

LITTLE

AFRICA



FICTIONAL NOVEL BY

STANLEY WELLINGTON

FINAL EDITION

LITTLE AFRICA

Written By

Stanley Wellington

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TABLE OF
CONTENT

PROLOGUE	i-ii	
CHAPTER 1 Stealing A People ...	Pg.	1
CHAPTER 2 The Hell Ship	Pg.	9
CHAPTER 3 The Slave Market ...	Pg.	25
CHAPTER 4 Hannon Manor	Pg.	34
CHAPTER 5 The Prodigal Son	Pg.	42
CHAPTER 6 Forbidden Love	Pg.	50
CHAPTER 7 Between Father & Son	Pg.	57
CHAPTER 8 A New Day	Pg.	64
CHAPTER 9 When Evil Plots	Pg.	73
CHAPTER 10 The New Mistress ..	Pg.	82
CHAPTER 11 War Changes All ..	Pg.	91
CHAPTER 12 The Surprise ..	Pg.	97
CHAPTER 13 Two Scoundrels ..	Pg.	111
CHAPTER 14 21 Evil Men ..	Pg.	118
CHAPTER 15 Trust No One ..	Pg.	125
CHAPTER 16 Too Many Ears ..	Pg.	134
CHAPTER 17 The Price of ..	Pg.	140
CHAPTER 18 A Bad Choice ..	Pg.	145
CHAPTER 19 The Last Hurdle ..	Pg.	153
CHAPTER 20 Life Goes On ..	Pg.	164
CHAPTER 21 Building A Future ..	Pg.	173
CHAPTER 22 Learning Respect ..	Pg.	182
CHAPTER 23 Unlikely Friends ..	Pg.	189
CHAPTER 24 Coming Home ..	Pg.	197
CHAPTER 25 ... Black & White ..	Pg.	204
CHAPTER 26 ... is Changing ..	Pg.	208
CHAPTER 27 Black Wall	Pg.	217
CHAPTER 28 Joining the Game ..	Pg.	222
CHAPTER 29 A Seedy Alliance ..	Pg.	229
CHAPTER 30 A Charming Snake ..	Pg.	235
CHAPTER 31 A Cancer Appears ..	Pg.	241
CHAPTER 32 Loving the Enemy ..	Pg.	248
CHAPTER 33 To Find A Killer ..	Pg.	259
CHAPTER 34 The Price of	Pg.	268

TABLE OF CONTENT (Continued)

CHAPTER 35 The Beginning of .. Pg.277

CHAPTER 36 A Night of Terror . Pg.283

CHAPTER 37 Living With It .. Pg.287

LITTLE AFRICA

PROLOGUE

The cool breezes of the Atlantic waft across the mahogany decks of this luxury ocean liner. My party and I receive a variety of queer looks from the other passengers. It's understandable that they should wonder who I am, though not for the usual reasons. You see, I am Daryl Hannon III, a Black Man and a former slave. The year is 1912. It is still early in the twentieth century. Many things have changed, but still I am an anomaly in this society. For some I represent the promise of a brighter future. For others I am a reminder of an ugly past they would just as soon deny or at the very least forget.

My father was a white slave owner - Daryl Hannon Junior, while my mother was his slave - Clarise Hannon-born Azizza Omai. Although they were very much in love my parents were never married. It was by tradition that a slave took its owner's last name. From these humble beginnings I find myself now standing as a passenger on the deck of this luxury ocean liner. As I look out upon the crystal blue waters of the Atlantic the circumstances since my birth have drastically changed. I am a rich man many times over. The only reminders of my past life are my beautiful wife Sandra - also an ex-slave and a stringy young boy named Calvin - who has lost too much in his very short life-span.

On this voyage we have seen rough seas crashing against the bough of this large ship. Those times seem a metaphor for the tumultuous life my wife, Sandra, and I have shared. When the seas of our lives were calm we were sure the worst had passed. Too often we were proven wrong. There came a wave so terrible we weren't sure that we wanted to survive

Prologue (continued)

it. The testament to our spirits is that despite it all, we are here, on this ship, heading to London to start a new life at our advanced years.

Know this, our journey did not begin here though. It began with my mother's journey on another ship, the slave ship *Mirador*.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 1
STEALING A PEOPLE

Africa is and always has been a beautiful land; green, majestic and as wide as the eye and heart can see. The terrible times of war has passed. Foolishly, some men had dared to call it a holy war. I am not sure of many things but, I am confident when I say, "God has never placed the song of war in any man's heart. Nor has He put the desire to kill, enslave or otherwise harm another in the reasoning of a man. These things are of man's own choosing toward man's gluttonous and selfishly evil ends."

In this beautiful land there lives a lovely young girl, Azizza Omai. Although she has Just turned fourteen she is beginning to blossom into young womanhood. Her luminous brown eyes, smooth ebony skin, taught slender figure has the young men of her tribe, Namimba, more than noticing her. There is one such young man whom has most caught her eye as well, Abubakar Waainee (Abubaker means noble). There is little wonder, why she is attracted to him. The handsome young warrior, tall muscular with chiseled features is the son of the chief. More than his station though is his valor. Four years earlier, at the tender age of twelve he proved himself worthy of his proud name by saving a woman and her child from a lion's attack with nothing more than a spear. There is no wonder that Azizza is flattered that of all the young women of their tribe he has chosen her to court.

In this tribe like all of life's pleasures courting must be second to duty. Each day after their duties to the tribe are complete, the two young sweethearts alongside their friends- Nubai and Coruu as well as

STEALING A PEOPLE

Dessan and Salaya- go off into the jungle. With joyous glee Abubaker takes Azizza's hand pulling her away from their friends. Seeking to be alone the two run off and leave their friends. The friends have a preset place to meet up afterward because they can not go back to the tribe separately. This would be considered scandalous behavior. Not that teenagers care about stodgy old rules, no matter what the time or the continent.

The two, who have just began to understand their attraction, walk hand in hand. The pulse of each other's heartbeat they can feel. Surprised and amazed are the two over this new sensation which makes them tingle. On occasion each in turn will look toward the other, but if they find the other already staring, then they quickly and shyly look away. The boy doesn't know fear of the animals of the jungle or the fiercest of enemy tribesmen, but he quakes at the thought that this hundred and five pound girl might not care for him as much as he does for her. He need not have feared, for she does.

The nearby pond they pass this day is too tempting to be ignored. The bold young boy tears away his loin cloth then without a single thought he dives into the icy waters. More reserved, Azizza hides behind a tree and removes her wrap, then quickly she runs for the water and dives in. The rascal, Abubaker, gets only the briefest of glimpses of Azizza's small perky breasts and her thinly grown hairs. It's enough to put a wicked grin upon his face.

The two laugh and splash in the waters. Suddenly Abubaker swims toward Azizza. He smiles. The girl

STEALING A PEOPLE

turns and starts to swim away from him. "Azizza. No. Don't go," he calls out. Longing for his favor she stops then turns to face him once more. The love-struck boy swims to within an arm's length of the girl then stops. Looking down he hopes to be able to see beneath the clear waters. Wickedly he does. The young warrior speaks, "You are so beautiful." A Flattered Azizza can only smile. "We should start back." she warns him. "Soon," he promises. Finding his courage the bold youth pulls her into his arms and kisses her. Fervently she returns his kiss. Warning bells clang loudly in Azizza's head so she pulls away and swims for shore. The young warrior watches as her bare bottom is revealed to him as she exits the pond. Delighted and disappointed the boy follows.

These are times of quiet prosperity and contentment. Such times are always brief in the history of man. Looming ominously on the horizon many wooden ships have come with men of pale skin. They bring gold, jewels and promises of ridding some African warriors of their enemies.

For many years the Regrellin tribe has been at odds with the tribe of Namimba over who is the rightful owner of the lands north of the Kawainee river. The Namimba tribe has the superior number than the Regrellin tribe so the Regrellin chief surrenders what he believes to be his people rightful claim to the land in exchange for peace.

Fools often find themselves too late wary of Greeks bearing gifts. Along comes Captain Joseph Tolan accompanied by his cruel first mate, Carl Whitherspoon. The whites stand in the center of the

STEALING A PEOPLE

Regrellin tribe's main camp bargaining with Shakara Bantu - heir to leadership of the Regrellin tribe. The son is handling these negotiations because Shakara's father, Mucus, is too ill to lead.

A wooden chest sits in the center of the negotiations. Captain Tolan a shrewd manipulator of men walks over to the chest and flings the chest open. Inside the chest one can see jewelry and gold coins, more than a reasonable man should ever desire. "All of this in exchange for your help Shakara," Tolan offers. The warrior looks around at his men then at the handful of men Tolan has with him and he laughs. "If I want it I can just take it." Shakara threatens. The captain points his pistol into the air then fires it. The Regrellin tribe's men leap back for fear of the weapon which will mold the future of the European empires. This is a lethal bargaining chip in the captain's hands. "Maybe ... Maybe not," Tolan answers. "But even if you did take it you would have only taken a single chest. Help me and I will give to you many more chests each time I return ... and with these," Tolan holds up the gun "... I will help you take back the lands that are rightfully yours anyway." tempting the young leader. Although Shakara hates and distrusts these pale skinned men and what they propose his thoughts are, "That land is rightfully ours." So he agrees to help them. The captain and his men return the chest and its contents to his ship saying, "After you have helped me I will give you all that this chest contains."

Each day thereafter for the next month the warrior - Shakara, along with Tolan, the tribesmen of Regrellin and the crew of the Mirador stalk the men

STEALING A PEOPLE

of Namimba. The death cries, bloodshed and capture of the brave men of Namimba proved that they were no match for the Regrellin and the whiteman's guns. Each day more and more of the Namimba tribe are dragged in chains on board the Mirador. The lucky ones die in combat.

Too young to partake in the battles against the Regrellin tribe the youth of Namimba take this threat too lightly. As is the way with the young; Abubaker, Azizza and their friends think that they cannot be caught by the slavers or the Regrellin tribesmen. There are even times when they joke about how stupid the slavers must be to seek an ally such as the Regrellin.

As if nothing has changed the young people of Namimba live their lives as before. They follow their same routine of first attending to their tribal duties then stealing away to be alone. Foolishly Abubaker and Azizza still sneak away from the others. Usually they end up back at their favorite pond. Often they strip down to their bare skin and go swimming just as before. Always in these moments alone Abubaker steals a kiss, but never does Azizza let it go further than that.

On one particular day Abubaker holds Azizza in his arms and kisses her. This time she does not pull away. Surrendering to her emotions Azizza has decided that she wants to be his lover and more. Their amorous intent never bears fruit. The two are startled apart by the sound of nearby gunfire. After the gunfire comes the sound of their friend's screams. The two young people hurry from the water then get dressed.

STEALING A PEOPLE

Fearful for their friends they run in the direction of the screams. When Abubaker can hear his friends voices and the voices of strangers on the other side of the bushes and trees he stops and turns to Azizza. "No matter what happens you stay in hiding until the slavers are gone then make your way home," he instructs her. Tears fill her eyes. "Do not go Abubaker. I am afraid." she tells him. "I am not. I will help our friends to escape then we will all go home. Now get down," he orders her. The girl pretends to obey his order. Brave, but foolhardy he charges through the clearing with nothing more than a spear in his hand. A fearful Azizza gets up from where she has been crouched down and peers through the brush in order to see what is to become of her dear heart.

Branches break as Abubaker tears through them. Frank, one of Nolan's crew, stands over Abubaker's friends. His foot is on Coruu's neck. Like an enraged lion Abubaker charges toward the man. The vicious villain has only a moment to react. He reaches out to late to stop the spear. The young warrior runs Frank through with his spear. The ruthless Carl Witherspoon does react quickly to the attack. Carl fires his weapon. The bullet whistles menacingly toward Abubaker and hits the brave young man. The wail of a wounded sparrow is what it sounds like when Azizza cries out from her place of hiding. "Woo ... nooo ...!" The force of the bullet as it strikes Abubaker's body sends him twirling in the air. The young warrior lands at Shakara's feet. The leader of the Regrellin tribe wonders too late, "What have I done? I never dreamed that it would come to this."

STEALING A PEOPLE

The first of Shakara's punishments is to look into the life fading eyes of one who had offered so much promise to the world. Like most mistakes Shakara's mistakes compound themselves one upon another. His second punishment all too quickly follows. Helplessly he watches as Carl drags a screaming Azizza from behind the brush. Carl then tosses her at Captain Tolan's feet, next to Nubai and Salaya. "Look what me found. It may be a fun voyage home after all." The foul words turns the captain's belly.

The captain is a former man of war and honor and the thought of his men raping these young girls went against all of his sensibilities. Being a realist and a coward he knows that the only way he can prevent this act is find an excuse to deny the cutthroat men that they will find palatable. He held little hope of finding any such excuse for these foul fiends.

It is the last day of this expedition for the captain and his men. When they got back to the ship most of Shakara's men are instructed to wait on shore. The Regrellon leader goes aboard to collect the contents of the chest. The pitiable sight of a distraught Azizza and the other mistreated captives in chains on the deck of the ship is Shakara's third punishment. His heart truly aches as his mistakes continue to feed themselves with his guilt.

As Shakara makes his way to the ship's deck Carl and two other sailors bring the chest up from below deck. Like a sentinel Tolan stands above everyone at the helm of the ship. The captain calls down to the

STEALING A PEOPLE

Regrellin leader, "I am a man of my word; the chest's contents now belong to you."

Neither the black warriors on the ship nor the ones on the shore notice that the crew of the Mirador are positioning themselves to attack. The warrior, Shakara, does not understand the laughter of Carl and the other crewmen as he nears the chest. When Shakara reaches the chest he throws open its lid. The warrior is befuddled by what he finds inside. There are several sets of chains. "Now ...!" the captain orders his men. The men open fire on Shakara's men on shore, killing most of them. A battle breaks out between the crew and the Regrellin warriors on board the vessel. Both sides lose men before the captain and several other crew members fire their weapons. The battle stops. Everyone looks up toward Tolan. "You and your men can put on the chains or you can die like the others," is Tolan's only offer to his former ally. Looking at his men the leader then leans down, picks up the chains and locks the attached bracelets around his wrists.

Fate has served Shakara a slice of irony. His final punishment this day is for him to now serve as a prisoner right beside the men whose freedom he had helped to steal.

Chapter Two

The Hell Ship

It is a heart wrenching scene as the Namimba and Regrellin tribesmen are herded below deck like so much livestock. The ship's oar galley reeks of the foul odor of those whom had died here in the past. The dark dank hole promised anguish to the captors. Some sailors carry whips while others carry guns. The guns are to intimidate. The whips are used all too generously for the crew's sadistic pleasure and to make the men follow instructions. "Kataaww, kataaww " is the sound of the whip tearing the flesh from the warriors' bodies. A cruel accompaniment is the sailor's laughter to this vicious symphony of abuse.

Once below deck the men are chained to the oars. For some of them the chains are attached so tightly that they actually bite into the flesh, tearing skin and drawing blood. It will be the task of the warriors, both friend and foe, to row the distance from the old land to the new under the harshest of conditions.

Above deck the captain looks out over his once proud ship. The man laments the depths to which he and his once magnificent war vessel have fallen. Instead of the once proud warriors with a code of chivalry that was his crew he now serves with the dregs of humanity. Their only creed is to delight in the foulest of deeds 'til death mercifully releases them from this world to whatever judgment awaits them. Knowing this he ponders the decision he will soon be forced to make. What will he do when the time comes that the men demand the diversion of having their way with the three young girls.

The wet cold and cruel day fades into a night which

The Hell Ship

is the day's more vicious and unforgiving sister. As unimaginable as these sisters treatment can be of the captives it is nothing compared to the hardships suffered when some are left to the devices of heartless tormentors. The tired and evil crew of the Mirador watches over their black captors. Their evil minds seek some manner in which to belittle these once proud men. In response to the crew's desires two captors foolishly provide them with an answer.

As if their imprisonment isn't punishment enough for Coruu and Shakara these two have been chained together. Although he is younger and less athletically built then the Regrellin leader the young boy's pride demands that he takes some action against the one whose actions led to his friend's death and who also was most instrumental in the capture of he and his other friends. Like some mischievous child Coruu yanks at the already biting chains of Shakara. The defeated warrior looks at the young boy and shakes his head. Not to be ignored Coruu pulls the chains again. The chains bite deeper into his enemy's wrists. The captor cries out, "Auugghh!" Still he only stares at the young boy sullenly. Determined, Coruu will not be denied his revenge. The young boy hits the warrior in the face, drawing blood from his nose. "Ugh!" Shakara groans.

One of the wicked crew members, Bill Blands, sees the exchange between the two Africans and he yells, "Fight! Fight!" The black warriors and the skeleton crew of the oar galley all turn their attention to the confrontation between man and boy. Having heard the call of fight the first mate, Carl, comes running down the steps into the oar galley, an evil smirk upon his face. Turning to Bill the first mate

The Hell Ship

inquires, "Who is it that's looking for a fight on my ship?" The crewman then points to first Shakara and then Coruu. Seeing the young boy next to the larger warrior Carl laughs. "Those two ...? Doesn't seem worth the bother of a wager. If no wager - no reason to risk prime stock like this," the first mate reasons. The other crewman has plans of his own. Having seen that Shakara doesn't wish to fight Blands believes that he may be able to cheat the first mate out of some of his money. "Give me ten to one odds I'll wager half a quid on the boy," Blands offers. Not a man of a trusting nature Carl looks at Bill suspicious. "Dat's half a days wages. Are you sure?" Carl questions. "It'll break the monotony and if the boy wins I'll get five days wages. What the hell!" he hopes to draw Carl in. "Then let's do this!" Carl screams out jubilantly.

