

ESCAPE

1

Those who have seen quadroons and octoroons will remember their peculiar style of beauty, the rich olive tint of the complexion, the large bright eyes, the perfect features, and the long wavy black hair. A hundred romantic associations and mysterious fancies clustered around that class in the South, owned, as they often were, by their own fathers and sold by them.—*The Story of Jane*

2

1

In 1806, there was no longer the fear of sudden attack by Indian raiding parties, the smashing of babies' heads and the loss of women-folk to the savage hinterlands. The Delawares and the Mingos, not without apprehension that certain whites might massacre them on a whim, lived along the river in peace with the whites. Thus, despite an oppressive shadow cast over Brown's Island by the steep hills on both sides of the river, Sarah felt safe from the brutality in those hills—the drunken rampages of the foul-mouthed, unpredictable youths and their indulgent fathers. Sometimes, though, she would imagine rapacious eyes watching her on the island as if waiting for an unguarded moment to attack.

Sarah Kinney was sixteen years old. As she watched the sun break through the dawn, lighting the spring air as if with invisible tinsel, this day seemed the most important in her life. She had fed the farm slaves their morning meal when she saw the sun from the kitchen window and sensed a power that spoke through nature: the surrounding forests and hills and in the great sugar trees covering the northern part of her island, where she wandered in the hour or two that she had free of her chores every week. From the window, she watched the Ohio River sweeping by to those far-off places like New Orleans that she imagined she would never see.

She thought of her mother Molly Kinney, a mulatto slave of Colonel Richard Brown, who died giving birth to her in 1790, and tried to picture her from her sisters' descriptions. Her sister Fanny, who was born on the journey from Maryland to Virginia six years earlier, was eventually sold to Dick Dawson, a free coloured man living in Wellsburg, the seat of Hancock County, Virginia, a few miles downstream. Sarah's oldest sister, Nell, became personal attendant to Mrs.

3

Honor Brown. The Colonel gave Sarah to his house slaves to raise. At six, Sarah understood that she was a slave. The abject obedience of the blacks transferred a fear into her at the same time that the superior attitude of the whites raised a wall of rejection against her. She also learned the difference between a house slave and a field slave but did not fully understand her position until Nell told her that the master was their father. She knew a kind of affection from the Colonel,

who would pat her on the head at times and call her a pretty girl. Once she overheard the Colonel defending the need for slaves with his brother Hugh, who believed that owning slaves was not Christian. The Colonel enlisted slaves for the rebel army in the Revolutionary War on the promise of freedom after the War, which, he admitted, caused him the occasional prick of conscience when he knew that such freedom was illusory in a slave state like Virginia.

Sarah remembered her childhood on this little Island, about three

miles long in the Ohio River between Virginia and Ohio, the games played with the children of the slaves who lived in huts near the house, and the wild boy George Brown, Hugh's son and the Colonel's nephew, who swam across to the island with Indian boys from Ohio to mix in their games. Sarah liked George, who was two years younger, because he acted so free in everything he did, and, unlike Colonel Brown's white children, he treated her as a friend.

Most of Colonel Brown's slaves worked for his white family in Hollidays Cove on the Virginia side of the river, but they were few relative to the numbers owned by his neighbours such as the Campbells, who had vast acres on the hillsides. Slaves were up before dawn working till after sunset, clearing timber and growing the crops that the flatboats would carry to points south in trade for manufactured goods and fine things like cloth and wine. Strikes of the whip and imprisonment in stockades were everyday reminders that they had no will other than that of their overseer. Sarah grew up hearing cries and screams for mercy every morning along the banks of the Ohio River. Fear of punishment and

of the auction block in Wellsburg, where families were separated and sold to different parts of the country, kept slaves cowed. The trade on flatboats down the river gave the women hope that when boats stopped to pick up goods from Colonel Brown's farm

4

on the mainland, there was a stranger meant for them.

Henry Lewis was just such a stranger, but he did not come by boat. He walked out of the bush one day and asked Colonel Brown for work. He was a free Negro, he said. The Colonel, glad to get a strong, intelligent man in his twenties, who was willing to work for little more than his keep, sent him to supervise the slaves who were pulling boulders out of the shallow parts of the river and planting wheat and corn on the southern part of the island. He was even more pleased when Henry Lewis asked to marry his slave Sal, which was Sarah's slave name.

