mansion, to speak privately with Major Geary.

On the way home, Henrietta sat opposite her daughter and the captain, who held hands.

“Mother, are you upset Mayor Arnold didn’t escort you home?”

“Heavens no, I’m actually glad. It was easier to say our goodbyes at the Caseys, than on the porch of my own home. He’s a nice man, but not for me. Too political.”

“In what way, Mrs. Gordon, if I may ask?”

“Oh, Mr. Broderick—”

“Please, call me Jason.”

LIBERTY STREET

“Yes, of course, Jason. I mean he’s got priorities serving the citizens, and now cozying up to our conquerors. It’s no wonder he never remarried. Probably too busy. Not the kind of man a mature woman would want.”

“Mother, he’s very nice. I hope I didn’t scare him away with my question.”

“I’m sure you did not, honey. Don’t you worry. I’ll be fine. Did he ever answer your question about that man Gustav what’s-his-name?”

“No, the mayor sort of avoided me after the dinner. As I expected. He’s probably in cahoots.”

Broderick laughed. “The mayor?”

“Well, if it’s true the brothels are illegal, how do you explain it?”

Broderick did not offer an answer. The carriage pulled up to the house and the driver jumped down to assist the women. Jason told him to wait, that he would return in a moment.

At the foot of the stairs leading to the stoop, Jane asked her mother to go inside alone.

“I’ll be up in a minute, Mother. I just want to say goodbye to Jason.”

“Yes, dear. Don’t be long.” Henrietta climbed the stairs, entered the house and shut the door.

Alone, the two young people kissed in the dim light of the stoop’s lamp, a more passionate kiss than might be warranted on a first date. Then they spoke rapidly, about a next date, where and when, and with each decision Jane nodded yes. Another deep kiss, and Jason returned to the carriage. He waited a moment until she entered the house and the front door closed.

Jane found her mother in the living room, being debriefed by Abigale.

“So,” said Abigale, “mother tells me you and the young captain got along splendidly.”

LIBERTY STREET

“He’s a nice man,” said Jane, with as little emotion as possible. “But mother and the mayor are also compatible, I believe.”

“Jane was quite the belle tonight, though she upset the apple cart a little, if I may say so.”

“Oh, how so?” asked Abigale. “Please, tell me.”

Henrietta recounted Jane’s question and the mayor’s response, and how “the whole table joined in.”

Abigale laughed. Looking at Jane, she said, “Good for you. Sometimes being very young helps. I don’t think I would have been brave enough to ask that question.”

“And what did you do tonight, all alone?” asked Mrs. Gordon.

“Oh, I read, and played the piano a little. The time did pass.”

END OF PART 1