As Blands walks toward the pair he passes grumbling black warriors. Bill reaches the two chained prisoners, Coruu and Shakara. With the jangling keys which hang from his belt he unlocks their chains then steps away. A confused Coruu and Shakara look Blands up and down then they glare at one another. The menacing figure of the first mate carrying a cat of nine tails trudges toward them. "Hell I thought you two had a bug up your butts and wanted to get at one another." Carl accuses the prisoners. Like statues they stand neither man moving. Each warrior stares first at each other then at Carl. "It's too late to change your minds now. Wagers have been made. Expectations have been raised," Carl charges. "Kataaww, Kataaww ...! The first mate's whip sings out its song of uncompromising authority. The older warrior turns toward the pale white man angered. Raising his gun in answer the man assures Shakara,

The Hell Ship

"You can't win a fight with me nigga, but you can get at dat boy."

The warrior doesn't understand the ugly word the first mate uses, but he does know that he has wronged too many already and will not be a party to harming the boy any further. The crew man Blands tries to urge the boy on. "Kataaww, kataaww." His whip strikes the boy with less fury. Bill hopes to incite not injure the boy and reduce his chances of winning. Not intimidated, Coruu grabs Bill's whip and pulls the crew man toward him. The young boy strikes Bill surprising him and knocking him backwards then downward onto the floor of the oar galley.

The remaining crew members laugh. From the deck of the rowing galley the embarrassed crew man glares up at the boy. "It's him who brought you here," Bill reminds Coruu, pointing at Shakara. The young boy turns his attentions back to the other warrior again, glaring at him. "Awwuggh!" Like a wounded animal Coruu roars as he charges at Shakara. The older warrior ducks aside then kicks Coruu gently in the butt. Caught off guard Coruu falls flat upon his face onto the galley floor. The ship is filled with the cheers and laughter of the crew. The other captives can only shake their heads in disapproval of the spectacle before them. With injured pride Coruu turns over then looks up at his opponent. "How can I possibly beat him?" he asks himself. The boy looks around. Coruu spots a grappling hook. Believing that it is his only hopes of defeating Shakara he bounds across the floor and grabs it up. The older warrior knows the weapon won't help the boy so all he can do is shake his head and prepare

The Hell Ship

for the foolish boy's attack. Swinging wildly through the air it is Coruu's desire to to kill Shakara. Easily the man ducks the instrument of death. The warrior then takes the grappling hook from the boy and stands holding it while staring across the galley at Coruu.

One can see the mask of fear which Coruu wears as he stares back at his adversary. The proud boy's posture relays the fact that he is no less determined to proceed on with the battle. Surprisingly to most Shakara tosses the grappling hook across the floor, away from himself and Coruu.

Witherspoon laughs. "It seems that one of our combatants is reluctant to fight. Wouldn't be why you were willing to bet on the boy, now would it be Bill?" the first mate accusingly asks. A nervous laugh escapes Blands. The foolish crew man knows Carl Witherspoon is not a man one wants to cross. "How could I know something like that?" Bill plays innocent. "No. You're right. That's something you couldn't have known." Carl laughingly replies.

"Well. What do we do now to inspire these two fighters?" Carl wants answered, but not truly expecting one. "Pow!" a shot rings out. A bullet flies by Shakara's head, barely missing him. "Chief or whatever you call yourself ... if you don't give your all to this fight I'm going to kill both you and the boy. Do I make myself clear?" Carl threatens the two prisoners. Shakara doesn't answer. The warrior stares blankly at Carl. The first mate fires his weapon again. Witherspoon shouts, "Do I make myself clear?" Nodding his head, yes, Shakara lets the wicked man know that he does understand despite

The Hell Ship

the language barrier.

Like two caged panthers unleashed Shakara and Coruu stalk one another, circling and waiting to attack. The impetuous boy charges first. The warrior side steps the boy then slams his fists aside the boy's head as he passes. Coruu goes tumbling once more to the floor of the oar galley. Carl laughs. Blands frowns. Jumping to his feet Coruu is quick to attack again. This time Shakara knees him in the stomach then holds him up, glaring into his eyes. "Give up boy. I don't want to hurt you," Shakara pleads with the young warrior. "It is too late to not harm me," Coruu reminds him of the harm he has already done. The crew watches the exchange not understanding a word that has been said.

There is no reasoning with someone when all they have ever valued has been taken away from them. This Shakara understands so he knows that it is he who will have to put an end to this. Slamming his right fist into the center of Coruu's face he knocks the boy down. Coruu crashes backwards like a fallen tree. "Thump!" is the sound of Coruu hitting the oar galley floor to end the fight. The boy is out cold.

The crew is awestruck by the end blow of Shakara. The black captives are sullenly yet quietly pleased that the battle has ended and no one is dead. The sounds of clapping and Carl's cheers break the silence. "Yea. That's a good nigga!" The first mate walks over to the victor and places his arm approvingly over his shoulder. The African shrugs the man's arm off of his shoulder. At first Carl is offended then he laughs in resignation to the fact that this is a captive who has just made him money,

The Hell Ship

not a friend.

Turning around Carl walks over to Bland and holds out his hand. The crewman reluctantly digs into his pocket and takes out the monies owed then hands it to the first mate. Pulling the man close to him Carl whispers, "I know yah tried to cheat me, matty." He then releases Bill.

"Chain those men back up and swab these decks. I can't stand the stench." Carl orders. The first mate walks up the staircase and back up onto the main deck.

An angry and frustrated Blands snaps orders at the other crewmen, "You heard the man. Chain them up then swab this deck!" Two sailors each grab the two combatants, but Bill has a change of heart. Stopping the men who have a hold of Coruu, Bill informs them, "Not this one. Not yet." Bland menacingly informs Coruu, "You cost me half a day's wages and Witherspoon is mad at me. There's be a price to pay." Meaning to prevent the boy any further harm Shakara jumps at Bland. A third large crew man helps grab Shakara and slam him down into his rowing position then chain him. Bill and the two crewman have to work together in order to tie a struggling Coruu to a beam. "I'm gonna whip you to within an inch of your miserable life then I'm gonna hurt you so bad that you are going to beg me to finish the job," he predicts. Tears come to Shakara and the other warrior's eyes as they watch helpless as the vicious villain begins to beat Coruu unmercifully. All can hear Coruu's wails of agony as the sound echoes throughout the ship. On deck the three girls weep. In his cabin an impotent captain Tolan shakes

The Hell Ship

his head in empathy. The coward knows he will quickly lose control of his ship if he shows any sign of weakness or mercy to these lowlifes, so he does nothing. Witherspoon laughs and plans his revenge. A beating isn't enough for this villain. The evil Bland pours vinegar into the open wounds. Again Coruu cries out in such agony that the stars in the heavens must have dimmed in shame. "Go on boy ... ask me and I'll do it," the man taunts his victim. The brave Coruu shakes his head vigorously. Again Bill pours more vinegar into the open wounds. "Aauugghh ...!" Coruu cries out. "Asks me and I'll do it," Bill continues to taunt. The boy can stand no more. Coruu spits in Blands' face. "Kill me then you bastard!" Bill doesn't understand that the boy has been defiant even in his surrender. Taking his knife from its sheath Bill slices Coruu's throat. "Nooo ...!" Shakara screams. Blood gushes. The boy slumps over dead .

The crewman turns to the sullen warrior. "By all rights I should do the same to you, but I intend to make my money back off of you before this trip is done." Bill assures him. The threat of death is meaningless to Shakara. At this point the warrior would welcome death's freeing caress.

A frustrated Blands then turns to another crew member and instructs him, "Take over my watch. It's nasty enough down here already, I think I'll go up on deck and take a piss this time. Then Bill heads up the staircase to the deck.

The foul man stands at the boat's edge peeing out into the ocean. A cruel laugh comes from behind him. Turning around Blands finds Witherspoon staring at

The Hell Ship

him. Nervously he speaks to the man, "Hey Carl. That was some fight, huh?" Not answering, Carl laughs, walks over to Bill and stabs his knife into the man's gut. "Auggh ..." Bill grunts then falls over the side of the ship into the waiting arms of the icy Atlantic. "Nobody tries to cheat me, you son of a bitch!" Carl declares then walks away as if nothing had happened. Unnoticed by Carl the girl, a hidden Azizza, witnesses the murder.

Even for this rowdy bunch the hour is late on the Mirador. Not surprisingly though is the fact that in a single day the men have drank one fourth of their drink rations and are feeling particularly rambunctious and randy. The crewmen have put Carl up to approaching the captain about the girls. The captain is both surprised and annoyed to find his first mate drunk and knocking at his door in the wee hours of the night. "Have you lost your damn mind man?" he reprimands him. "No sir. Believe me, I am here in my capacity as first mate of this ship," is his excuse. "What duties could bring you to my door at this hour?!" the captain wants explained. "Ship morale ... The men are demanding to have at the girls, sir. I don't think it would be wise to deny them," he answers. Thinking fast Tolan comes up with an idea. The cowardly man believes he may be able to save the girls. "Fortunately it is I who am captain and I make decisions about ship's cargo. Those young girls would decrease in value as much as two hundred pounds if they lose their virginity. It would take you four years to earn that much, so I don't think that it will be you who will repay the ship's owner," Tolan informs Carl. Not so easily dissuaded the first mate counters the captain's claim. "We

The Hell Ship

have a ship's doctor. It will be easy enough to find out if any of them are virgins or no. The ones that are not the men can do with as they will. If any of them are virgins I will stand by your side to defend their worth."

There is nothing more the captain can do. Rather, there is nothing more that he is willing to do. The girls' fates are dependent upon how virtuous a life they have led up to now.

The glare of the morning sun finds most of the crew standing out on the deck of the ship awaiting the outcome of the doctor's examinations of the three girls. As usual Tolan stands at his lofty perch at the ship's helm. From this vantage point he can look down upon the men literally as well as metaphorically. As if he stands apart from them morally he thinks, "Like vultures hovering over a dying body."

The captain leaves the helm headed for his quarters, where the doctor is carrying out the examinations. He wants to be the first to hear the results.

As the door to the captain's quarters open the last of the three girls is putting their wrap back on. All three girls cry because of the humiliating ordeal they have had to endure. Dr. Wayne Harris wears a smirk on his face as the captain enters. Although Wayne Harris is a doctor he is far from an honorable man. It was his questionable reputation with female patients that eventually sent him running off to sea to hide from a vengeful fiancée. "Wipe that smirk from your face and tell me the results," Tolan demands. The low life man points to

The Hell Ship

Azizza and smiles knowingly. That one is a genuine never been violated virgin. The other two are whores," Harris answers. The captain shakes his head. "Just because they aren't virgins doesn't mean they're whores. They could be married or betrothed." the captain excuses their lack of chastity. "Whatever." the callous doctor replies.

Believing there is still a chance to sway the girl's fate Tolan goes to his desk and takes out a bottle of bourbon. Seeking to get the doctor on his side he tries to ply him with liquor. Holding out a glass of bourbon that he has poured he offers it to the doctor. "Care to join me?" Quickly the doctor takes the glass. "Don't mind if I do. It's mighty kind of you to offer," Harris replies. The drink is another of the wretched doctor's weaknesses. Gulping the drink down in a single gulp he then looks to the captain with begging eyes. The captain pours him a second drink. "I need a favor doctor," Tolan begins. "If I can oblige you I will," the doctor promises. "Tell the men that all three of the girls are virgins," Tolan requests, hoping to protect all of the girls. The man laughs. "Why would you want me to do that?" he asks. Joseph realizes it's of no use to explain his position. This man understands nothing about chivalry or principles. "I have my reasons," is the captain's vague reply. "Don't get me wrong captain I would love to help you. I would also love for you to owe me a favor, but if I lied to those men and they found out ... well, the things that they are capable of doing I don't care to find out," Harris answers. The captain can't stand this man, but he knows that what Harris says is true, so having become a coward himself he doesn't much blame the man.

The Hell Ship

It is then that Joseph turns to Azizza and speaks, "You stay here. I will discuss with you later what your duties on this ship will be." Heart heavy with the foul thing he is about to do he turns to Salaya and Nubai. "You two come with me!" waving his hand toward himself, he demands. Frightened the two girls follow the captain from the his quarters.

Later that night Azizza lies covering her ears in an attempt to drown out the cries of her friends as they are raped again and again by the members of the crew of the Mirador. No pillow or anything else can keep those sounds from cutting into her heart like a jagged edged blade. She stares across the room at the captain with contempt. Ashamed he looks away from the place he has made for her upon the floor. Fooling only himself he wears his shame like a badge of honor, but his days of honor are now a distant memory.

The captain decides that Azizza's duties shall be that of nurse to the black captives. Acting as nurse she is allowed to go anywhere on the ship she chooses. Among her first duties is to tend to the private wounds of her ravaged friends. The captain commandeers supplies, such as salve, from the doctor to administer to the wounds of the friends as well as the rowers who have lacerations and scabs from the biting chains and the crew's whips. Every courtesy he extends to the captors Tolan feels he must excuse to his crew. This bit of humane treatment is said to be given because a dead or unhealthy slave is worth nothing.

One night after her duties are done Azizza is returning to the captain's quarters, where she still

The Hell Ship

sleeps upon the floor. Unexpectedly Carl steps in front of her then drags her into an alcove. He has one of his powerful hands holding her head while covering her mouth. His other hand tears away at the top to her dress. Her small breasts are exposed. "Whack!" goes the sound of the billet the captain uses aside Witherspoon's head. The evil man falls to the floor. Frightened Azizza cowers against the wall. "Go back to my cabin. Don't let anyone see you," the captain instructs her. A frazzled Azizza struggles to get her crying under control then leaves the alcove stealthily. The captain takes his sword from its sheath. For one last time Carl opens his eyes. It is just in time for him to see the captain run him through. Unbeknownst to the captain the girl stayed just outside the door peeking in just long enough to see the evil man's fate. Azizza smiles pleased for a taste of justice.

After weeks at sea the toll is beginning to show on all, especially the black captives. Each day more bodies of the Africans are tossed overboard. They are dying from diseases, malnutrition, infections from their wounds, but mostly from an infection of the spirit. Some have lost their will to go on.

The once athletic Shakara is so thin that the bones of his rib cage show through his skin. The scars on his wrists are one large scab. He almost never looks anyone in the eyes anymore. His shame is too great.

The nurse, Azizza, has come down to the oar galley to tend to the sick and make sure each person is getting their ration of fresh water. When she looks at the pitiable figure of the once proud warrior, Shakara, it is impossible not to forgive him, even

The Hell Ship

the grievous crimes he has committed against her and her friends. Kneeling down next to him she offers him a drink of water from a tin cup. "Let him die of thirst!" Dessan cries out in protest. The friend turns to her fellow tribesman and answers, "Isn't it enough that he suffers the same fate as we do?" she begs answered. "If he burns in hell for an eternity it will still not be enough," Dessan assures her then turns away.

The one time heir to the Regrellin leadership looks up into Azizza's eyes. "He's right you know. No price can buy me redemption," he agrees with Dessan. "If it's redemption that you seek then you will have to speak to God, but if it's forgiveness, you have mine," she offers. The warrior takes Azizza's hand in his. Leaning his head upon her shoulder she consoles him. One of the crew men pass by. He pulls Azizza and Shakara apart. "Get back to your duties, captain's whore," he accuses. The crew man then walks on. The warrior grabs Azizza's wrist pulling her closer. Leaning in he then whispers, "Get me that piece of wood over there." The girl looks across the galley and sees a stake like piece of shattered wood lying on the floor. The clever Azizza deduces what Shakara wants with the wood and shakes her head. With pleading in his eyes he begs of her, "Please." Slowly she crosses the galley and retrieves the piece of wood. Returning with the wood hidden under her skirt she sits down beside Shakara. The girl then slips him the shard of wood. Tears fill her eyes. "Go!" he tells her. Head bowed in resignation Azizza gets up and walks toward the stairway to the upper deck. When the girl has disappeared from sight into the stairwell the beaten

The Hell Ship

man takes the piece of wood, presses it against his chest then with all of his remaining strength he plunges it into his own heart. Leaning against the stairway wall the tearful girl cries when she hears the proud warrior's death wail, "Uuuggghhhh ...!"

One day blends into another and week into week then all too soon yet all too late the journey ends. The slave ship Mirador enters into the harbor of the great slave markets of Annapolis.

The young African girl and the captain of the Mirador stand side by side at the helm of his ship. Captain Joseph Tolan knows that today is probably the last time he will ever see this remarkable young woman who stands beside him. "Azizza, I know this won't make anything right, but I have to say it, I am so sorry for the life that I've brought upon you. I excused what I did by telling myself that one trip as captain and I could buy myself the life I've always desired. If I knew then what I know now I would have preferred to have died a poor man." He has convinced himself of the truth of his words. The clever Azziza knows the pale men's language. She answers Tolan, "Your words are empty and your honor a mere facade. You are worst than Witherspoon or Blands or Shakara because they believed they were right in what they were doing. They knew no better. You knew better and chose the road that you thought easiest for you. If God would grant me a single wish it would be that the nights you spend in your big new house are haunted by the screams of Abubaker, Nubai, Salaya, Coruu, Shakara and the many others who suffered dearly or failed to survive this trip," she curses him.

The Hell Ship

"I guess I should go join the other cargo, my captain." She says to Tolan. Without waiting for an answer Azizza walks down the stairs from the helm to join her remaining friends; Dessan, Nubai and Salaya.

Azizza would never know, but she got her wish. Not a moment of joy or peace did Tolan ever know for the remainder of his life.

CHAPTER 3

The Slave Market

In these times Annapolis is a sprawling metropolis. No matter your taste one can find the most discerning of personage or almost any kind of rift-raft drifting through. Never moreso than on the days of the slave ship auctions. This day is no different since the cargo of the slave ship Mirador is to be auctioned off today.