Sarah liked Henry Lewis because, although his skin was dark, he was free and could look men in the eye. He was bold and wooed her like no other black man could. She found a new status with him—a hope for the future, a step towards freedom. Sarah was almost white because her mother Molly had been mulatto. Molly's father had been white but because her mother was black, according to the law, she was a slave. White men on the frontier, who recognized practically no law, recognized that one. Their identity depended on it.

"Penny for your thoughts," Fanny said from behind her and giggled.

Sarah turned to embrace her sister. "Oh Fanny, I want to thank God for this day!"

"You're a lucky one," Fanny whispered. "You got a real man and he's free. You got a chance with him as I always told you. Ma would have been proud."

The sisters tightened their embrace and then quickly let go afraid that someone would see them.

Sarah had two dresses: one for everyday wear, which was ragged, and one for occasion, which she mended to look good. As she put on her good dress and tidied her hair, she thought of the hut she would move to that night. Recently built, it smelt of pine. Henry put in a wooden floor, which distinguished it from the others of hard earth. Fanny helped her decorate it with coloured cloth that the Colonel gave her and some chairs and a table where she could prepare and set out meals. Henry could afford to buy food in addition to what field hands received. Most of his money, he said, he was saving to buy Sarah's free-

dom.

In mid-morning, she and Fanny stepped into a rowboat sent by the

Colonel to bring them to the main farmhouse. The Colonel's oldest slave took this duty seriously and tried not to smile at the excited whispering of the girls. He helped them out of the rowboat with ceremonial precision and escorted them as if they were his daughters to the farmhouse. Nell came running to them and embraced Sarah.

"I saw Henry all spiffed up, looking real nice," Nell said, "He's gone ahead with Dick."

Sarah looked up at the house to see Mrs. Honor Brown and her two daughters watching from an upper window. The Colonel, dressed in full military regalia and with the steel blue eyes of a commanding officer, walked from the house to a carriage with two horses waiting. The Colonel was in a good mood and joked with his son Richard, a tall man with a mild philosophical expression and twinkling green eyes. The son climbed into the wagon to take the reins and the Colonel sat beside him, adjusted his sword and nodded to his son, who drove to where the three sisters stood. The girls climbed into the back of the wagon where they sat on clumps of straw.

"Alright Colonel, sir," the old slave cried. "They's all comfortable."

The wagon moved ahead and Sarah felt she was beginning a journey into a new life. As they passed through the Cove, Sarah waved at some of the coloureds whom she knew, and they waved excitedly back at her. Word had got round that she was being married this Saturday morning and some of her friends had made an effort to be on the streets to greet her. Hugh Laird was walking toward them along the river road and hailed the Colonel to stop. Hugh was the teacher in the Cove. Whoever was educated in these parts had gone to Laird's school for a couple of years. The Colonel had invited Laird to teach his white children, and Hugh had enjoyed talking to the house servants whom he encountered, particularly Sarah, who, as he told the Colonel, would make a good student should he allow her to learn. The Colonel was reluctant to set a precedent and feared the criticism from his fellow settlers should he send Sarah to school.

"You got one of my girls, there, have ya, Colonel?" Hugh said with

a slight slur as he often began drinking in the morning, particularly on a Saturday morning. His hair was tossed by the wind off the water and his cheeks were ruddy.

“Marriage day, Mr. Laird,” the Colonel said. “We’re late starting. Don’t want to delay Mr. Doddridge.”

“What a beautiful day for it!” Hugh almost sang and reached into the wagon to clasp Sarah’s hand. “It’s a good omen, my dear. I wish you happiness.”

Sarah gushed her thanks, and, as the wagon moved away, she looked at Laird standing in the road and watching them go, and she wondered why he had not married.

When opposite Steubenville whose fort and houses they saw across the river, they turned inland through the thick forest over small rolling hills and into fertile valleys for three miles. St. John’s Episcopal Church stood in the centre of a long stretch of level ground. A simple log cabin, it served the Episcopalian community for miles around. It had been built by its very dedicated minister, Joseph Doddridge, who now approached the wagon when it stopped under one of the trees at the front of the Church.