Not one to frequent the big city Daryl Hannon Senior - known to some as Duke- has been persuaded by his young overseer, Martin Grant, to come to the Annapolis slave auctions. The first generation plantation owner is not in the market for any more slaves, but he is still young enough to be filled with vigor and desires to sow a few more wild oats. Unlike many of his gentlemen counterparts Duke earned not inherited his plantation. The scalawag has worked his way up by his boot straps. He did any sleazy or hazard filled job he was asked to do. To raise the last of the monies he needed to make his dream come true he even stole from his boss, Finley Merchant. After the thief he bought the plantation then changed its name to Hannon Manor.

An outsider may easily judge him, but the truth is more complicated. This man isn't totally evil. He is more a product of his times. These times have taught him harsh lessons. It is alright to enslave another human being. Women are possessions or playthings. Lastly, he believes that a son is the only way for a man to continue on in this life pass his own brief life span.

The two men begin their day at one of the hotel-gambling houses. The overzealous work hand, Martin,

The Slave Market

rushes pass Duke up to the bar. The seemingly always broke worker waits for his boss, hoping that he's in a treating mood today. When Daryl Senior reaches the bar he looks over at his employee and laughs. "What'll you have?" he asks. Turning to the bartender Martin says, "A double rye." Looking to the bartender Duke says, "Make dat two a' da same." The bartender pours the drinks, collects the money from the master of Hannon Manor then goes on to the next customer. Like a kid in a candy store Martin looks around the busy establishment.

There is a roulette wheel spinning, dance girls dancing, card players gambling and whores being flirtatious and more. The employee turns to his boss. "Masta Hannon I sure would like to get me one of dem gals, but my money is awful short." The sometimes generous man reaches into his pocket and takes out a twenty dollar gold piece. "Make it las 'cause we're gonna be yere for a few days." The young man grins then takes the money.

Some time later Martin drags himself down from the room of the whore - Sissy. Cautiously he approaches the table where his boss is playing poker. He knows most men don't like strangers standing behind them when they gamble, but his curiosity gets the better of him. A large stack of money sits in front of Daryl. It is obvious that he has been doing very well. On the other hand one of the other players, a Bart Towson, hasn't done well at all. The poor card player has lost more than half of his profits from last year's crop sales. Unfortunately for him not only is he a poor card player he is also a poor sport as well. A smile from Duke is all it takes for the man to go into a tirade. "You can take that shit

The Slave Market

grin off of your face or I can wipe it off," Towson threatens. The man has made one more terrible mistake. Gun-play had been a part of some of the dirty jobs that the onetime bounty hunter, Daryl Senior, had done. He was very good at it. The plantation owner laughs. "Look mista you've had a run of bad luck don't compound it by getting yahself kil't" Daryl warns.

Standing up Towson reaches for his gun. There is the sound of gunfire. The reckless man falls backwards into his seat then onto the floor, dead. Under the table Daryl had already drawn his gun and has shot Bart Towson. Grinning from ear to ear Martin excitedly exclaims, "Mr. Hannon, you got him dead to rights! He should listen to yah and mind dem manners." The overseer mocks the dead man. The boss glares up at Martin. The fool has spoken his name for all to know. Turning to the bartender Hannon calls out, "Have someone fetch the sheriff."

The sheriff's office is a nice clean modern facility for the times, but after all this is the big city. Clancy Monroe, the sheriff, glares down at the survivor of the gunfight. "All of the witnesses say that the man went for his gun first, but know this I don't like gun-play in my town so I will be happy if you just tend to your business quick as possible 'n be on your way," he advises the two men. Martin stands behind his boss. "We're gonna 'ten the auction, maybe buy some stock 'n be on our way home, sheriff," Duke wants Clancy to know that he has gotten his message. "That's good. The two of you are free to go," Clancy tells them. "By the way, where's 'bout is home," the sheriff asks. The foolish Martin shouts out, "Kelly, Louisiana!" His boss glares at

The Slave Market

the man then grabs him by the arm and yanks him out of the sheriff's office door.

Once the two men are outside a pissed off Daryl slaps his overseer aside the back of his head. "Ow!" Martin cries out. "What yah do dat for ...?" the fool asks. "I jus' kil't a man and yah running 'round town shouting my name and telling any friends he might have where dey can find me. Do you think dat's smart?" the boss asks his overseer. "I'm sorry." The exasperated boss turns his back and walks away. The hired hand has learned nothing. Running after his boss he shouts his apologies. "I'm sorry! Mr. Hannon, I'm truly sorry. I jus' wasn't thinking," he excuses. "You still ain't cause yah still doin' it," the frustrated man points out to his work hand. The two men head for the stock yards in silence.

Most of the wealthy bidders like Daryl Senior generally sit in the comfortable grandstands, but Daryl prefers to be down in the crowd, among those with backgrounds like his own. The grandstands he hopes for Daryl Junior someday. His son is going to be one of the social elite of Louisiana. Maybe he will run for office someday. Maybe he will be president. Duke has big dreams for his son, that's why he had sent him up north to the most expensive private schools he could find.

It won't be long before Daryl Junior will be home from college for good. Four years, except the brief holidays, seems like forever to this dotting father.

"Whack!" goes the sound of Daryl Sr.'s walking cane across the fingers of the would-be pickpocket who

The Slave Market

was about to lift the little money Martin had left from him. The man very quickly scurries away. Grant laughs. "You just can't stay out of trouble, can you?" he kids. His boss slides his walking cane inside of Martin's purse strings, which thanks to the pickpocket now hangs half the way out of his pocket. An annoyed Martin turns in the direction of the long gone man. "That bastard ...! Why isn't he trying to pick the pockets of some of dos' fat cats?" Grant wants to know. His boss points to the Pinkerton men, the sheriff and the deputies. "... cause dat's who dey're yere to protect," he explains to his overseer.

The auction day begins. The first of the slaves, Dessan, is brought out to a ragged makeshift stage and displayed for the bidders' amusement and assessment. A hulk of a man, Grunt, drags the young boy onto the stage. Dessan kicks and pulls at his chains. Finally tiring of the boys antics Grunt slaps him. The blow knocks the young boy across the stage. The crowd laughs heartily. The so called gentleman's crowd frowns and shakes their heads in disdain.

The auctioneer, Pillsman, steps from behind a tattered curtain. "Ladies and gentlemen ... though only gentlemen are allowed to bid ... welcome to the sale of the cargo lot of the bondage ship Mirador," he begins.

The crowd laughs because the auctioneer is unaware that Dessan has managed to get his chains free of the big man, Grunt. He and Grunt run around and around in circles on the stage. The young boy is

The Slave Market

stopped by the deputies, Pinkerton or the sheriff whenever he tries to get off of the stage. Pointing to Dessan, Pillsman begins his spiel, "There is a sample of what we offer for sale here today, a spirited, strong young buck, who can work in your fields all day and still have energy 'nuff to service your black whores increasing your stock."

In answer to the wealthy slave owners' urging a Pinkerton man tosses a Billy club at Dessan's legs. The boy is knocked to the stage floor. The handler, Grunt, takes his huge hands and grabs Dessan by the back of his neck then carries him across the stage to a pole. Once there he chains the boy to the pole. "Who will start the bidding at \$500.00?" Pillsman begins the actual auction. One of the gentleman farmers raises his hand in answer.

After more than a half an hour of watching the auction Martin becomes antsy. "Mr. H ..." Martin is very careful not to say Hannon's name again. "I'm gonna take a peek backstage and see if dey have any black fillies for sale that might make a good house nigga." Daryl Senior shakes his head in agreement more to get rid of the bothersome employee than because he is truly interested in purchasing any more slaves. Eager to explore Grant hurries away.

As Martin nears the holding area of the slave auction the sheriff comes up behind him, startling him. "Ain't no bidding back here mister," The sheriff cautions Grant. He then notices him to be one of the troublemakers from earlier. "You seem to find yourself always in places that you just ain't got no business being ... don't you?" the sheriff accuses. "I just wanted to see if 'n dere is ar'ting

The Slave Market

worth waiting to bid on. If'n dere ain't den me and my boss could be on our way early," Martin answers him. The sheriff leads a wary Martin into the holding area. "Follow me." Clancy instructs the man. The overseer smiles. "Not to be one to look a gift horse in the mouth ... Why are you treating me so good sheriff?" The sheriff smiles then answers the man, "I know the two of you are just trouble waiting to happen, so anything I can do to speed you out of my jurisdiction, well I say, hell let's get it done." Truth be told, Clancy has a taste for some of Daryl's poker winnings.

The first time that Martin sees the vision that is Azizza it is like lightning striking him. Although she is young she is the most beautiful creature that Martin has ever seen. The sheriff takes his hand and literally lifts the man's jaw up, closing his gaping mouth. "I take it that you see something that interest you. I tell you what, if you come up with a thousand dollars for the girl and another five hundred a piece for me and the auctioneer then you won't even have to bid on her. The two of you can take her and be on your merry way," Clancy offers. Frowning Martin answers, "I have to talk to my boss. He ain't never paid that kind of money for no Negress" The sheriff laughs. "Bring him on back here and let me do the talking," he instructs the overseer.

After some convincing by Grant a few minutes later Duke and Clancy are once again face to face. "My overseer here says dat you have somethin' very special for me, but it's gonna be very expensive." Daryl inquires of the sheriff. Clancy points across the holding area at the exquisitely delicate creature

The Slave Market

that is Azizza. "\$2,000. No negotiating, no bidding. She's yours ... " Interrupting the sheriff's sells pitch the plantation owner laughs. "She's a good looking nigga. No. Truth be tol' she's an incredibly beautiful young woman no matter what her race, but she'd have to have a lot more than dat going for her for me to pay dat kind of money for her," he assures the sheriff. "She's a guaranteed money back, true to life virgin." The sheriff answers. The three men laugh.

After giving it some thought Daryl Senior hands the sheriff the currency. The sheriff hands him Azizza's papers of ownership which states the sheriff's warranty of her chastity. Hungrily Martin reaches for the girl wearing a lascivious expression. The frightened African princess pulls away from the lecherous man. Her new owner gently takes her hand. "Don't you worry none honey. Yah going to a good home. Easy work, plenty of food and comfortable accommodations for yah as long as yah do what yah tol' and don't try to run away." The young girl smiles because of the soothing tone and the promises of reasonable treatment that this stranger offers to her.

Wasting no time they gather their possessions and head for the train station. Just a few hours later the three of them are on the train headed from Baltimore to Louisiana. Smoke billows from the train and wafts backwards and into the passenger section of the train. The conductor passes through the trains corridors collecting tickets. Daryl Senior hands him the two tickets he holds. "I'm sorry sir, but you have to pay for your slave too," the conductor informs the plantation owner. "How can you

The Slave Market

charge me a fare for a piece of property? Do I have to buy my luggage a seat too?" an exasperated Daryl wonders aloud. The man collects the money then sighs. "I don't make the rules sir. I just work here."

Still wearing the same lascivious grin from earlier which makes Azizza fearful of him Martin turns to Hannon and asks, "Can I have her after yah tire of her?" The master of Hannon Manor slaps Martin aside the head again. "Ow! Why'd yah do dat?" Martin asks. "I wouldn't 'spec da likes of yah to understand dis, but dis girl is special. She's not for me ... not for you ... nor is she for any of the other scum 'round my plantation. A man of power needs a mistress who will never tell his secrets to anyone. She is gonna be dat woman for my son. Grabbing Martin's face in his vice like grip ... "know dis ... if anyone takes her virginity before he does I will find out who and I will castrate them then I will quarter them," Duke threatens. Martin takes a more timid posture for he knows Daryl Senior means what he says and says ezactly what he means.

The Slave market is behind the young girl - Azizza Omai, but what kind of life awaits her now, she ponders as the train all so slowly trudges toward what, she knows not.

CHAPTER 4

Hannon Manor

At long last the three traveling companions are near their journey's end. The buggy that they road in from town in is turning onto the Hannon plantation. The dirt road that they are on, which leads up to the main manor, is very bumpy. A fearful Azizza is bounced around and her body rocked and jarred by the rough riding buggy that she shares with Martin and Daryl Senior. The lecherous Martin uses the jarring transport as an excuse to press himself against the young woman every chance he gets. Fear wraps around Azizza like a coarse burlap blanket. Noticing her apprehension Daryl once more tries to comfort her. "Yah gonna like it here. The people are nice. I don't abuse my slaves, least dey give me call. And yah ain't likely to find a more beautiful place den dis in da whole dang country," he brags. His words do help to ease Azizza's fears a little.

After miles of unwanted attention the girl finally pushes the raunchy overseer away. An annoyed Daryl Senior grabs the man by his ear and points his attentions back to the road. "Keep your mind on what yah doin'. And remember what I said happens to any man who touches dis girl," again he threatens. A frustrated Martin lashes out cruelly at the horses with his whip. The horses sprint forward dragging them along at a faster pace.

As they pass through the grove of apple trees which mark the beginning of the southern boundary lines for the Hannon plantation a pride filled Daryl Hannon Senior turns to the girl smiling and asks, "What yah think? Beautiful ain't it?" Azizza smiles a weak smile and begrudgingly she nods her head in agreement.

Hannon Manor

A little further on they pass slaves and white workers toiling side by side in the fields. Some keep on working, but most stop and turn in the direction of the buggy, curious of the master's return and the new Negress. The black workers remind Azizza of the people back home, but they are somehow very different. As the buggy moves further away from the field each worker turns their attentions back to work. The curious girl still looks back, wondering how many of them have been ripped away from their former lives.

Then it happens, they pass through a clearing and onto the main grounds of the plantation. The young girl is in awe of the size and the beauty of the main house, Hannon Manor. The proud owner sees her expression and he laughs. "I tol' yah. It's beautiful." The two of them soak up its beauty. The now bitter Martin spits out his chewing tobacco onto the side of the road. Azizza and Duke frown at the uncouth man.

As the buggy pulls up to the main house Mother Jasmine, the black slave woman who is in charge of running the house, comes running down the stairs and up to the side of the buggy. She smiles adoringly at Daryl then looks at Azizza curious. "What you done dug up now Massa Daryl?" the woman wonders aloud. "A special present for my son," he makes an unnecessary accounting to Mother Jasmine "Uh oh. Yah know Daryl Junior got a lot of dem northern ways 'bout him. Yah sure he's gonna 'preciate what yah doin' for him?" Daryl Senior looks at Azizza and laughs. "Look at her Mother Jasmine. How could any man in his right mind not 'preciate somethin' like dat?" he says with confidence. Mother Jasmine looks again at the girl

Hannon Manor

and nods her head. "I guess you right bout dat Massa Daryl."

It is then that Mother Jasmine turns to her staff barking orders. The house boys bring in what little luggage Daryl Senior has. The older black woman leads the way into the house. Once inside she takes Azizza's hand then shows her to her quarters, a large closet like space on the master bedroom floor level of the manor. It had long ago been made into sleeping quarters for a slave. Up until now no slave had merited living on this floor, save Mother Jasmine - who now has a real bedroom. "What yah intention yere girl?" the protective Negress asks of the new slave. "I don't know what yah mean," the girl replies. "Are yah gonna be a good nigga or are yah gonna bring dis family grief?" Jasmine asks. "I'm no nigga at all. I am Namimba, but I don't mean to be no trouble to no one." Azizza answers. The older woman laughs. "Namimba! Girl yah got a lot to learn, but dat's what I'm yere for ...," the motherly Jasmine assures Azizza.

A blanket of silence enshrouds Hannon Manor. That quiet is shattered in the middle of the night. Everyone is awakened by the heart wrenching screams of the young African girl. Shooting upward the frightened girl looks around the crowded and unfamiliar surroundings of her new living quarters. Azizza begins to weep sorrowfully. The door opens slowly then an empathetic Mother Jasmine stands in her doorway. The older woman takes the two steps needed to reach Azizza then kneels down beside her and takes the girl into her arms. "Dear, dear chil' ... It'll soon all be a distant memory and you will learn to love dis new life." Mother Jasmine

Hannon Manor

knows of what she speaks. "I slept yere some thirty or more years ago, a girl of sixteen at the time. Hard to 'member xactly, now. I was young. Me and Massa Daryl were close den, if you know what I mean," Jasmine recounts earlier times. "There was someone that I loved. The slavers killed him when I was taken," Azizza tells of Abubaker. "Bes' you jus' forget him too. Memories are jus' a different sort of chain darling'."

A bone tired Mother Jasmine climbs to her feet and steps toward the door. Stopping she turns and faces Azizza one last time that night. "The one thing life has taught me chil' is that caring for anyone or anything is foolish 'cause you never know when dey'll be taken away from yah. Goodnight girl and yah only dream sweet dreams ye hear," she smiling wishes for her new charge. The door closes behind Jasmine. The girl wonders, "What's the point of life if you care for nothing or no one?"

The next morning Daryl has given orders that Azizza be allowed to sleep late this once because he heard her cries in the night and he also empathizes with her pain.

Near to noon Mother Jasmine has had enough. She goes to the girl's room and rousts her from her slumber. A few minutes later Azizza has joined the rest of the house staff in the kitchen. Some giggle at the girl because they have heard the rumors already and believe that they know her main duties will have little to do with the kitchen. An annoyed Mother Jasmine snaps at the girls, "If you silly young girls have got the foolishness out of you den we can teach ...". Jasmine realizes that she doesn't know

Hannon Manor

the girl's name. "What is yah name chil'?" she asks. "Azizza, mam." The staff laugh, all except Jasmine. The house mother glares at the others. "You ignorant fools. Least ways she still recalls her real name and takes pride in it," she chastises them. Their heads are bowed low in shame. "Don't know how long for Massa Daryl let you carry dat name, but 'til he says otherwise we will all call you Azizza," Jasmine promises.

The beds have been made, the house cleaned and the meals prepared. Mother Jasmine is surprised at how good a worker the frail young girl has turned out to be. She did twice as much work as her more experienced and older co-workers. As a reward Mother Jasmine takes the girl by the hand and leads her from the kitchen. The other slaves are jealous. During the day, unless you are working somewhere else in the house, Mother Jasmine always restricts the house staff to the kitchen. The older woman knows that way she doesn't have to worry about anyone getting into any mischief.

Once in the vestibule Jasmine turns to Azizza. "Go! Take a tour of the grounds. Dis is home now. You might as well see what it's truly like," the woman instructs the girl.

Once outside Azizza stares back at the big house. She still can't relate to such a large place for someone to live in. The biggest home in her village was smaller than the room that they call the parlor. "Hey you ...!" Martin yells at the girl. Startled Azizza turns toward the obnoxious man. "Are yah s'pose to be out yere?" he questions her. "Mother Jasmine told me to come'n look around," she answers

Hannon Manor

then hurries away from him. With yearning he watches as the girl takes the path away from the house and toward the fields. "If the Negress said it was alright it must be so," Grant remarks sarcastically.

Suspicious of the wretched Martin the young woman continues to look back over her shoulder every few steps. This is why she doesn't see Ray, a young black slave, until she has practically run him down. "Wooo ...!" the young man says as he holds Azizza up, preventing her from falling. "Yah see a lot better if yah look ahead not behind," he jokes. The girl frowns, thinking that he is reprimanding her. "When I need lessons in anything it won't be from the likes of you," her biting tongue lashes out. "I was jus' jokin'," he defends himself. Her demeanor softens toward Ray and she apologizes. "I'm sorry. It's just that people have been telling me what to do since I was dragged from my home. I'm not sure how much more I can take," she explains. "People have been telling me what to do since the day I was born. You can take a lot," he assures her.

A watchful Martin jumps from the bushes. "What yah two up to ...?" he asks brusquely. The young man's head bows low in fear. Azizza stares at the man defiantly. Knowing what Daryl Senior has told Martin she believes that she has little to fear from him. "Not'in boss Grant," Ray answers. Martin grabs Azizza by her hand and pulls her away from the other slave. "Yah jus' make sure you keep it dat way boy. You or any other buck touches dis girl and Massa Hannon gonna cut dat thang off. Yah be sure and tell the others too," he orders Ray. The young man turns without answering him. Grant grabs Ray's arm and twirls him around to face him. "Yah hear, boy?" he

Hannon Manor

demands. "I hear," with broken spirit Ray answers then turns and walks away.

The overseer drags Azizza back toward the house. "If I can't have yah. I sure ain't gonna see no black buck have yah!" he snaps at her. She pulls her arm loose from his grasp and runs toward the house. Behind her she can hear the evil man laughing.

Still angry Azizza slams the door as she enters the house. Daryl Senior had been asleep on the couch in the parlor. Startled awake he jumps up and runs to see what the commotion could be. At that same time Mother Jasmine exits the kitchen in search of her own answers. The three meet in the hallway. Everyone can plainly see that Azizza is upset. "What's wrong gal?" The plantation owner demands of his new slave. The older woman knows complaints will only make enemies and a slave doesn't need even one enemy, so she shakes her head, unseen by master Daryl, signaling for Azizza's silence. The girl is smart and understands, so she lies, "Not'in Massa Daryl. I was jus' hurrying' to get back to my chores." Looking suspiciously back and forth between the two women he replies, "If yah sure I'll leave it at dat." He waits. Jasmine and Azizza look back and forth at one another without speaking. The master of Hannon Manor turns and walks away.

"Come with me Azizza." Jasmine orders. The sharp eared owner stops dead in his tracks. Turning he glares at Jasmine "What da hell did yah jus' call dat gal?" he demands. With her head bowed low Jasmine answers him truthfully, "Azizza." You can almost feel the heat as Duke turns a fiery red. "She don't know better, but I'm surprised at yah Jasmine

Hannon Manor

Jasmine. On this plantation no niggas don't go by no black names. If'n a name is good enough for a white person it sure as hell is good enough for yah niggas," he screams. "You said dat she was for Massa Daryl Junior, so I didn't wanna name her. I figures he would," she lies. The man knows Jasmine is lying, but she seldom over steps her bounds so he decides to let that part go forgiven.

"Da gal will be called Clarise. Dat's da end of it." He turns to leave. Outraged, the girl starts to speak, but again Jasmine shakes her head no. This time she shakes her head even more vigorously than before. The smart Azizza understands that this means it is a battle she cannot win. The girl watches as the man who has stripped her of her identity walks away. An unhappy Azizza thinks to herself, "So this is Hannon Manor, my new home?"

CHAPTER 5

The Prodigal Son

It has been more than two months since Clarise was brought to Hannon Manor. Odd as it may seem to most she has grown to think of this place as home. It is truly amazing what the human soul can accommodate.

The crops have been harvested. A light snow has fallen. It is almost the time of year for Thanksgiving. The whole of the manor is a buzz with anticipation for the young master's return for the holiday season. Mother Jasmine is in the kitchen preparing her special jams. The young master, Daryl Junior, has always loved her jams. Rufus, another slave, is carving jack - o - lanterns. The young master is seldom home at Halloween, but he gets a kick out of Rufus' spooky craft work. A not so enthusiastic Martin hunts geese with Duke in anticipation of the many guests and parties that will be held while the young master Hannon is home for the holiday.

One can get used to most anything. Starting to get accustomed to her new name, Clarise helps out in the kitchen. "What is he like Mother Jasmine?" the curious girl asks. "Better than most men, a kind heart, a gentle soul. He'll treat you well. Dat is ... if'n he goes along with his father's wishes," Jasmine tries to give the girl the insight she is seeking. A puzzled Clarise wonders aloud, "And why wouldn't he?" The older woman takes Clarise by the hand and sits her down. Face to face she begins to explain, "Massa Daryl Senior sent the boy up north to the best private schools 'cause he has big dreams for him. What he didn't 'ticipate was dat the young massa would take on northern ways." A puzzled expression on Clarice's face says she doesn't quite

The Prodigal Son

understand. "The cultured northerners don't cotton to slavery. Dis country is supposed to be somethin' different. A place where all people are free and can believe what dey want to believe." The girl almost laughs as she interrupts the older woman. "Ain't never gonna be no such place, long as men are men." The girl has already become a cynic at her tender age. "You're probably right, but some men strive for the impossible. Our young massa is dat kinda man." Mother Jasmine acknowledges. Remembering Martin and starting to worry about her fate Clarise wonders aloud, "What will become of me if'n he don't want me?" Shaking her head for lack of an answer Mother Jasmine tells Clarise the truth, that she just doesn't know.

The wintry like weather is taking its toll on the house staff. The day before Daryl Junior is due to return home Clarise comes down with a cold. The cautious Mother Jasmine confines her to her bed, saying she doesn't want her to get the whole staff sick with all she has to do for the holiday. That is why Clarise isn't outside assembled with the others when the young Massa Daryl's coach makes its way up the road to Hannon Manor the next day.

The house staff are all dressed in formal servant's wear and lined up just in front of the main house staircase. Although no one has to work today the field workers are all lined up along the road next to the fields. Grant and other white workers stand off to the side of the main road, hats in hand. Daryl Junior sticks his head and hand out of the coach window and waves to everyone as his coach rides by them, much like a royal procession.

The Prodigal Son

As the coach pulls up in front of Hannon Manor its door opens just as Duke exits the main house. As unusual as it is for the elder Mr. Hannon to get dressed up today he wears a suit and a bow-tie to signify how very important his son's return is to him. His face beams with delight when he spots his son exiting the coach. The father is taken by surprise when his son turns around and reaches back into the coach then helps the very beautiful Donna Miller from the vehicle.

An overjoyed father- Daryl Senior-rushes down the steps. He runs up to his son, grabs the young man into his arms and lifts him into the air. They laugh. As they laugh Duke spins the young man around in mid-air. Others can almost feel the love. "Dad let me down," he reluctantly asks of the elder Hannon. His father puts him down then turns to survey the lovely lady who has accompanied his son. With a lascivious smile the father asks, "And who might this beauty be?" Again Daryl laughs. The son puts his arm around Donna's waist. He lies, "This is my lady love, Miss Donna Miller." He merely flatters her. Other than a physical attraction he has no true feelings for the girl. Playing the role of a gentleman Duke takes Donna's hand in his, bows down and kisses it. Then standing erect he looks Donna in the eyes. "My son has always had an eye for beautiful ladies." The young woman smiles, but her air is one of disappointment. Knowing the son she had expected his father to be more refined not this obviously boorish oaf before her. "Thank you Mr. Hannon," she feigns appreciation for his compliment. "Call me Duke," Daryl Senior insists. The father grabs her roughly around the waist and leads her toward the house. The son follows.

The Prodigal Son

Once the Hannon's and their lady guest are inside the others go back to their normal routine.

There is always a feeling of warmth about Hannon Manor when Daryl Junior is home that you can't feel in his absence. No man has ever loved a son more than Daryl Senior or put so much of his dreams and aspirations into their child's care. You can see pride in his eyes as he watches his son and the uppity northern girl, Donna Miller, as they walk the grounds of the plantation. The truth is he doesn't care much for the girl, but what does it matter. His attitude is that this Donna is nothing more than a woman, an ornament to be worn to give a man stature, like a gold watch or a diamond ring. The girl's family's connections though are important. They will serve Daryl Jr. well. She is supposedly a great grand niece or some such nonsense to Benjamin Franklin-himself.

The blonde beauty looks to see if anyone is watching. When she sees no one is spying on them she grabs a handful of Daryl's butt. Laughing she turns and runs away. "You are mine now!" he shouts then gives chase.

The girl's dress and slips puff up blown by the wind, revealing more than what is modest of her legs and panties. Donna reaches the bank of the lake before Daryl can catch her. Plopping down in the grass gleefully she laughs.

Giddy as a school boy he plops down beside her. Pulling her into his arms he kisses her passionately. The hot blooded young woman slides her hands down the front of Daryl's pants. "Oh ...!" the

The Prodigal Son

surprised suitor gasps. "Ah hem." Clarise shocks the pair. Donna grabs her hands out of the young man's pants, but not before tugging the front of his pants open and scraping her arm on his zipper. An embarrassed Donna looks up and sees a black slave staring down at her. "Daryl! Tell this girl to get lost!" she screams. Instead of being angry he begins to laugh uncontrollably. This only serves to anger Donna further. Jumping to her feet she straightens her dress and marches off in a huff. "It'll be a cold day in hell before you taste of my favors again Mr. Daryl Hannon Junior," she shouts back to him.

Once Donna is out of sight Daryl looks up at Clarise. "I've never seen you around here before. What's your name?" he asks. "Don't you think it would be better etiquette if you closed your pants before asking someone their name?" Clarise points out his present state to him. Again the young man laughs. Then he modestly rolls over, turns his back and buttons up his pants. When he turns over again Clarise is already walking away from him. Smiling Daryl Junior calls after her, "You don't know what you're missing." Clarise laughs but keeps on walking. "Didn't appear to be much from my vantage point," she kids him.

The late hours of the night may be when the manor is most quiet, but it is also when the upstairs of the manor seems to be at its busiest. Most are asleep at two am in the morning. The door to the young master Hannon's room opens slowly. Easing the door closed, trying not to make any noise, down the hallway he creeps to the guestroom where Donna is staying. The door to Clarise's room is cracked silently open as she spies the horny young man closing the guest room

The Prodigal Son

door behind his self. The hopeful Clarise waits at the door for some twenty minutes hoping the girl would be true to her earlier proclamation. When Daryl does not quickly return she guesses what is happening in the guestroom and she is admittedly jealous.

The next day the father and son are cloaked in somewhat warmer wear than they had adorned the day before. The two walk the grounds of the plantation side by side. "Donna is the kind of woman a man needs by his side if he's to make something of his self in this world." the father points out. "I'm just having fun. She's a little too uppity for my taste," the young man accuses the girl.

The two men stop at the bank of the lake and sit down. "Remember when we use to come down here and fish almost every day of the summer?" a smiling Duke remembers fondly. His son laughs. "We caught about six fish a piece each summer." They both nod. "Fishermen we were not born to be, but most anything else you might want you can do. Money, good schools, the right woman and contacts can make it happen. Think hard on it son 'cause life has a way of getting away from yah. Then all yah left with is regret for what could have been," he tries to pass on a little homegrown wisdom to his son.

As they lay back on the bank taking in the beauty of the Hannon plantation the two men spot Clarise walking down to the barn to get milk for the house. When Daryl Junior sees her he sighs, "Ummm" His father smiles approvingly. "Yes, she is something special. She's a virgin you know," Daryl Senior adds. "No I don't know. And how would you know?" the

The Prodigal Son

son asks. "Dat's what I paid for so I had the doc check her out when we got back from Annapolis," he explains. "She isn't some livestock. She's a person!" his son reprimands him. "Dat's where yah wrong. I got a piece of paper in the house, a receipt, dat says dat she is livestock, my chattel property," the ignorant man insists. "A piece of paper doesn't make it so," the son tries to reach his father. "In a court of law in dis yere country it does." the father and son glare at one another for a time. The glares turn to smiles, the smiles become laughter and the laughter becomes hugs. "On this we will have to agree to disagree," the son offers an olive branch.

"It's not quite that simple ..., " Daryl senior begins his explanation. The son looks at his father suspiciously." Remember how I told you dat a woman can help a man achieve success. Well, a man needs a good mistress as well. Someone who can help him keep his head on straight ... so I bought her for you."

Outraged, the young Hannon shakes his head in disbelief of his father. It isn't like his father doesn't know how he feels on this subject. The man just refuses to consider his feelings, as if that will somehow make them change. His father knows how vehemently he opposes the concept of slavery. The master of Hannon Manor turns his son's head in the direction of the barn then waits until Clarise exits the barn carrying the pail of milk she had gone in to get. "Slave or free woman by the time you finish college dat is gonna be a woman worth dying for my son." The younger Hannon stands up and looks down at his father. "I won't own another person," he insists. The father waves his hand around pointing

The Prodigal Son

out the great expanse of the Hannon plantation. He laughs at his son's naivety. "Hell boy you already own more slaves than almost any man in dis country, but if you insist I can always give her to Martin. He's been biting at the bit to get at dat gal since the first time he laid eyes on her," the father threatens. "Like you said, I'm already a slave owner. What's one more?" he pretends to accept his father's appraisal in order to protect the girl from the likes of Martin Grant.

The father is not easily fooled, so he watches his son closely for the remainder of his vacation. Knowing that his father is assessing their relationship Daryl Junior puts up the appearance of pursuing Clarise. A situation which Clarise enjoys, but the girl - Donna finds offensive.

By the time they are loading the coach with Daryl Junior's and Donna's things the snobbish young woman is convinced that he is not the man for her.

As young master Daryl exits the manor everyone is assembled as they had been upon the young man's arrival, except that this time Clarise stands next to the coach as he reaches it. After waving to his father he bows and kisses Clarice's hand. The young slave girl smiles while Donna grimaces. As the coach pulls away Daryl Senior looks at the girl he purchased in Annapolis and smiles. Turning to Mother Jasmine he says, "I think dat girl is gonna bring me and my son closer than ever." This is his prediction. Mother Jasmine, though nodding her head in agreement, believes with all of her heart that the exact opposite will someday prove true.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 6
Forbidden Love

Maybe it is a coincidence, maybe something started that holiday vacation, whatever it is or was Daryl Junior begins returning home more and more frequently than before. What went unnoticed by most, but is disturbing to Mother Jasmine, is the fact that he never brings another woman home with him again. The seeds of a forbidden love have been sown, but sour fruits it must surely bear.

It isn't the outward influences which mold Mother Jasmine's dread for the two young people, but her personal experience. All too well Jasmine knows that no good can come of a white man and black woman being in love in times such as these, for either one of them.

Hastily month after month passes. One year follows after another. The young master would come home during every break. He would spend the obligatory time with his father than he would seek out Clarise. They spent most of their time together by the lake. The young woman would tell him of Africa and her village. Sometimes she would speak of her first love, Abubaker, his bravery in the face of the slavers and his tragic death. Instead of jealousy Daryl Junior admired the young warrior's courage. That is the kind of man he was and why Clarise fell in love with him.

The young master of Hannon Manor watches closely as before his very eyes the young woman blossoms physically and grows in confidence as a woman. It is all he can manage not to take her in his arms and make love to her, but he fears that she will believe

Forbidden Love

it is by privilege he expects her to give herself to him and that is not how he would have her become his.

One day as they sit below the great oak on the banks of the lake where Daryl and his father once fished the young man takes out one of his favorite books of love poems. As he begins to read from it there comes a light to Clarice's eyes. The woman is mesmerized by the beauty of the words. Looking into her eyes Daryl can see the hunger for knowledge that dwells within her open heart. "Would you like to learn to read?" he asks. "It's against the law," a frightened Clarise warns. "I'm not going to tell and you're certainly not ... so who's to know?" he reasons. Her face lights up in anticipation. "We'll have to find some place more private than this," she happily acknowledges. "My room," Clarise offers. A mischievous smile curls his lips. "To teach me to read, not not'in else." she says, reading his mind.

The young slave girl looks forward to the reading almost as much as she does Daryl's company. Whenever he comes home they rush to be alone in her room. The young man is an excellent teacher, but it is made easy by the fact that Clarise is an incredible student. She seems to soak up knowledge like a sponge soaks up water. Of course all of the dirty minds on the plantation believe that the two have become lovers and that is why they spend so much time together in her bed chamber. Unlike the others Mother Jasmine knows differently. The wise older woman knows the gait of a woman and Clarise definitely is not yet a woman. The fear filled woman wonders what mischief the two are up to in those

Forbidden Love

tiny quarters, if not discovering the pleasure of one another.