Doddridge was a tall, well-built man with fair complexion and black hair. The Colonel felt humbled in his presence because the man’s earnestness and devotion to the Christian message and his great learning set him apart from other men. The fact that he became a medical doctor to support himself as a minister gave him added prestige in a community where most people were illiterate and blasphemous.

While the Colonel’s son helped the women down from the wagon, the Colonel chatted with the Reverend. Doddridge’s sharp blue eyes seemed to pierce him as if searching for signs of failure, shortcomings, sins. But when the Reverend turned to greet Sarah and her sisters, his eyes glowed with compassion, and he held out his hands to Sarah. The Colonel recalled then how the Reverend hated slavery, and he felt uncomfortable. But the moment passed quickly as Doddridge told them that Henry and his best man were waiting in the church and strode away to prepare for the ceremony.

Richard Brown Jr. accompanied Sarah’s sisters into the church where they waited by the open door. Sarah was alone with the Colonel

now. She felt a sudden shyness and looked at the ground. The Colonel, resplendent in his uniform, had supreme power in her world. Only God was more powerful because God worked through nature whereas the Colonel worked directly through human beings.

“You will make Henry a good wife, Sal, won’t you?” “Yes, sir.”

“You can cook as good as your mother.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I loved your mother’s cooking,” he said in a rare outburst of affection.

Sarah nodded and sensed that the Colonel was trying to express his connection to her, despite the law, the custom, the barrier between master and slave that stood between them.

“You and your sisters are good girls,” the Colonel said reflectively. “I’m glad you got a good man who will care for you.”

“Yes, sir, so am I,” Sarah smiled and looked up into the Colonel’s bearded face. His beard was flecked with white hair.

Colonel Brown smiled at her and tightened his lips signifying he would say no more. Sarah listened to the birds singing in chorus all about them. It was God’s way of celebrating her marriage day, she thought. Hugh Laird was right about this being a glorious spring day.

Richard Brown Jr. stepped from the Church and beckoned to them. The Colonel gave his arm to Sarah, and she, with mixed feelings of eagerness and trepidation, put her hand gently on his sleeve and walked with him into the little church. Her two sisters fell in behind her as the Colonel led her up the aisle to the altar where Henry in a suit and tie stood with Dick Dawson, a man of medium height slightly shorter than Henry and with light brown skin. Henry turned and his face lit up into a broad smile. Sarah thought she saw love in his deep brown eyes and took courage from his strength and assurance.

The Reverend Doddridge glided in long strides to stand before them and began reading earnestly from a prayer book. Sarah let the words pass over her. She was too excited to concentrate on their meaning. She sensed only that they were meant for her. But she responded when she had to, and she felt the ring slip onto her finger, and she embraced Henry with a fervour that surprised even herself. Everyone

smiled and the Reverend gave his blessing upon them. When the couple came to the register, Henry signed for them both, and Sarah made a small “x”. Then, they were back in the sunlight and riding alone over the hilly road in the one-horse shay that Henry borrowed from Dawson. The others followed at a distance.

Henry happily joked with her over the responsibilities of marriage that the Reverend had impressed upon them, and she clapped at every point and repeated them and emphasized them and admonished him with impish humour to live up to them.

When they got back to the Colonel’s homestead, they found a knot of people waiting for them at the servants’ quarters. To Sarah’s surprise, there was a feast laid out on a long table, which had been dragged from the kitchen onto the lawn. The Colonel’s neighbour, Mrs. Butler, stood beaming as she waited to receive them. Sarah fell into her arms in gratitude and Henry expressed his wonderment. When the Colonel’s party arrived, they sat in chairs near the table or stood eating in small groups near-by. The Reverend Doddridge arrived on horse-back and joined in the festivities in a jovial mood. Fanny was talking animatedly with Dick Dawson and her sister Nell. Mrs. Honor Brown came to congratulate Sarah and stood beside the Colonel chatting with the guests before leaving. There was no sign of her two daughters, not even at the windows of the house. Sarah had sensed their indifference and did not expect them to congratulate her. Richard Brown Jr. remained for a while and said good-bye to Sarah when he left.