A plot is hatched by the house mother to find out the truth of things. Pretending that she is unaware of their presence in the room she opens the door without knocking. Frightened for them she quickly closes the door behind herself when she sees Clarise holding a book.

Chastising them she screams, "Have the two of you lost your damn minds! She could be kil't and you would surely be thrown in jail and your father disgraced for dis." She reminds them of the price that they risk. "It's my fault," they say in unison, each trying to take the blame. "That doesn't matter. This has to end!" Jasmine demands. "It will not." Daryl defies the well meaning mother figure. "Clarise, you and anyone who wants to learn should be able to learn and I will teach anyone who has the inclination," he promises. The woman glares at Clarise for it is her that Jasmine blames. I knew you would bring grief to this family," Mother Jasmine accuses. "It isn't me who brings grief. It is an unjust world," Clarise points out the truth to Mother Jasmine. The two young people believe their friend has gone mad when she begins to laugh hysterically. "Is da worl' s'pose to change for you gal or will you change ta fit into the worl'?" she asks the hopeful girl.

It is a sad day for Jasmine for she has broken her own rule - she cares about Clarise and the young Daryl Hannon Junior. For the first time in years she is scared about what the future may hold for all of those involved.

Forbidden Love

Months have passed since Jasmine caught the two reading. It is mid-Summer, a hundred and three degrees in the shade when the ruthless overseer, Martin, drives the workers all so hard out under the blazing sun. "Faster! Faster! If you bullshit around dis crop is gonna be lost to dis heat and I won't have dat on my watch," he assures the workers. Sweat pours from the black and white workers' brows. The black women have their tops tied just under their breasts. The ebony beauties skin glistens in the summer sun. Although he is hot and tired Martin still takes note of the bouncing flesh of the more than amply endowed black female workers that toil in the field. As could be expected a woman faints from her efforts under this unbearable sun. It is at that moment Duke arrives in the fields.

The angry plantation owner balls his fists up at Martin and screams at him, "Get someone to ten' to dat woman and get every one else under those shade trees for a time." Two black men jump quickly to the aid of the woman. They place her gently under the tree and give her water to drink while the other workers, white and black, follow their lead. Martin walks up close to Duke and whispers, "Yah making me look bad. If dey don't get back to work we's gonna lose dat crop." Laughing the more experienced man says to him, "You make yahself look bad. And as far as dat crop goes. If you kill my workers dat crop will die in the field and I'll be outta da price of my slaves as well, so if I give an order don't second guess me. I was overseer before you was born, boy." Feeling humiliated and wanting to get back at the elder Hannon the man mocks him, "Yah mus know er'ry thang's goin' on 'round yere den. Like yah son giving up on white women all together." The workers

Forbidden Love

all pretend that they aren't a party to the two men's conversation. The senior Hannon grabs Martin by the nape of his neck and squeezes. "What da hell yah talkin' bout Martin?" Grant can barely breathe. "If'n yah let me get some air I can tell yah," the overseer bargains. An infuriated Daryl Senior releases the man's neck. Glaring at Martin he awaits his answer. Too late the frightened man wishes he hadn't stirred up this hornet's nest, but now he has no choice but to tell what he knows.

"She done bewitched him is what it is. Since yah boy met dat nigga gal he ain't been wit' a white woman. Didn't yah even notice dat Donna gal never come back? And when is the last time he even went into town while he was home?" Martin points out. Pushing the agitator to the ground Duke storms off to confront his son.

Ominous is the air of his home for the first time for the master of the manor as he enters. The doors to Hannon Manor bursts open and an angry Daryl senior rushes in. "Daryl ...! Daryl ...! Where da hell are yah boy?!" he yells at the top of his lungs. The clever woman, Mother Jasmine, has guessed that somehow her master knows of the budding romance. Running from the kitchen her nerves rattled because it has been years since she has heard Massa Daryl sound so angry she asks, "Whats' wrong Massa Daryl? Whats wrong?" Heart filled with suspicion he glares at Jasmine "Was you part of da conspiracy too?!" he screams then grabs her by her arms. "I don't know what in da worl' yah talking 'bout Massa Daryl. Honest I don't," she lies. Deciding to believe her he pushes her away. "Dat gal ... she done

Forbidden Love

done put a spell on my boy. 'Cause ain't no Hannon ever gonna love no nigga woman. My son is destined for great thangs, so if'n I have to kill me a nigga to make it so, then it's on god's head not mine for letting dis happen."

Down on her knees Mother Jasmine kneels at her onetime lover's feet and pleads the young couple's case, "It ain't like dat massa Daryl. Clarise jus' being a good nigga, his mistress, liken you told her to be." Hoping she has convinced him Jasmine pauses and looks up at him. Wanting to believe her he listens for more. "You don't think young Massa Hannon would do such a shameful thang to you?" she reasons with him. Daryl Senior's expression softens. Then he bursts into laughter. It works. Jasmine smiles, relieved. "Of course yah right. Dat damned Martin got me so riled up I couldn't think straight is all," he excuses.

The father reflects on the terrible gossip. "Rumors like dat could keep him from the great future I have planned for him. We jus' gonna have to find him a white wife 'fore he finishes school," the father schemes. The older woman knows how headstrong the son can be. This time she hopes that the stubborn child will listen to reason. If not, god only knows what his father may do.

Thinking that today is none too soon to speak to his son about his plans the father searches the grounds of the plantation for Daryl Junior.

The day all so quickly stole away from the two sweethearts, Daryl and Clarise. An orange moon, unique to Louisiana summers, shines down upon two in

Forbidden Love

love. The young master Hannon has worked up his courage and takes Clarise into his arms and kisses her. The young woman melts into his arms. "Ohhh ...," she moans. "I wondered how long it was going to take before you kissed me," she teases. "I didn't want you to think that you had to do anything that you didn't want to do," he answers. "When you hold me in your arms I want to do everything and be everything dat yah want me to be," she confesses.

In the shadows, unseen by the pair of lovers, the father lurks. A nagging doubt has him eavesdropping to learn the truth of this thing between his son and the Negress "Does that mean what I think it means?" the young man asks Clarise. "You have to say it first," Clarise employs him. "I will ... I love you," the words flow from his lips like music on the wind. Her heart skips a beat as she answers his declaration, "... and I love you."

The elder Hannon has heard enough. As he skulks away from the two in love he pledges to himself, "I will change dat! On all dat I hold holy I will change dat!"

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 7
Between Father And Son

The kerosene lamp on the rickety table in the center of Martin's cabin gives off a light so dim the cabin seems to have a smokey effect. An outraged Daryl Senior sits upon a old wooden chair venting his frustrations upon his overseer. "Everyone is conspiring against me!" He looks at Martin. His next words are pure irony. "Yah da only one I can trust. We have to find a way to come between him and dat nigga!" The evil word is spat from his mouth. "I'll do whatever you ask of me Mr. Hannon." The conniving man sees an opportunity to ingratiate himself with his boss. "I have a plan." Duke assures his co-conspirator.

It is unusual for the young master Hannon to have any dealings with the despicable Martin Grant, yet just before dusk his father had instructed Daryl Junior to accompany the overseer into town. The two men were supposedly going for fertilizer that his father had forgotten the day before. The overseer looks constantly back over his shoulder then at the young master then laughs. At first Daryl Junior ignores the man, but a man can only tolerate so much foolishness before he reaches his limit. Having his fill of this nonsense he turns to Martin and demands, "What is so funny?" Martin shakes his head and answers, "Not'in ... ," but the man continues to laugh. Wanting to belittle the young man of privilege Martin begins to taunt him, "Yah so damned smart, ain't yah? Whatever yah want yah get?" Martin rants. "Are you trying to tell me something?" the young man asks. "I saw dat Negress first, but yah daddy wanted her to be yah mistress. Stead yah

Between Father And Son

had to go and fall in love with a nigga," Martin accuses. "I wonder ... how much dumber can a white man be ...?" Grant questions.

An enraged Daryl Junior grabs the loathsome man by his shoulders then tosses him from the moving wagon. Grabbing a hold of the reins he then pulls the horses to a halt. At first he looks down at the fallen man with contempt. Then it hits him. This trip isn't about supplies at all. Leaping down from the wagon he grabs Martin up from the ground by his collar. "If you don't want to die you had better tell me what's going on," he angrily threatens. Martin's laughter is laced with envy and hatred for the privileged young man. "Sure, I'll tell you. By now it's probably too late for you to do anything about it anyway," the loathsome man begins.

"Yah father knows 'bout you 'n da black bitch so he's gonna rape her. He figures yah won't want her after he's through with her," Martin reveals all.

A terrible storm bubbles inside the heir to Hannon Manor. With all of the strength he can muster Daryl Junior strikes Martin Grant in the face. The shallow man is knocked backwards, flat onto his back and rendered unconscious. The son unhooks one of the horses, jumps upon its back then rides hard back toward Hannon Manor.

The study of Hannon Manor is grander than any personal library in Louisiana. The mahogany bookcases are filled with some of the greatest literature ever written. It matches the majestic desk at which Daryl Senior now sits. The elder Hannon can't read, but he had this room built with

Between Father And Son

his son in mind. Now he sits here with a half empty fifth bottle of one hundred year old scotch sitting upon his desk. His glass is filled near the top, but this is his third glass of the potent drink. The door creeps open and Mother Jasmine peeks in. Seeing the state that Master Daryl Senior is in she enters then closes the door. It is her intent to console him.

The drunken man looks up to see who dares to disturb him. At first he laughs when he sees Mother Jasmine. Quickly his laughter changes to anger. "You knew! Don' lie!" he screams. "You knew! You know everything! Dat was what I liked most 'bout yah ... how much smarter you were than any woman ... hell ... you were smarter than any man I have ever known too. How could yah let dem do dis to me?" he asks. "You once said dat you loved me ...," the woman starts. He walks menacingly toward her. "Is dat what dis is 'bout, revenge?" he asks. Now it is Jasmine who laughs. "I've no need for revenge. I knew what loving you meant and I was grateful to pay da price. No, my point is that no one could no more stop them from falling in love than I could have stopped us all those years ago," she explains. Not wanting to think on the past Daryl Senior pushes Jasmine aside. "He won't want her after I'm through with her tonight," he threatens. It is then that Jasmine rushes to his side grabbing his arm. "Don't do dat massa. Please! You won't drive a wedge between him and her. Instead he will hate you." she assures him. "My son ... take the side of a nigga over his father. No way," he rebuts her claim. With pleading in her eyes she stares at him. "I'm right about dis," she speaks with quiet certainty. Angered beyond reason the father strikes out blindly then knocks Jasmine

Between Father And Son

down. The woman Daryl Senior had once proclaimed his love for hits her head on the edge of one of the mahogany book shelves. The senior Hannon has already started out of the room and doesn't see the blood at the back of Jasmine's head or the lifeless expression in her now dead eyes.

Minutes later the door to Clarice's room is kicked open. Surprised she looks up and sees an angry Daryl Senior. Confused and scared she begs of him, "Whats wrong Massa Daryl?" He slams the door shut then marches menacingly toward Clarise. "Is dat what you call my son? Or do you jus' call him Daryl? Maybe you call him sweetheart? What does a nigga call a white man she's in love with ...?!" he demands. Now the frightened slave girl knows that the master of Hannon Manor knows his son has committed the ultimate sin. He has fallen in love with a slave.

"We didn't plan it. It jus' happened," she pleads scared for her life. "Don't kill me Massa Daryl. Please don't kill me. I didn't do not'in wrong," she tries to reason with him. The two of them stand only two feet apart. The elder Hannon reaches out and tears open Clarice's blouse. Terrified she recoils away from his grasp. "I'm not gonna kill yah. Dat would be a waste of money and good slave stock. After I have you my son won't be able to look at you without knowing dat and whatever you two call love will die," he promises her.

From behind Daryl Senior and Clarise the door is pushed open again. This time it is Daryl Junior who stands in the doorway. The son stands glaring at his father. "You get the hell out of here now!" he orders his father. His father laughs at him with mocking disdain. "Dis is my house, my slave and you

Between Father And Son

are my son. I will do as I please here and with her. And you'll do as I tell yah," the father reminds his son of what is expected of him. "I'm going to count to ten and if you aren't gone from this room by then I swear that I am going to kill you," the young Hannon threatens.

A white ghostlike expression covers Duke's face. It is as if all the blood and emotion has drained from the man. His devastation runs to the core of his soul. With his head bowed low and voice cracking the man asks of his son, "You would truly go against yah own father for a nigga?" The son steps menacingly toward the father and answers him, "For a nigga no. For the woman I love, a proud African woman of the Namimba nation, yes." The elder Hannon pushes by his son and storms out of the room. A relieved Clarise rushes into the arms of the man she loves. The two lovers can hear the father as he rushes noisily down the stairs then soon after they hear the front door slamming shut behind him.

"I never wanted to come between you and your father," Clarise assures Daryl Junior. "I know." He answers her. "I know." He repeats.

In the dreary darkness of night the master of Hannon Manor stumbles down the stairs of his grand home. He is already more drunk than a man has any right to be, but his world has just crumbled before his eyes. The son he has killed for, lied for, built an empire for and loved more than his own life has turned against him for a woman. Worst still, it is for a black woman, a slave. There isn't enough liquor in all

Between Father And Son

the world to quiet that kind of pain, but tonight he will surely try to come close to consuming enough.

It is a wonder how the father has managed to make it to the bar in town in his state. It is beyond all understanding how he can continue to drink and remain conscious. In front of him sits his 2nd empty bottle of rye. Despite that a third bottle is close to half way being done in. Whores have come over and tried to sit with him, but tonight women are the last creatures in this world that he wants any parts of. This is a sorrowful night for Daryl Hannon Senior, a sorrowful night in deed.

It is the peculiar state of the world that when a person is at their seeming lowest is when the events and circumstances of one's life continues to go in a downward spiral. As the master of Hannon Manor sits in the bar trying to drown his sorrow a stranger has rode into town, a Wilbur Towson. The man, Wilbur, is Bart Towson's brother, the man whom Daryl senior had killed some years before. Wilbur Towson is a gunman and a ruthless killer. He has already killed Sheriff Clancy Monroe, beaten him to death, to get the name and location of his brother's killer from him.

A half drunken Martin wobbles down the street as Wilbur rides in to town. The gunman stops his horse in front of the overseer. "Where can I find a slave owner named Hannon?" he asks. Being a coward Martin readily points Towson toward the bar. To Martin's small credit, knowing the look of a gunman, Martin runs to the sheriff's office to get help.

The swinging doors to the bar open and Towson enters with his guns drawn. The patrons in the bar all

Between Father And Son

scamper for cover. "Which one of you sons of a bitch is Hannon?" he demands. Barely able to get to his feet Daryl Senior stands up and declares, "I am, you low life swine." Without speaking another word Wilbur shoots him down dead. The sheriff enters behind Towson and sticks his guns into Towson's back. "You can drop 'em or save this town the cost of a hanging," the sheriff warns. The coward drops his guns.

The trial only takes a day. Two days later they hang Wilbur Towson. In these times justice is swift and harsh.

On one side of the Hannon plantation slaves bury Mother Jasmine. On the other side of the plantation, on the same day that they bury Mother Jasmine, the master of Hannon Manor is also buried. No one can figure out how Mother Jasmine had died. Most assume that she had fallen while trying to clean one of the the higher shelves. It is a sad tribute or maybe poetic justice that the two lovers who couldn't share their lives do share their last day.

Like some demon's hand across his face melancholy smothers the new master of Hannon Manor's spirit. Daryl wrestles with this beast as he ponders a single question, "If his father had lived would he have ever forgiven him for his actions or would the ignorance that had poisoned his father's heart against Clarise have forever more been a barrier between father and son."

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 8
A New Day

The sun is shining brightly and the shadows of yesterday's mistakes have all but been forgotten. It is a new day at Hannon Manor. For some there is the hope for a better future. For young Master Hannon there are still a few conflicting emotions that haunt him, one of mourning and a second of despising his now dead father.

Some plans for the future have already been altered. The young master Hannon would not be going back to school. There is no one else to run his plantation. Martin offers to run things, but Daryl's father has warned him of how he had gotten control of Hannon Manor. The scoundrel Martin is cut from the same cloth as his father, rotten through and through.

The one thing he loves about this new life is that it affords him the opportunity to spend more time with the woman that he loves. When he isn't overseeing the day to day operations of the plantation he and Clarise are off riding or sitting in their favorite spot on the banks of his pond.

Today Daryl sits quietly and solemn. So plainly Clarise can read the pain in her lover's eyes. "Talk to me," she asks of him. "What is there to say? My father loved me more than any man has ever loved a son before, but he was an evil man. There is not a single thing about my father that I can think of that was worthy of being loved or mourned," he explains his dilemma. "Your father wasn't truly evil. He was a product of an evil time, a time when it is acceptable to enslave another human being. Remember he didn't have a chance to be educated or

A New Day

see more of the world than the evil that surrounds us. A better man ...? Yes he could've been that, but he was better than most of his peers and his love for you makes him worthy of mourning and of being loved." The woman offers in answer to his queries. The heartbroken son cries. His true love takes him in her arms and kisses his brows consoling him.

As in all things grief has its season. The living know that time for mourning has passed.

The dreams that the elder Hannon had for his son are no more, but the joy of loves promise grows stronger.

It has been two years since Daryl Senior and Mother Jasmine had passed away. Life has moved on. Crops have been sown, harvested and sold. Hannon Manor is even more prosperous under its new master's supervision. There is reason for celebration and others expect them to, so they do.

It is customary for the most successful of the plantations to throw a grand cook out. Although Daryl would prefer something small where he would be able to spend time with Clarise he knows that their relationship is already under scrutiny from his white workers as well as his white neighbors. In order to keep the peace with all he invites the suspicious parties. The times demand and he concedes to the tradition of whites celebrating with whites while the slaves have their own area for celebrating set up behind the barn. The two disappointed lovers, Clarise and Daryl, wish with all of their hearts that they could celebrate together, but they know that these times are far too dangerous for that.

A New Day

There are many serpents among the flowers of Hannon Manor the day of celebration. Albert Marshal, a grand dragon of the racist group the Knight Ghosts, and his very spoiled eight year old daughter Karen are in attendance at the celebratory bar-b-q. Albert stands off to the side with the sneaky Martin Grant. "I hear yah boss is in love with a black slave," Albert accuses. Not even Martin is stupid enough or evil enough to admit that to the Knight Ghosts leader. "All plantation owners have their black mistresses. He's no different than the rest," Martin covers for Daryl. The evil man doesn't believe Martin, but he lets the subject drop. "I thought that you were gonna join us Martin." Albert changes the subject. "I'm not much of a joiner." The overseer excuses. "It's important to all white folks dat we show a united front, especially southerners. There's talk of abolishing slavery. *Making niggas citizens of dis great country of ours.* If we don't stand together before you know it we won't stan' at all," the racist leader preaches his propaganda. "I better get back over dere 'fore dem Flanagans finish off all of da bar-b-q." Martin makes his excuses then rushes away.

A cute young girl of eight, Karen Marshal, comes over to Daryl and tugs at his shirt tail. A much older Daryl looks down at the pretty young girl and questions, "What can I do for you Karen?" Smiling up at him she answers, "You's one pretty man." Daryl laughs. "Why thank you," he answers the flirtatious little girl. "I'm gonna marry you one day," she predicts. Again Daryl laughs. "What you are going to do is break my heart one day by marrying some strapping young man and forgetting an old fart like

A New Day

me," the young man teases the even younger girl. "I know what I want. And I always get my way," she warns Daryl.

Just then Daryl spots his sweetheart, Clarise, peeking from behind the barn. He makes his excuses to Karen then sneaks off to be with the woman he loves. As Daryl comes around the corner to the back of the barn the mischievous Clarise leaps up into his arms. A surprised Daryl tries to get his balance, but can't. The two tumble backward onto the grass. They laugh and roll around on the ground. The two stop then stare deeply into each other's eyes. "I love you," the enamored youth tells his beautiful ebony princess. "I love you too," she assures him. Leaning down Daryl tenderly kisses her lips. They are rudely interrupted by taunting from the malicious little girl, Karen, "You kissed a nigga! You kissed a nigga!" There is hurt in Clarise's eyes over the filthy word the young girl calls her. No matter how many times one hears the word it still has the power to cut into your soul. An angry Daryl grabs a handful of small stones then begins tossing them at the girl. Some of the stones hit their mark. Karen cries. "I'm gonna tell my daddy dat yah hit me. And I'm gonna tell everyone dat you kissed a nigga!" she threatens. Angered Daryl picks up still more stones. The young girl turns and flees. A sullen Clarise turns to Daryl and warns, "You had better return to the other white folks. We don't need that kind of trouble." An exasperated Daryl agrees. Daryl kisses Clarise quickly on the cheek then turns and walks away.

As the new master of Hannon Manor returns to the white side of the cook out his white guests are all

A New Day

whispering among themselves. Although he shouldn't have been surprised he didn't expect the queer looks he received from his white guests. The silly girl, Karen Marshal, runs up to him and licks her tongue at him. Just as she had promised, "I tol' er'ryone ...!" She exclaims. Her father grabs her by the arm and jerks her away from his host. Albert Marshal walks closer to Daryl and whispers. "What a man does with his slaves is his own business, but you need to be a little more discrete. These are dangerous times young master Hannon. These are dangerous times," he repeats.

The last of the guests have gone. A drunken Martin Grant wobbles away toward his shack. The servants have cleared away most of the debris, the food and other remnants of the bar-b-q. The orange harvest moon lights the way as Daryl and Clarise stroll across the grounds of the Hannon plantation. "I have a surprise for you." The giddy young woman announces. They stop walking and look at one another. "... and what can it possibly be?" he asks with anticipation. His love reaches out and takes his hand. She then places his hand gingerly upon her belly. "I'm gonna have your child." she waits anxiously for his reaction. At first Daryl stands there stunned then he bursts into a joyous laughter. Grabbing Clarise into his arms he lifts her into the air then twirls her around. The night is filled with the magic of their love filled joyous laughter.

Things changed. From that day forward Clarise is treated by Daryl and the slaves of the Hannon plantation as the mistress of the manor. There is no longer the desire to put up the pretense of her sleeping in the room she had been given so long ago.

A New Day

The sun shines brighter, the flowers more redolent and the birds sing a sweeter song. For the first time Clarise turns over in the master bed then smiles as she looks upon the face of the man she loves as he awakens. Daryl's eyes twinkle as he opens them to find his sweetheart finally beside him as she awakens.

Reaching under the covers Daryl rubs Clarise's growing, round, full belly. "Ummm," she sighs contentedly. "It is so wonderful for you to be the first thing I see in the morning and the last thing I see at night," he confesses. "We still have to be careful. White folks might understand you having sex with your slave, but never you keeping her in your bed," she warns. The enamored young man stands up in the bed with his arms raised toward the ceiling. "To hell with white people! To hell with black people! To hell with everyone except us!" he proclaims loudly. Giggling Clarise puts her finger to her lips, shushing him.

As their day begins Daryl and Clarise take their usual route across the Hannon plantation. Cautious because Clarise is pregnant they are sure not to hold hands in front of any of the white workers, especially the untrustworthy Martin Grant. Like the weasel he is Grant spies their every movement. Gossip is the food for small minds, so of course everyone for miles around have speculated that Daryl is the father of Clarise's baby. No one dares to confront him because he is the richest land owner in the district therefore almost everyone depends on him to some degree or another for their livelihood. They all feign ignorance.

A New Day

With a touch of joy and a touch of melancholy Clarise remembers, "I wish Mother Jasmine was still here. Her face is more clearly etched in my memory than that of my very own mother. I wish she could have lived to see our child." This is the first melancholy note in a very long time. The mother-to-be cries, so her love takes her in his arms and comforts her. "Don't worry. Mother Jasmine will be here looking down over you when our child is born and watching over both of you in troubled times. Death won't cheat her out of her role of protector," Daryl speaks lovingly of the black woman who had raised him after his mother's death.

The time goes quickly. It seems that in the blinking of an eye nine months has passed. The night they have waited for is upon them. An anxious Daryl stands at the edge of the master bed. The slave woman Bertha, who has acted as mid-wife for all of the deliveries on the plantation since Mother Jasmine's death, now kneels upon the bed in between Clarice's legs. "Push girl! Push! He is almost here! ... just a little more!" the woman orders. The proud father is already beaming with joy. He has heard the mid-wife say "HE." When the elated new parent looks over to the bed he sees Bertha lifting the boy into the air and spanking his bare behind. The baby lets out a loud yelp, "Waahhh ...!" that fills every heart there with joy. "That's the cry of a healthy baby," Bertha notes.

The young father ventures closer. The mid wife hands the child to Daryl. Looking down upon his son's face he smiles. "We shall name him Daryl Hannon III. An expression of fear adorns Clarise's face. Without needing to be asked Bertha hastily takes her leave.

A New Day

"You can't do that. People jus' won't put up with a slave being named after his owner," Clarise cautions. "To hell with what people will or won't put up with. You and I have made a million concessions to please other people, but in this I will not be denied," the determined father declares.

A few of the white workers quit when they hear of the slave's offspring being named after the white master. Martin is just as appalled as anyone at the young master's audacity, jealous of his relationship with the African woman, but appreciative of the livelihood he makes on the Hannon plantation. He is going nowhere.

Days have passed since the new birth at Hannon Manor. Needing to get away Martin has gone to town. The jealous lout sits alone. He tries to drown his sorrows, envy and lack of ambition in a fifth of rye. The doors to the bar swing open and Albert enters with several of his Knight Ghosts associates. The grand dragon spots Martin sitting alone. Leaving his fellow Knights Marshal goes over to Grant. "May I join yah?" he asks. Not wanting company, but too scared to say no Martin doesn't answer. Instead he points to the empty seat beside him. Knight Ghosts leader raises his hand for a barmaid. When the young lady comes over to the table he instructs her to bring him a glass and the table another bottle of rye whiskey.

Quickly Marshal dives into the talk of the town, "I hear dat dere's been a birt' out at da Hannon plantation," the curious man comments. "One pickininy after another," Martin makes light of the

A New Day

new addition. "I hear dis one is different. I hear dis one is named after the master of Hannon Manor," Albert accuses. "What da hell does it matter what yah call a nigga. He's still not'in more den a nigga." the foul mouth man uses the offensive word again and again. "You jus' don't get it. Do yah?" Albert questions. "Every day the northerners are pressuring us more and more to abolish slavery and give blacks more rights. Do you know what happens to poor white trash like you if dat happens? A nigga will take yah job," he warns the overseer.

The two men gulp down their drinks then fill their glasses again. "What does all dat matter? He has the money and powerful friends in the north and the south. Dere ain't a damn thang we can do 'cept watch as he lets dem black folk take over Hannon Manor," Martin points out. Albert smiles. "If you agree to help me we can bide our time. A patient man is always rewarded with opportunity." The ignorant overseer nods his head, not having a clue as to what it is he has agreed to be a party to.

The leaves have turned red, golden, orange and brown as the fall season grows old. The year is slipping quickly away. With all of the talk of freedom for blacks. With the threat of the Knight Ghosts growing in numbers. The tumultuous times have Clarise and Daryl wondering what the future may hold for them and their child. As Clarise sits holding her newborn son, wrapped in a lamb skin blanket, while his father watches protectively over them she knows it is truly a new day at Hannon Manor. Her only question happens to be , " ... is it a Good Day or a Bad Day?"

CHAPTER 9
LITTLE AFRICA
When Evil Plots

A decade plus six years has passed since the birth of the child born to Clarise and Daryl. A sixteen year old Daryl Hannon III is called Repeat by everyone, so as not to remind white folks of his origins. Repeat races across the plantation. An amazing sight is that of his father close behind him riding a beautiful gray mare. The son reaches the fence ahead of his father and his prize mare. The father laughs as he pulls up next to the fence. "Damn you are fast. I didn't let you beat us. I swear." The father is in awe of his son's ability. Out of breath and panting the son gloats, "I didn't think you did, but maybe you should pay a little less on horse flesh the next time if it can't outrun a person." They laugh.

"Oh you are a joker." The father notes as he climbs down from his horse. Rushing over to his son Daryl playfully grabs a hold of him then pulls him over the fence to his side. The two begin to wrestle. After a few minutes of the horseplay the boy pins his now thirty nine years old father to the ground. He grins down at his father. "I finally pinned you! I finally pinned you!" he exclaims. The father takes his right leg raises it around the front of the boy and flips him off. Then Daryl jumps quickly on top of his son and pins him. "Don't count your chickens before they hatch," he instructs his son. The man and boy roll around gleefully on the grass. The mother watches them as she sits on the porch of Hannon Manor. Clarise's heart is so filled with happiness she is afraid it is going to burst. No one could have known that there wouldn't be many more

When Evil Plots

days like this for these three?

Like a boil, Martin Grant festers upon the Hannon family. His hate and envy quietly and secretly eating away at the lifeblood of this happy place.

It is a full day for the evil Grant. His day begins with driving the black slaves to their limit. As Marshal's lackey he spies on the activities of the loving mother, father, son and the goings on at Hannon Manor. This hateful man ends his day by going into town in hopes of drowning the remnants of his failed life.

It seems that Martin Grant spends more time in the local bar than he does on the plantation where he works and lives. This morning as he enters the bar he spies the powerful Knight Ghost leader Albert Marshal. As usual Albert talks with some of his Knight Ghosts associate. As Martin walks toward the man's table the racist leader rushes the others away. An intimidated Martin looks down upon the menacing man. "Do you want me to go or stay?" he asks. Pointing to a chair next to him the man informs him, "I was hoping to see you today." The overseer smiles, relieved. He sits down.

"How are things going out at the Hannon place?" Albert is quick to inquire. "Not'in ever changes out dere" Martin answers in disgust. "It looks like Mr. Lincoln is gonna become president. Do you know what dat means Mr. Grant?" Albert implies a danger. A puzzled Martin shrugs and answers, "Na. I'm not into politicking too much." The Knight Ghosts leader shakes his head, disappointed in the man. "You should be. If Mr. Lincoln wins da presidency dere's

When Evil Plots

gonna be a war between the north and the south. Mark my words." Albert foretells. He then pushes the bottle of rye over to Grant. The overseer pours himself a stiff drink then gulps it down. "Why was you hoping to see me Mr. Marshal?" Martin asks. "We have to make that move I told you about ... now Mr. Grant. Time is growing short for us white folks. No longer can we wait for opportunity. We must make our own," The Knight Ghost leader declares.

The cowardly Martin sees himself caught between a rock and a hard place. He doesn't want to do anything to put his job in jeopardy, but he knows that it wouldn't be wise to make enemies of a man like Albert Marshal. Reticently he listens as the wicked older man lays out his wretched plan.

There are times when Daryl and Repeat would work side by side in the fields with all the others who work the Hannon plantation. It is on just such an occasion that Martin sidles up to his boss and begins a conversation. "It looks like it's gonna be a bumper crop." Daryl looks at Martin suspiciously. The master of Hannon Manor can't recall the man ever having two words to say to him unless it was about supplies or managing the place. "Yeah. We'll make out pretty good this year." The clumsy Martin is trying to figure out how to maneuver the conversation in the direction Albert has instructed him. "I guess we'll be having another bar-b-q to celebrate," he adds. "I don't know. There was a lot of nonsense I didn't care for at the last one I ever threw." Daryl reminds Martin. This seems the perfect opportunity to begin to manipulate the man. "I think dere would be more nonsense if you don't. People are already talking'." Martin warns. "Who? Talking about

When Evil Plots

what?" a curious Daryl demands. "Dem's talkin' bout how da massa of Hannon Manor prefers the company of niggas to good white folks." Repeat glares at Grant when he hears the offensive word. The father grabs the man by his collar. "We never use that word around here." Daryl insists. The overseer throws up his hands. "I didn't mean no harm, but dat's da sort a thang dey been sayin'." Turning his back on the despicable man Daryl answers him, "Let 'em talk."

As instructed Martin sees this as the time to put the final nail into the coffin. "If'n talk was all dey was 'bout I wouldn't a brought it up." Recognizing a hidden threat in the man's words the master of Hannon Manor spins toward the man wearing an expression of anger and impatience. "Who is about what Martin?" he demands of the overseer. "It's jus' rumors. Like da rumors I heard las' month 'fore dey burnt out dem newcomers who was helping black folk." Martin implies more than he says. That is the last straw. Again grabbing the man by his collar Daryl lifts him up into the air. Kicking in mid-air, Martin's toes barely touch the ground. "Why you mad at me? I done not'in'," he questions his boss. "I want a name. Who is threatening me and mine?" Daryl demands. "Ain't no names. You knows how it is. The Knight Ghosts don't come at yah like dat. First you hear a word yere and dere then someone is hung or somebody's place is burnt to the ground. And nobody ever sees not'in," again he warns. This only serves to anger Daryl even more. "Then you spread this rumor ... If anyone comes to Hannon Manor with so much as a match in their hands the Bayou will run red with blood!" he threatens. "I can do dat if yah truly wants me to, but I think dere's a better way."

When Evil Plots

A way where no one gets hurt," the weasel of a man has began to implement the other even more evil man's plan.

Repeat looks at his father and shakes his head, trying to warn him not to trust this scoundrel. The father looks to the untrustworthy man for an answer because his first concern must be for the safety of all. The scheming man grabs the father by his hand and leads him away from prying ears.

Days later Clarise is surprised and delighted to see Daryl dressed and going out for a change. "Don't you look handsome." she compliments him. "There's a cotillion and I thought it important for all of us that I make an appearance there." he answers sullenly. The woman understands that he must keep up appearances. Tenderly and lovingly she lifts his lips into a smile. "Don't worry. I understand. Anyway, you deserve to go out into the world and enjoy yourself. It isn't right that you have to be a prisoner on this place because of me," she apologizes. He kisses her lips. "I'd rather be a prisoner in hell with you than dancing the night away at the most luxurious cotillion," he truthfully answers her. A smile lights the woman's face. "Get out of here. And don't come back until you have had you a good ole time." she cajoles him. Still his heart is heavy, because he hasn't told Clarise the complete truth about tonight.

The overseer is dressed in a tacky gray suit. He drives the carriage that takes Daryl to the cotillion at Marsters Hall. This plantation is the second largest plantation in the region. The owner of the plantation, Garfield Marsters, is the fourth

When Evil Plots

generation of plantation owners in his family. Wealthy in his own right is Garfield, but a crueler or more racist man you were not likely to meet anywhere. Though he feels his gentleman' status won't allow him to be a member of a group such as the Knight Ghosts he supports them in every other way that he can, including financially.

It is Garfield and Albert who greet Daryl as he steps down from his carriage in front of Marsters Hall. "I'm so glad that you could make it Daryl. I know that plantation of yours keeps you busy." There's the hint of sarcasm and ridicule in the man's words. Ignoring his host Daryl turns to the man he knows is truly pulling all of the strings here tonight, Albert Marshal.

In anticipation Martin Grant jumps down from the driver's seat. He stares at Garfield. The master of Marsters Hall addresses the work hand, "Yah can go 'round back with the servants." The overseer hesitates. Foolishly he had thought that he would be allowed to attend the elite event. It was almost laughable. "You may go." the aristocrat dismisses the lowly farm hand. With head bowed low Martin makes his way around to the back of the house.