Sarah’s friend Mrs. Butler remarked how happy she looked; Mrs. Butler had encouraged her to marry Henry, a free Negro, because he could buy her freedom. Slavery happened to you whether you were white or black, whether you arrived as an indentured servant from Ireland to be bought from your ship’s captain and herded into the interior or you came from Africa to be sold on the auction block. As the settlements increased and the Indian threat disappeared, colour would become more important as a mark of slavery. Sarah should be thankful, Mrs. Butler said, because she could pass for white in a world which was becoming more conscious of race. But she had to get her freedom.

When Henry signalled with his eyes that they should depart, she and Mrs. Butler embraced. Sarah valued their friendship and at times

9

marvelled at it. Mrs. Butler was unique among “whites” because she accepted Sarah without reservation.

Henry rowed Sarah back to the island. They entered their little hut, closed the door, and fell hungrily at one another. Sarah was no longer a simple slave girl. She was Mrs. Henry Lewis.

2

Sarah and Henry, happy in the first years of their marriage, worked hard, Sarah cooking for the Colonel's family when they came to live on the island for the summer months and for the field hands the year round while Henry worked in the fields and crated goods to be shipped south and sometimes to the north as more and more foundries developed in Hollidays Cove. Henry felt more at home on the island than he had anywhere in his life. Being free, he could travel at will to neighboring towns and, sometimes, took Sarah. She noticed that he was uneasy on their trips to Wellsburg or over the river to Steubenville and Mingo town. For a long time he remained silent about his past and made only references to his work as a skilled artisan in Maryland. But after their son Henry Jr. was born a year into their marriage, he confessed that the welts on his back were not from fights but from the lash, the result of his first attempt to escape from a plantation in Kentucky. After three months he was forced by hunger to come out of the bush. He refused to let his spirit be broken by the whippings, the solitary confinement and the starvation diet. Eventually his owners saw that he was more valuable to them when working rather than smouldering with resentment in the stockades. His eyes fired with hatred as he recounted the brutal treatment meted out to the slaves for no known reason or offence. As he worked as a blacksmith and fashioner of farm equipment, he escaped most of the beatings, but he had to feign abject submission to avoid sudden and unpredictable savagery by

10

the white overseers. By comparison, life on the Brown farm was paradisaical. Henry swore that he would never again be a slave and asked Sarah to be vigilant.

Sarah was devastated at first. All her high-flying expectations that some day Henry would set them up free and independent shrivelled like a balloon. Worse, her newborn son was doomed to be a slave. For a week she went about in a gloomy state and avoided worried queries from her friends. Resentful at Henry for lying to her, she, nevertheless, became sympathetic and forgiving. She understood that he could not reveal his secret until he was certain of her. She

loved him more now. Yet try as she would, she could not extinguish that slight pain of disappointment underlying her life from that moment. Their fate lay in the good graces of Colonel Brown more than ever.

Henry reasoned that by hiding in a slave state he tricked his pursuers who would look for him in a free state like Ohio and Pennsylvania. As the years went by and Sarah gave birth to a girl, whom she called Molly after her mother, she persuaded herself that Henry was right. She let herself hope that Henry was free in fact if not in name, that he could establish himself as an independent settler like Dick Dawson and free her and their children.

Henry proved to be good with horses and took care of the Colonel's stables eventually, which meant that he worked less in the fields. He was reluctant to strike out on his own, however, and kept putting off the decision to leave Colonel Brown's employ. Sarah also felt secure under the protection of the Colonel and did not want to challenge the ambivalence of her position lest her assumption that she might one day be really free was proven wrong. Contented with their life on the island, they raised their children with confidence that their basic needs would always be met. Life as an independent settler on a small piece of land was too precarious. Would the Colonel let her go in any case? Even if he were inclined to free her, his white family might persuade him against it.

During the years that Sarah was raising her young children, George Brown stayed at the home of his cousin Richard Brown Jr., who lived a short way upriver from Brown's Island while George attended Hugh Laird's school in the Cove. Sarah was delighted to see George when he

11

came to the island on occasion and reminisced with him about his wild young days. George was still fairly wild and spurned the religious practices of his father and uncle. He wanted a business career.

The old Colonel spent more time in his island home in these years. His grandson, who lived with him, adopted the general attitude that slaves were not humans but things who were set on earth for the pleasure of their masters. When the vicious treatment of a thirteen-year-old girl slave by her owners became known, causing widespread disgust throughout western Virginia, the grandson showed no pity for the brutalized dead girl. It was this attitude that offended Richard Jr. and resulted in his son being raised by the Colonel, who, it was hoped, would inculcate humane values in him. Sarah, however, divined that the Colonel could have no effect on his grandson's warped personality. She kept her children out of his sight.

Nature was a strong component of people's lives. The wilderness, although hacked at and burnt back, still dominated the scenery: the howling wolves, the sharp cries of hunted animals at night, and the song birds in full-throated calls throughout the day. The tall ancient trees were majestic witnesses to the spirit of the world and held a special meaning for Sarah and the other slaves, rooted, like them, to one place communicating silently, like them, to one another, and tied by their very essence, like them, to the great wilderness of absolute freedom which lay beyond the hills and far back from the river. It was all they had, and they looked to the trees for comfort and reassurance almost as much as they looked to God.

Henry Lewis loved to hunt the deer, bears, turkeys and the elk which roamed the forest. Some of the game he brought back he gave to Sarah for the family. Most of it he sold or bartered to tradesmen in the Cove. Sarah was as diligent as the other women spinning yarn, weaving cloth and linen. All clothing for the families was made on the farm. The increasing trade with ports down river and the manufactories appearing in the Virginia Panhandle and southern Pennsylvania brought little relief from these household duties.

As more and more settlers passed through the area or stayed to buy land from the Campbells and other early settlers, Hollidays Cove flourished. More of the island was cleared to grow wheat and became

12

the main source of bread for the area. Among the people who came on business to see the Colonel was Beseleel Wells, the son of a friend who had fought alongside the Colonel in the Revolution and in Indian skirmishes on the Ohio River, where he was killed and scalped. Beseleel was a trader and ran flatboats down to New Orleans. The Colonel admired him and his brother Richard Wells, who were partners, for their resourcefulness. He made the brothers executors of his will.

Sarah, as a very good-looking woman, attracted the attention of male visitors to the island but none more than Richard Wells, who, out of sight of the Colonel, made lascivious remarks to her. She told Henry about his attentions, but he could do nothing other than reassure her that the man knew the Colonel would not allow such behaviour toward his female slaves, that is, if he knew of it.

Sarah's life of hard work and strict obedience continued until one fatal night in mid-February 1811. A cold wind from the north and swirling snow caused everyone to build large fires in their hearths to keep warm. Sarah gathered enough wood to last the night and kept her small fireplace alight. Henry Jr. was

four years old and Molly was over one year. The children were sleeping and Sarah was sewing by candle- light awaiting the return of Henry from Wellsburg, when she heard shouts from the main house. She went to the door of her hut and saw flames and huge clouds of smoke coming from the bottom level of the house. The grandson was running about excitedly calling for help. Slaves rushed from their huts with buckets to the river side and returned to throw water on the flames but to little avail. The fire, whipped up by the wind, consumed the homestead in a short time.

The Colonel's personal attendant was comforting his wife as they gazed fearfully at the flames. Sarah rushed to them to ask about the Colonel. The old man had not got out. He had gone to his study to keep his accounts as he often did at night, but this time the candelabra he worked by must have fired a curtain. The slaves were being urged on by the grandson to keep dousing the flames, but, in the end, the fire, having reduced the house to ashes, died out in the wind.

Henry arrived breathless from the Virginia shore and gasped that the residents of the Cove were sending a boat load of men headed by James Campbell to help. He hurried Sarah back to their hut and went

13

out to meet the boat, from which they heard the men's voices approaching despite the noise of the wind in the trees.