The master manipulator Albert takes Daryl by his arm. "There are a lot of people here from the capital that I think you should meet. Your father's aspirations for a political career for you need not have died with him," the evil man would tempt Daryl with some golden carrot. The master of Hannon Manor eases his arm from Albert's grasp and follows him. "Lead the way. After all it is your party." Daryl

When Evil Plots

let's Albert know that he knows who is in charge. "No. It's Mr. Marsters party, but I do like to keep my hand in things." Albert denies being in control.

It is a whirlwind of a night. The master of Hannon Manor is introduced to senators, governors, powerful men of industry and gentlemen plantation owners like himself. Some of the conversations Daryl finds offensive. "I bought me this beautiful young black Negress. I tell yah, she was a hellion to break in, but now she is as tame as that stallion I had my nigga Jeffrey break. Hell maybe I should have had Jeffrey break her for me too," one plantation owner kids. Many of the men gathered around found this tale amusing, not Daryl. Senator Swanson asks Daryl if he is truly interested in a career in the public arena. He admits more to himself than to the others that politics was more his father's dream than it had ever been his own. The senator assures him that there are many advantages to be gained by such a life. Then the senator tells Daryl that a man must be willing to compromise his own interests for the "greater good." The greater good the senator speaks of is whatever is asked by the persons who benefit you most financially.

The principled young man has had enough of these boorish oafs and insufferable bigots. In hopes of finding an escape he goes out onto the beautiful veranda of Marsters Hall. Although he hasn't forgotten the obnoxious ways of a younger Karen he is almost relieved when it is the beautiful, now grown, Karen Marshal who finds him on the porch. "I don't care much for these things either, but being in polite society does have its obligations, now doesn't it?" she questions him. "I wouldn't know.

When Evil Plots

I've never considered myself a part of polite society," he assures her. The lilt of a light laugh escapes Karen. "You jus' insists on being a rebel, don't you, Mr. Hannon?" she accuses him. "It's not my intention Miss Marshal. It just seems to work out that way," he assures her.

Again Daryl finds himself being pulled by the arm. This time it is Karen pulling him back inside Marsters Hall then out onto the dance floor. "Is it your intention to deny me a dance this evening?" she flirts with Daryl. Realizing that all eyes are upon them he pretends to succumb to her charms. "No. That is definitely not my intention," he allows himself to be led out onto the dance floor. The women smile. The men nod in approval. Everyone is glad to see the rich white owner of Hannon Manor is finally dancing and flirting with a beautiful white woman.

The next few weeks are very strange indeed on the Hannon plantation. Clarise and Repeat don't understand why Daryl is spending so much of his time away from them and the plantation lately. Nor do they understand why he is being so secretive. One of the things that the mother and son loves most about the man is how honest and open he is. They are fearful of what is being kept from them.

Meanwhile Daryl has began courting the daughter of the Knight Ghosts leader. This is the plan that the two evil men had hatched. It was Martin's task to tell Daryl that he believed the young man could probably placate the Knight Ghosts by marrying a white woman. The naive overseer has no idea that Karen is Albert's daughter. The Knight Ghost leader,

When Evil Plots

Albert Marshal, figures that once the two are married he will think of a way for his daughter to gain control of Hannon Manor.

Because Daryl either lacked the courage or simply did not know how to tell the woman that he loved of his plans Clarise is blindsided. It is like a knife through her heart when the trusting woman receives a telegram telling her that Daryl will return in one week from his honeymoon with the new mistress of Hannon Manor, Karen. The distraught woman doesn't know what to make of all of this. What else could she believe except that Daryl has tired of his black mistress and now has entered into a serious relationship with someone with whom he can share a complete life.

The evil plot brings with it a terrible toll. It is destroying the wonderful life of three good people.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 10
The New Mistress of
Hannon Manor

A gray misty fog settles over the Hannon plantation. It is as if nature is trying to warn them of the malevolent force that approaches.

As usual Martin has the slaves hard at work in the field. A vigilant Repeat stands by the overseer's side. The son of the master of Hannon Manor works twice as hard as any man there, trying to prove his worth to all. The overseer walks over to the water bucket and scoops himself a tin cup full of water from the bucket. A horse drawn carriage with Daryl and Karen inside passes by the workers and Grant. The excited son throws down his hoe and runs ahead of those in the carriage to the main house. The evil Grant waves to the returning couple as the carriage goes by. Secretly he gloats that their plan has succeeded. The villainess Karen sees the overseer as unworthy to note. Daryl believes Martin is now and has always been merely a necessary annoyance, so he ignores him. "Mama, mama ..." Repeat calls out as he nears the house. In front of the main Manor Clarise and other house slaves stand waiting. The hurt woman sees the carriage and knows that she has to keep her emotions in check. Holding onto her hopes that she is wrong, she now can only pray that there is some other explanation for Daryl's hurtful actions, but hope seems an unlikely companion to the truth.

The former mistress of Hannon Manor walks toward the carriage as it approaches in order to greet the new mistress of Hannon Manor. Just ahead of the carriage Repeat reaches the house and his mother's side. The carriage pulls up in front of the main house then

The New Mistress of Hannon Manor

stops. The door to the carriage opens and Daryl exits. Reaching back into the carriage he helps Karen down. The two stand there for a moment surveying the grounds of the Hannon plantation. Although it's only been a few weeks it seems like a lifetime to the flustered man. He knows that he has a lot to make up for and a lot more to explain to the woman that he loves. For now though he tries to carry off this facade as best he can.

The father turns to his son and snaps at him, "Do you need an invitation to get these bags son ..." he catches himself and quickly changes his address, "... boy?" Karen glares at Daryl and his son. Except for his golden brown skin Repeat is the spitting image of his father. The young man hurries to the buggy. Bowing his head, so as his eyes and Karen's do not meet, he reaches for the bags. "No sir. I have them." he answers. Taking the two large bags down from the carriage he then rushes pass Karen and his father up the stairs and into the house. Finally it is his mother's turn to be tested. Clarise approaches Daryl and Karen. The newlyweds walk toward the black woman. All three stop when they reach one another. "I'd like to welcome you home Massa Daryl," she respectfully addresses him. The woman then turns to her rival. "... and welcome to your new home Mistress Hannon." Clarise lets Karen know that she understands who is now the mistress of Hannon Manor.

Quickly Karen makes known her true nature. Without speaking to Clarise she turns to Daryl. "I know bein' a woman in all it's not my place to say, but I ain't never known niggas to speak as proper as yours

The New Mistress of
Hannon Manor

Daryl. I tell yah it's a bit disconcerting," she notes. Then the woman leans in and whispers to Daryl, "It's the uppity ones like dis dat joined dat Nat Turner and kil't all of dose good white folks." An impatient Daryl has had enough. Roughly he grabs his new bride by her arm and even more roughly he ushers her up the stairs and into the house.

Impatient plotters don't wait. Karen's first night - under the cover of darkness - each clandestine rendezvous begins. Although he dreads having to face Clarise after the way he has handled things Daryl makes his way across the plantation grounds. When Clarise had received the message about Daryl getting married she moved out of the main house and took one of the empty supply cabins then renovated it into her new home. Still cautious Daryl takes a last look around then knocks on her door. The door opens and the hurt lover stands there wearing a blank look. Unsure of what he should do or expect Daryl questions Clarise, "May I come in?" Without answering him she steps aside and ushers him in. The night wasn't half as cold as the reception Daryl received. The door closes behind him.

The wary lover tries to take Clarise in his arms to comfort her. Pulling away she then turns her back to him. "Don't do this Clarise." Daryl pleads with her. The cynical woman turns and faces the man who has betrayed her confidence. The pain is evident on her face. "I's sorry massa ..." she mocks what they have had. Making light of the terrible treatment she expects she begins to take off her clothes and offers herself t o him, "If'n it's sex yous wan' I's

The New Mistress of
Hannon Manor

glad to service yah." Now it is Daryl who is hurt and angry. Grabbing her hand he stops her. With tremors of anguish reverberating in his voice he pulls her close and reminds her, "That isn't fair. I have never treated you like that."

Meanwhile outside the cabin Daryl Hannon III, Repeat, stands in the shadows eavesdropping. He wonders too what has come between his mother and father. The young man pulls further back into the shadows as others pass by him and the cabin.

Inside the cabin glaring into her lover's eyes she demands, "How did you expect me to react? I knew that you could never marry me, but despite that I believed in my heart that I would always be the mistress of Hannon Manor just the same." Turning away from Daryl, fearful of his answer she asks, "Do you love her?" Taking Clarise's hand he then tenderly turns her to face him. Softly he kisses her lips then answers, "I don't even know how you could ask me that," he showers Clarise's face with tender small kisses then stares into her eyes. "I never have and never will love anyone except you," he answers. With tears welling up in her eyes a relieved loved one throws her arms around the neck of the man she feels so deeply for then kisses him again and again. Just as suddenly she stops and pulls away from him then turns and walks away. "What?" he asks. She turns to him again.

"Then why did you marry this woman?" the question demands to be answered. With a heavy heart the

The New Mistress of Hannon Manor

master of Hannon Manor unburdens himself for he knows that Clarise will never let this question go until it is answered. "I didn't want to alarm you or Daryl, but you both have a right to know. The Knight Ghosts are growing here in Kelly," he starts. "That's frightening but what does it have to do with us?" she interrupts. "I had heard rumors, but last month while in town Martin confirmed that they were planning on coming out here and burning this place to the ground." Now she knew why the mock marriage.

Now Clarise crosses the room to Daryl then wraps her arms around him. "Has the whole world gone mad? Why would they want to do such a thing?" seeking a rational answer for irrational people. "The Knight Ghosts see our love as an insult to white women and fear my acceptance of you as a threat to their ideology and power," he explains. The woman shakes her head. "I understand why you did what you did, but believe me it won't stop hateful evil men from acting," she warns. He nods his head, agreeing. " ... but it will buy us time to find a solution," he speaks hopefully. "What's to become of us?" Clarise wonders aloud. "I wish I knew." Daryl echoes her doubts.

The young Daryl Hannon III had all the answers that he sought. He turns and walks away, not wanting to intrude on his parents' privacy any further.

On the other side of the plantation another clandestine rendezvous takes place. The light of the full moon shows through the diaphanous white nightgown that Karen wears as she makes her way across the plantation grounds. As she passes male

The New Mistress of Hannon Manor

slaves still working in the field or standing around they divert their eyes downward. They know that to look at a woman such as her is to invite trouble. Finally Karen reaches her destination, the shack of the overseer, Martin Grant. The brazen hussy knocks once on the door then enters without waiting for an answer.

The inside of the cabin is lit by a single kerosene lamp. The mattress on the small bed is lumpy. The floors are rickety to say the least, but Karen is not here for the ambiance.

Standing much like a sentinel on duty Martin is speechless as he stares at the beautiful half naked wife of his boss. Frozen from fear and not daring to move he watches as Karen crosses the room. "Are you going to invite me in?" she asks the stunned man. He still fails to speak. The vixen sits down upon his bed. She fidgets on the bed trying to get comfortable. Finally she gives up, sits still then looks over at the vexed man. Finally the fear filled man walks over to the door and leans nervously against it closing it shut. His action is in hopes of preventing a surprise visit from an irate spouse.

"Aren't you the least bit cold in dat outfit?" he wonders aloud. The wicked woman laughs. "On da contrary ... I'm feeling rather hot. If you get my drift," she answers suggestively. It is then that Karen stretches out across the bed all so provocatively and licks her lips. It is an involuntary reflex when the man smiles at the delicious sight before him. "Where is your husband?" the cowardly man inquires. An exasperated Karen

The New Mistress of
Hannon Manor

frowns. "Let's not start out on the wrong foot," she warns Martin. "What do you mean?" a truly puzzled Grant asks. "The wrong foot ... you treating me as if I am some stupid schoolgirl who doesn't know the score. If everyone else around here knows my husband is -shacked up- with his black whore than you had better assume that I know," she is candid with the frazzled man. Wearing a look of surprise he walks toward the bed and Karen. "You know about Clarise?" he asks. "Is dat her name? I wouldn't know dat. I never call niggas by dear given names. I figure boy or girl will suffice." she makes plain her evil nature. Martin stops in the middle of the room, knowing that this woman is nothing except trouble and to proceed further is likely to be his undoing. "If you know den why did you marry him?" curiosity drives him to ignore caution. "My daddy made me marry him. You see, my maiden name is Marshal." The man is truly confused now. The plan that Albert Marshal laid out was for Daryl to marry a woman connected to the Knight Ghosts, but for his own daughter to be married to a nigger lover ... didn't make any sense to Martin. "Your father is Albert Marshal, the grand dragon of the Knight Ghosts?" he says it aloud hoping it will somehow make more sense to him, but it still does not.

Wickedly the Knight Ghost princess lips curl into a smile and she answers the fool intentionally in a slow sexy southern drawl, "Dat's right!" The beleaguered man finishes his walk across the room and sits down upon the bed beside the evil creature. Head in his hands he tries to make sense of all that is transpiring around him. "Why would your daddy want you to marry a man who he knows is in love with

The New Mistress of Hannon Manor

a black woman?" he surrenders to his ignorance and asks, "My daddy frowns on killing white folks, especially ones wit' rich and powerful friends," she begins. "It was always my daddy's intention for me to be the wife of the Master of Hannon Manor. Your rumors and my feminine wiles brought dat a 'bout." Karen moves closer to Grant. "You're mistress of Hannon Manor, but you still have the same problem, you can't or won't kill him," Martin reminds her.

Rolling the straps of the nightgown from her shoulder Karen smiles suggestively. The nightgown falls away exposing her lovely breasts to Martin. "Why do yah think I'm here?" she informs him. Then the wretched woman pulls his face to her breasts. The weak man kisses her breasts. Pulling his head away from her body she stares into his eyes. "First your word ... that when I ask you for my payment you will be equally as anxious to please me," she demands. It is Martin's turn to smile. "What's to stop me from lying to you?" the ever cautious man wants to know where he stands. "You ain't rich, so my daddy would have you strung up almost as fast as he would hang a nigga," she tells the lowly overseer. The harlot then rubs her hands across Grant's chest under his shirt. "Besides, if you do as I ask, when I ask, I may make you the next master of Hannon Manor." she leads him on. Again the woman pulls the man toward her. This time she kisses his mouth hungrily. When they separate again she stares into his eyes awaiting his answer. "You can count on me." He surrenders. Karen Marshal Hannon pulls Martin Grant's body down on top of her own body. The two of them lose themselves in this forbidden affair.

The New Mistress of
Hannon Manor

The new mistress of Hannon Manor has made her preparations there is little to do now, but wait until the right opportunity presents itself.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 11
War Changes All

As Albert Marshal has many times predicted Mr. Lincoln has become president and the north and the south are at war.

Many of Daryl's neighbors go off to join the south in defending their way of life. Not believing in slavery Daryl won't join their fight, but he also will not take up arms against his neighbors, so he doesn't join the union forces either. Because of his powerful friends on both sides he is able to straddle the fence without dire consequences.

War is like a cancer. It spreads until it consumes everything. Eventually the war strikes closer to home for all. Taking a neutral posture Daryl lends aid to both sides. His slaves mend the wounds of rebels as well as union soldiers and no one is refused food, shelter or supplies. Some on both sides resent him, but know that they benefit more from his continued neutrality because of the powerful friends he has.

The rebel sympathizer, Garfield Marsters, doesn't go off to war, but he is a staunch supporter of the confederacy. The embittered union forces come through Kelly. What they don't loot from Garfield's place they burn to the ground. Four generations of work is wiped out in a single afternoon. He and his men fight valiantly in their losing cause, if there is ever truly anything valiant about war. Their bodies are left strewn across the remnants of a once proud estate.

As in all things good or horrific the war ends and

War Changes All

those who have survived its carnage return home. Many of the south's sons return to find that all that they had fought for has been lost. A bitter brine is this to swallow.

Life resumes. For Martin Grant that means his usual trips into town to drink as is the staple tonic for his ailing soul. Union soldiers still occupy Kelly. Some sons of Kelly have returned home with less than savory characters they have met in the war. As Martin makes his way to the bar a Willard Marsters calls out from his seat. "Dere's one of dem cowards who wouldn't choose a side. He stayed home, safe and prospering on our blood."

The resentment filled man gets to his feet. "Yeah ... He was safe while just miles away my brother was dying and my home was being torched. "One of the captain's of the union garrison, Eric Banner, enters the bar. He spots Willard standing in the middle of the bar with his hand at his side, near his gun. Banner asks, "Is there a problem here?" The last of the Marsters answers, "Dis is between two southerners, so mind yah damn yanky bizness." The captain laughs. "There's truly nothing I'd like more than to let you dirty rebs kill one another, but it is my business to keep the peace down here, so ... you will have to take this somewhere else if you insist on killing one another." The ex-rebel turns toward the captain. Willard goes for his gun, to draw on Banner. The captain is faster. The younger Marsters lies dead on the floor. Soldiers then pour into the bar.

"Take all of their guns from them," the captain instructs his men. He turns to the other ex-rebels.

War Changes All

When you're ready to get out of town you can pick up your guns from the sheriff's office," he informs them. There is a grumbling among the men, but they surrender their guns all the same.

This was just the start of animosity between the ones who had gone to war and the ones who hadn't.

Some of the last men to return home are Albert Marshal and his two sons, Derek and Clyde. They stop off at the Hannon plantation to see his daughter and their sister on their way home. An elated Karen runs down the stairs of Hannon Manor to their side. Tears almost come to the usually unfeeling Karen's eyes when she sees that her brother Clyde has lost one of his legs in the war. Kneeling down beside him she gives him a hug. The father-in-law looks up and sees Daryl as he exits the main house. The man smiles an insincere smile. "Daryl! I see dat you've managed through these hard times. And taken good care of my little girl too," he greets his son-in-law with empty flattery. The master of Hannon Manor makes his way down the stairs to his in-laws side. He shakes hands with her father and brothers in turn.