Henry feared the unpredictable James Campbell, the toughest and roughest of his family, whose father brought goods over the mountains to trade with pioneer settlers and made a handsome profit within a few years. At his death, James inherited the best land on the hills overlook- ing the Cove and married the same year that Henry Lewis married Sarah with the difference that he had been 59 and his bride, Margaret MacDonald from Canada, had been 14.

"Where's Colonel Brown?" Campbell shouted to the grandson as his boat ran against the shore.

The boy, in tears, pointed to the smouldering house. Campbell led the men with him as close as they could get to the heat and peered about for signs of the Colonel's body. The slaves stood back and watched them. A sense of bewilderment and dismay held them in shock. What would happen to them now? they wondered. Brown had been a stern taskmaster, but they knew that most owners were worse.

Henry first spotted the body. It was stretched out over what remained of the floor. Although scorched, it was still recognizable as the master of these domains. About him were strewn burnt account books, large leather bound volumes.

“See the old man, do you, Lewis?” Campbell snorted. “Well, he’ll have to stay there for the night till we fetch him tomorrow morning.”

The men took the grandson across the river to the Colonel’s home in the Cove to inform Honor Brown of her husband’s accidental death. That night the river froze over. Henry told some of the slaves that it offered them a rare chance to walk over the ice to Ohio and escape into the wilderness, but they were too afraid of being caught and whipped. Moreover they did not know where to go. Their chance of survival seemed better with the Brown family for the moment at least. Henry tried to console Sarah, who regretted the Colonel’s death, not only because she was fond of him but because he offered her family security as long as he lived. Now that he was dead, the menace she had often felt from the hills looking down on their island suddenly seemed more intense.

14

3

In the morning, Richard Brown Jr. and James Campbell came to retrieve the Colonel’s body from the ruined house. Campbell looked red-eyed from drinking and his temper was short with his slaves, who moved quickly at his command. Sarah and her small son watched as Campbell’s slaves put the remains of the Colonel on a horse-drawn sleigh and walked behind the frosted body atop the sleigh moving against the snow-capped hills. Sarah, sad and apprehensive, hugged her son to reassure him that she would always remain with him.

Brown’s slaves gathered their meagre belongings into sacks which they hoisted on their shoulders and when all were ready to depart they followed Henry onto the ice. Sarah carried Molly and led young Henry by the hand while her husband carried their belongings. The cold sliced through their light coats and their feet went numb. When the slaves reached the Brown homestead shivering with the cold, they were doubled into huts already occupied by slaves. Sarah and Henry were given a hut for themselves out of deference to Henry being a free man.

That night a thaw descended out of the hills and by the next morning the ice melted in the river. The Colonel's body lay in a coffin in the front parlor, and, later in the day, after all the relatives and settlers had viewed it, the slaves were instructed to file by and pay their last respects. All of his body was covered by a blanket, but his face, which had escaped the flames, was viewable. He had a look of slight surprise despite the fact that his eyes were closed and his white hair and beard were combed with care to make him appear to be in peace.

The Reverend Joseph Doddridge officiated at the Colonel's burial service in the log cabin church in the woods. The settlers took up most of the seats, but there were some left near the door for the house slaves such as Sarah and her sisters. Doddridge reminded them that the Colonel led them in defending against Indian attacks and building a

15

series of forts to which they could flee when wars broke out. After the service, Sarah looked up to see George Brown give her a broad smile when he passed.

The Colonel's lands and the rents from them went to his widow, son and two daughters. He freed the couple who were his personal slaves and bequeathed their son to his grandson. He declared Sarah's sister Nell free whenever Honor Brown died. The remaining slaves were to be sold after the Colonel's debts were settled. Sarah thought that Colonel Brown looked upon her as special to him and would free her or give her some hope of freedom in the future. But now she realized with a taste of bitterness that money meant too much to the man. She tried to hide her disappointment from her children, and they, being too young to understand, were lulled into thinking that their life would continue as it had been. Henry heard that James Campbell planned to buy Sarah, or Sal as the settlers called her. She had a good reputation as a cook, but it was her good looks which was an attraction, according to the gossip among the young toughs whom he overheard on the street and who mocked him as he walked by. Would Campbell employ him? He had several weeks to decide on a course of action before the executors settled the Colonel's debts and put the slaves up for auction in Wellsburg.

Campbell had a reputation for ruthlessness, drunkenness, and pitiless ferocity. Willful and obstinate with immense influence along the Panhandle, he was in the gang of whites who massacred a village of Christian Indians. Henry and Sarah whispered in the bed they shared with their children and turned over their thoughts until they admitted that their only choice was to ride out their fate where they were. At least, as a free man, Henry could give some

protection to his family, and if Campbell did not employ him, someone in the Cove would. Sarah fell asleep in Henry's arms for the last time. Before dawn as Henry rose sleepily from bed to take up his duties in the Browns' stables, the door of the hut flew open and Richard Wells, his lean face leering, confronted him with the words, "Henry, these folks claim they own you."

Two burly white men stepped round Wells, pushed Henry back against the wall, and bound his wrists in an iron clamp. Henry looked in terror at Sarah.

16

"You're our shitty little black slave," one of the men cried. "And you're goin' back to good old Kentucky where you fuckin' belong."

The other man laughed with glee and gave Henry a shove out the door.

"Say good-bye, Sal," Wells smirked. "You won't see him again." "You'll never keep me!" Henry shouted in fury.

"After the tanning you're gettin'," one of the men said, "escape

won't even go through your mind."

"Henry!" Sarah shouted and tried to get to her husband, but Wells

pushed her back warning her she would get a whipping if she did not let the law proceed. His clipped nasal voice with its hard-edged menace frightened her.

Sarah sank down on the bed and listened to Henry's voice shouting that he would be back until he could no longer be heard. Wells stepped outside and shut the door with a knowing look. Sarah buried her head on the bed and groaned softly. She feared her children would be taken from her as was usual in slave auctions. Her only hope was that James Campbell really would buy her family.

Within days of her husband's removal back to Kentucky, Richard Wells began to hover about her. Dispirited as she was, she formed a hatred for this man, whom, she suspected, had discovered the truth about Henry and informed on him to collect the reward. Fortunately his brother Beseleel, in settling the Colonel's affairs, frequented the Brown homestead, which made him cautious. Fortunately as well, George Brown, now a handsome lad of nineteen and nearing the completion of his studies with Hugh Laird, noticed Wells's attentions to Sarah. Partly for Sarah's sake and partly for his own, for he recognized with surprise the strong attraction that he had for her, he informed

his cousin Richard Brown Jr. He suggested that, with spring upon them, Sarah be returned to the island to cook for the field hands tending the crops.

Until the slaves were sold, Richard Brown Jr., had the authority to use them as he wished. He dispatched Sarah and her children to the island along with a body of slaves, who erected a new central house. Richard asked George to oversee that work.

Sarah fixed on the idea that George could be her protector and

17

prevent her sale to the South. As she expected never to see Henry again, she encouraged George's obvious interest in her when he visited the island—cautiously at first and more boldly as he responded to her charms. George was a virgin but anxious to experience love. All of his desire fastened on Sarah. He loved the proud carriage of her body, the light-brown tinted white skin, the handsome face alive with intelligence, and the full figure which at times caused him to grab her hands and gaze into her eyes with meaning. Sarah's black background, almost hidden in her physiognomy, intrigued him as a mystery, an unknown element of her personality. As soon as the house was built and Sarah and her young children moved into one of the rooms, George contrived to stay the night with the excuse that it was too risky to cross the river in the evening.

Sarah helped him to arrange his bed, and, while she tucked the linen sheets under the mattress, he put his arms around her. They fell together on the bed, and the heat of their passion drove them tightly together. With cries of yearning and professions of love they made love until exhausted. Sarah excused herself to check on her children asleep in the other room; her mind was in turmoil because she felt that she had betrayed her husband and yet she loved George Brown and her need for love had never been greater at this troubling time in her life. Watching over her sleeping children and reflecting that Henry had lied to her that he was free and destroyed her dreams and brought her and the children to a life of misery, she remembered the wild bravery of the young George when they were children. She returned to George's bed. They made love again during the night.

George met the morning with unimaginable joy and Sarah gave thanks to God that He had brought George to her. She had wondered what it was like to make love with a white man. George, who had a good figure, was of average stature with a kind, strong face and an innate sense of rebellion against authority, which she liked. If only their relationship could last, she thought, but she sensed it was doomed on that first morning they lay together. George had his

life to follow. He would not be tied to a slave girl whatever he decided to do. She clung to him for that spring and into the summer months until he had to return to his father's farm to harvest the crops. Their good-bye

18

was tearful and cheerful by turns. He swore never to forget her, and, since she was his first love, she knew he never would.

By this time, the Wells brothers had paid off most of the Colonel's debts and divided his estate among his white children. Ignoring a suggestion that the slaves be sold to local settlers, they decided that more money could be got for them by auctioning them off in Wellsburg to dealers, who would take them for resale to southern plantation owners. Disgusted, Richard Brown Jr. talked to Philip Doddridge, lawyer for the estate. Doddridge, who could cut to the core of any issue and come up with an unassailable argument, persuaded the Wells that the Colonel's house slaves were too talented to send out of the county and, as for the field hands, their experience of working this particular area of land was invaluable. If local buyers could be found, the slaves would be relieved from the horror of plantation living. No action would be taken until after the fall harvest.

Fanny tried to keep Sarah's spirits up with predictions that the Brown family would keep her because she had served the family well. Nell, as Honor Brown's personal slave, heard the discussions within the family and reported the latest decisions. There was a complication. Sarah was two months pregnant and would be unable to disguise the fact much longer. She was happy that she was having George Brown's child but apprehensive about the reaction among the Brown family members. Births among the slaves were usually greeted with mild interest by the settlers; they were considered offspring of their owners or overseers if they were not readily seen to be the result of love-making between two slaves. In Sarah's case, George's father Hugh, a very religious man, might take out his anger on Sarah and cause her to be banished to some distant land. She was concerned for George as well because the family could well turn against him. She asked Nell to tell George the next time he was visiting his aunt that she wanted to see him. But the fall season had come upon them with the trees and bushes ablaze in reds, yellows, mauves and russet, and George had not returned. Nell, whose close relationship with Honor Brown was valued by both mistress and slave, confided in Honor about Sarah's condition.

As a widow Honor Brown had more authority than when she was the wife of the powerful Colonel because now she had property and

seemed to represent her late husband's wishes. Chagrined but understanding, she gave the matter some thought, and, when she developed a slight fever, she told Nell that she would feign serious illness, which would bring George to her bedside. Her doctor, who had seen numbers of his patients die from swamp fever, alerted the family, already shaken by the Colonel's sudden death. The Browns and the Wells came to the homestead in the Cove and worriedly talked among themselves about the disposition of her property and slaves. Hugh Brown, riding his favorite horse, and George Brown, jogging alongside his father, traveled the fifteen miles south along the Ohio shore of the river. Hugh Brown talked to his wayward son about the Methodist religion and the importance of believing in the Christian message in order to live a fulfilling life. George listened and responded with mild objections and different opinions. His friends rebelled against the strict and rather quaint views of their elders and valued force and cunning rather than piety.

When they reached the passing place formed by a sandbar which stretched under the surface of the river to the north end of Brown's Island, George mounted the horse behind his father. The horse waded across, the current running up to the level of its neck and wetting the trousers of the men. On the island, they walked beside the horse along a trail through the heavy timber glowing with colour. George felt a closeness to his father and the joy of being alive. He thought then of Sarah and hoped that he would catch a glimpse of her as they passed by the huts on the south end of the island. He saw her as he was preparing to mount behind his father to cross over the shallower fork of the river to the Virginia shore. She ran out from one of the huts and was looking anxiously at him. He smiled broadly until he noticed the swelling of her stomach and gave her a questioning look. She nodded as if in agreement, and, he, stunned, stood undecided whether to go to her or obey the summons of his father, who was impatient to continue. He mounted the horse and crossed the river without a backward glance. His head swirled with impressions, memories of their love-making, and fears. At first, George decided to hide his indiscretion from his father; should Sarah charge him with being the father he would deny it. By the time they arrived at the Brown homestead, Honor had recovered and their relatives were leaving for their homes.