The two brother-in-laws, Derek and Clyde, find it hard to hide their contempt for this man. "I think it's the other way around. It's your daughter who has taken good care of me," Daryl lies. Everyone skates on the thin ice of deceit, believing there is still something to be gained from this continued alliance. "Come on in. I had my people prepare a feast as soon as I heard that you would be coming this way." Daryl patronizes his in-laws.

Later that same evening Karen, Daryl, Albert and the

War Changes All

two brothers sit around the table in the main dining room preparing to eat. There are steaks, chicken, homemade bread, cakes and pies. There is lemonade, orange juice, wine, rye whiskey and a homemade beer - compliments of one of Mother Jasmine's old recipes. The brothers have the table manners of pigs. Albert hits both men more than once during the meal to remind them of their manners. Clarise enters carrying a large bowl of fresh fruit salad. As she walks by Derek he grabs her ass. An enraged Daryl jumps up and knocks Derek from his chair. The brother-in-law jumps up and pulls a knife on his brother-in-law. A much calmer Albert takes control of the situation. "Wooo boys. It's jus' a misunderstanding. We's family and family ain't gonna fight over no Negress. Now are we?" An insincere Derek laughs and shakes his head. "Hell naw. Dere's better reasons than that to fight, if'n one's lookin' for a reason." Daryl and Karen frown, he at her family, she because of his concern for his black whore, as she sees it.

The black woman leaves the room. The wife excuses herself and heads out, going to meet her lover, Martin. The men sit back down and eat and drink some more.

After the meal is over Albert sends his sons on their way home. He stays on to talk with Daryl. "We committed everything and lost everything in dat damnable war. I wish I had been as smart as you and not picked sides. Hell ... what's done is done. I jus' gotta figure a way to get back on my feet." the father-in-law hints. "Don't worry about a thing Albert. I will lend you enough to get your trading business back up and running again. Like you said,

War Changes All

we're family. We have to look out for one another," Daryl hints at the protection from the Knight Ghosts his father-in-law can provide.

For once Albert is as honest as circumstances allow him to be, "I will do everything I can for my family, but you must understand there are a lot of bitter people cause of the war and there will come a time when even I won't be able to hold 'em in check." Daryl nods his head, quite clear on Albert's warning.

After his in-laws have all parted father and son walk across the grassy knolls of their Hannon plantation. They each carry a handmade fishing pole on their shoulders. They reach the small lake where they have fished side by side since the son was smaller than the pole he now carries. Laying down their poles the two of them stare up at the lake blue skies above. The father turns on his side and looks at his son. "I hope you know that I love you and that I'm proud of the fact that you are my son," he offers in the way of an apology for the way he has had to act in front of others. "Sometimes I wonder." Repeat honestly answers his father. "Never doubt that son. Everything I do or say to the contrary is to protect you, your mother and the others on this plantation," he assures his son. "Why are you telling me this now?" Repeat questions.

The father stands up and looks around to be sure that no one is eavesdropping on them. The young black man stands up. The two begin to walk. "The south lost a lot in the war. Sons were lost. Men came back to find that their homes were burnt to the ground. A way of life that many had cherished was

War Changes All

forever changed ...," the son interrupts his father," ... and it should have been!" Daryl nods agreeing. "I know son, but now there are men who are looking for someone to blame for their losses. Those same men are looking for someone to take their frustrations out on." Again the young man stops his father. "You think that they're gonna kill us ... don't you?" Repeat wonders aloud. The master of Hannon Manor assures his son, "I'm never going to let that happen." The son turns away from his father. He looks out toward the many white workers on the plantation and asks, "What can one man do against a mob of fanatics?" A vague answer the father offers his son, "I can put you out of harm's way. ..." but the outlines of a plan is in his thoughts.. "What do you mean?" the son asks. "The government has set aside land in the Oklahoma Territory as a Black and Indian settlement. You are going to take yourself and others there and stake claims on land there." Unsure of the details of this plan Repeat questions his father further, "How can I do that?" The two men stop walking. Again the father looks around before speaking to his son, "I'm going to give you gold, jewels and money, more than enough for all of your needs. First you will go straight north. Once you are far away from here you will buy the supplies for you and the others then make your way to the Oklahoma Territory, where you will settle." Grabbing his son by the shoulders Daryl stares intently into his eyes. "Trust no one! And know that there will be bounty hunters looking for you!" He warns. "Traveling with women and children it won't take the bounty hunters long to catch up to us," the son points out. "Let me take care of that. I promise you that you will have a pretty good lead on them," the father predicts.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 12
The Surprise

It is a festive season. Christmas is only a few weeks away. Decorations adorn the Hannon plantation. Some pretend to set animosities aside. There are many carriages outside of the manor itself this night. Daryl is throwing a pre-Christmas bash for his lovely wife, Karen. Anyone who is anyone in Kelly is here. Before the war the Hannon plantation was one of the grandest in the district, but after the war it is one of the few plantations anywhere whose splendor stands virtually untouched by the war. Many resent him for it, but now more than ever they are dependent on Daryl's good will for their livelihoods.

Inside the manor guests dance to the music provided, mingle and gossip or simply roam the manor enjoying its splendor and the fact that they are still a member of the elite and still invited to such a function. Karen doesn't have any true friends, but the one person who attaches herself to the new mistress of Hannon Manor is a social butterfly by the name of Lilly Longstreet. The two stand looking at the magnificent buffet that Clarise and the other ex-slaves have put out. Lilly is rightfully impressed with their plenty. Turning to her hostess she comments, "Dere' ain't a lot of southern tables dat can still boast of such bounty Karen." Just then Daryl happens by the two women. "And believe me we thank god every day for our blessings Miss Longstreet," the master of Hannon Manor assures her. "If'n god had been half as kind to the confederacy we would have won the war," a bitter Lilly answers. "I don't presume to understand god's plan," Daryl offers a subtle instruction to Lilly.

The Surprise

The servants enter with food and drink then exit. Bob, an ex - slave, enters carrying a bottle of champagne. He begins to refill everyone's glass. People look toward Daryl in anticipation. The drunken overseer has been allowed to attend this function for he is a key player in the hand being dealt. "What's dis surprise dat you planned for Karen?" the drunken man blurts out. Everyone turns and glares at the inebriated fool. "I had intended to wait a moment longer, but since the cat's out of the bag ..." he turns to Karen. "With the holiday season upon us I thought as a special treat for my beautiful wife she might like to go shopping in New York City. I made hotel reservations and the train leaves tomorrow and returns in two weeks, just before Christmas.

The spoiled, but delighted young woman runs to Daryl and wraps her arms around his neck. She showers his face with kisses. Turning to her guests she asks, "Isn't he da best?" Envious, socialite Lilly glares at the seemingly happy couple. Her voice is rank with jealousy. "Da best," Lilly mimics the hostess. Karen turns to Daryl once again. "We're gonna have the best time." Martin glares at Karen. The wretch can barely conceal his jealousy. "I thought you knew that you will be going alone. I have too much work to do, inventorying things, planning for next season's crop and a thousand other things that I cannot assign to anyone else," he explains. The brat pouts. "I don't want to go by myself. What fun would dat be?" Karen whines.

As the party moves out into the garden the guests all talk about the extravagant gift of a New York shopping spree. The garden is well lit and the band

The Surprise

plays on. Some dance, others still eat or just mill about. Unseen by most Martin squeezes Karen all too tightly as he dances with her. The part of the garden where the two adulterers dance is darkened by shadows, so he feels safe. Despite this fact Karen pulls away and glares at Grant. He pulls her back into his arms then in a venomous tone her lover chastises her, "You seemed awful happy when you thought you were going to New York wit' yah husband." She laughs. "Don't be an ass. I would be suspect if I were to react in any other way," she excuses her actions. Again Martin pulls her even tighter to him. "I would like to have you all to myself in New York for two weeks," he says suggestively. "Then I will jus' ask my husband if'n yah can escort me," she answers smiling wickedly. The overseer becomes frightened because he sees that Karen is serious. "I hope dat yah jokin'," the coward almost pleads.

Again the evil woman laughs. "Do yah really think dat he doesn't already know 'bout us. The slaves love him. Surely one of 'em has said sometin' by now," she assures Martin. "Then why ain't I dead?" he wonders aloud. "Cause he don't give a damn 'bout what I do. As long as you keep me happy he can spend more time wit' his black whore." she explains.

Instead of being offended Martin smiles, relieved. Do you truly believe he would let me take yah to New York?" the doubtful man asks. Smiling the conniving Karen assures him, "When I finish manipulating him he'll be begging me to take you," she exaggerates.

Minutes later on the front porch of the Hannon Manor, Daryl Hannon Jr. sits alone, drinking a glass

The Surprise

of lemonade. He can hear the musicians playing from around the side of the house. The sound of lovers giggling in the shadows disrupts his thoughts. The doors to the main house open. His wife, Karen, exits carrying two glasses of corn liquor. They spot one another. The woman walks over to her husband and takes his lemonade then hands him a glass of corn liquor. "It'll put hair on your chest." they smile at one another. The vixen slides in close to Daryl on the porch swing. Beginning her game she leans her head against his shoulder as if they were the picture of a loving couple. "Dat was mighty sweet of yah. Wantin' me to enjoy myself while yah toil over ledgers," she pretends to thank him. Looking down into her eyes he then begins to weave a well calculated plan, "I know I haven't been a very good husband to you." The sly woman sits up, places her finger to his lips and silences him. "I knew yah didn't love me when yah married me. Dis ain't no marriage of love. It's a marriage of mutual consideration," she pauses that he might think on her words then she continues, "Like dis trip. You were considering my needs." Daryl points out, "It sounds kind of empty." Vigorously shaking her head she pretends to disagree with his assessment, Karen answers, "I beg to differ. Love fades, but two considerate companions can share dat to the grave." Daryl nods, yes ... a continued party to this pretense.

"I guess there are worst things for two people than sharing an understanding," he pretends to agree.

The scheming woman decides the foundation has been laid. It is time for her to make her move. Sliding over even closer to her husband on the swing she

The Surprise

starts, "Can I be brutal in my honesty wit' you?" she asks. "I think that we owe each other at least that much." he answers. "I know dat Clarise is da only woman you will ever love. I don't understand how a white man can love a Negress, but I know dat it's true," she confronts him. Not wanting to be on the defensive Daryl brings up her dalliances, "As long as we're being honest with one another, I know that you're screwing the hired help." Karen figures that in order to get what she wants she is going to have to be the diplomatic one, so she answers him, "I could have been jus' as callous in my appraisal of yah feelings for da Negress, but I wasn't." Daryl acknowledges his lack of fairness. "You are right and I'm sorry." he apologizes. "Look. I know dat da only reason yah sending me away is so dat yah can spend more time wit' her and in all fairness I would 'preciate da same opportunity," she makes her vague request. The clever husband understands, but it is part of the plan to feign ignorance. "You've lost me." The crafty woman knows her husband is not a stupid man. She answers, "No I haven't. You know exactly what I'm saying." He laughs. "You want me to send Martin along with you to New York?" he says what they are both thinking. "Dat's only fair. Ain't it?" Karen asks in the most gentle feminine southern drawl she can manage.

All has been decided between Daryl and Karen. Impatient Karen makes haste to join her lover as soon as the guests are all gone. Most of the others of the Hannon plantation have retired for the evening, At the same time Karen meets her lover Daryl stealthily makes his way to Clarise's cabin. The door is unlocked in anticipation of his visit.

The Surprise

Daryl turns the knob then enters. Once inside he and Clarise stare at one another. The sly Daryl bursts into laughter. The two rush into each others arms. A smiling Daryl, grabs Clarise then swings her around in the air. They laugh. Both are giddy with excitement. "Not only are you the most beautiful woman I have ever known you are also the smartest and the most devious." he gives her a left-handed compliment. As the co-conspirator kisses her again and again Clarise can barely catch her breath. Then Daryl stops and extends his arms holding Clarise at a distance. "It went exactly as you said it would go."

The man releases his lover and paces the cabin agitated. "I didn't have to suggest a thing. Once I offered her the trip I went outside, away from the guests ... then just like you said she would she came and found me. Under the pretense of wanting to be honest with me and of nurturing a relationship of consideration she brings up you, so I bring up Martin. I barely believed it, but she did have the audacity to ask me to sponsor her lover as well," he recounts the whole evening for Clarise.

The woman is happy. Standing on her tip-toes she kisses Daryl tenderly. "How soon do we all leave?" she asks the man she loves. The mood changes as Daryl turns away from Clarise. The one thing that he knows is that she will not like his answer. "Karen and Martin leave tomorrow afternoon, so to be on the safe side you and the others will wait until the following night to leave. It didn't get pass her that he hadn't included himself in those plans. Hesitantly Clarise walks over to Daryl and wraps her arms around him. She places her head upon his back

The Surprise

asks, "What about you?" He turns and faces her. Staring into her eyes he tells her what she already knows, "I can't go with you. It would be far too easy for bounty hunters to find all of you if you're traveling with a white man. We would stick out like a sore thumb," he assures her. The woman he loves cries. "Then I'm not going," she insists. "I don't want to live without you," she assures him. "If you stay they will kill us all," Daryl warns Clarise. "If you stay they will kill you," she warns him. "This plantation has little value without free labor, so it wouldn't do them much good to kill me. Besides, I still have powerful friends," although he doesn't believe this is enough he tries to reassure Clarise. "I promise you that as soon as Karen returns I will leave." They both know that Daryl's words are lies, but they pretend anyway because they know that they have little or no choice in this matter.

"Where will you go?" Clarise pretends to believe. Dreaming of what might have been he gets this faraway look in his eyes and says, "I've always dreamed of seeing the Pacific Ocean." The game of pretend goes on. "I could wait for you. We could see it together." Clarise offers knowing it is all a game of what if that they are playing. Daryl tilts her head upward and kisses her lips. "They will follow me hoping to find the rest of you. If they found us together they would kill us both," he warns to make sure that Clarise understands the reality of the pretend game that they are indulging in.

All that's left for Clarise to do is cry some more. The more pragmatic Daryl reminds her, "We've had more than 20 years of loving one another. That is

The Surprise

something to celebrate, not to mourn. "My sweet, sweet Azizza," he calls her by her tribal name. Her lips curl into a smile and she vows never to answer to any other name ever again.

The next twenty four hours creep by slowly. After the wife and overseer are gone the seemingly generous boss gives his white workers the remaining weeks before Christmas off with pay.

Late the next night outside of the Hannon Manor at twelve midnight Repeat, Azizza and ten other ex-slaves are on horseback. The saddle on Repeat's mount is loaded with money, gold and jewels. The father holds the reins of his son's horse and looks up at him. Pride beams on his face. "I charge you with the safety of all of these people, my son's life and the life of the only woman I have ever loved especially," he instructs his son. "I won't let you down, father." Daryl Hannon III assures his father. For the last time the son leans down from his saddle and hugs his father's neck. The young man then sits upright in the saddle. "I know that you won't, son." the father expresses confidence.

Suddenly Daryl slaps the rump of his son's horse. The horse gallops off. The others, except Azizza take off quickly after the son of the master of Hannon Manor. With tears in her eyes she looks down at the man she loves one last time knowing that they will never see each other again. The heartbroken woman then pulls upon the reins of her horse, turns then rides off, out of sight.

Totally alone Daryl Hannon Junior stands on the grounds of the Hannon plantation. This place has been

The Surprise

the source of so much joy yet so much pain. He knows that no matter what happens next it is a chapter that will soon come to an end.

Two days after leaving the Hannon plantation Martin and Karen walk the busy streets of New York City. There is nothing quite like New York City during the Christmas holiday. The usual fast paced existence slows down to a mere rush. Formerly grumpy faces greet you with holiday cheer. Almost everyone you meet has their arms loaded with holiday gift packages. Even the policeman's horses get into the holiday spirit by wearing mistletoe in their reins or bridle.

One who didn't know any better could easily mistake Martin and Karen walking side by side down Fifth Avenue for a loving married couple. For now the two are satisfied to window shop. A beautiful gown in one of the couture fashion shop windows catches Karen's eye. Turning to Martin she smiles from ear to ear. "Ain't dat the perdiest thang yah ever seen?" The amorous man wraps his arms around her waist right in the middle of Fifth Avenue. "Not nearly as beautiful as you," he compliments her. Instead of being flattered the married woman finds it annoying. Turning to Martin she snaps at him, "Not where jus' anybody can see us, yah fool!" Backing away from the enchantress he demands, "How much longer Karen?" The wicked creature smiles, "I was waiting for you to ask."

She pulls Martin into the privacy of a doorway then continues, "When we get home you will kill him and his whore. We will place a necklace on her dead body and say dat when we got back we found him dead and

The Surprise

standing over him holding the necklace and a gun was the Negress, so we shot her." The annoyed lover says, "I could have done dat before we left." Laughing, Karen answers, "Yes, but who will suspect a wife whose husband has jus' given her the generous gift of a New York shopping spree of killing him upon her return?" The cruel Martin laughs. "You are a dangerous woman Karen Hannon." Smiling at Martin Grant she warns him, "You remember dat after I make you the master of Grant Hall."

Hours later after the two plotters have finished shopping and touring the grand city they are back in their hotel. The only light in Karen's room is a candle sitting on a night table next to her bed. She is stretched out across the bed totally nude. There comes a soft rap at her door. "Who is it?" Karen calls out. A barely discernible whisper comes back, "It's me, Martin." In a sultry voice she beckons him, "Come in." Slowly the door opens. Martin steps in and quickly closes the door behind his self. His eyes have trouble adjusting to the lack of light. He gazes around the room. When he finally sees the magnificently sculptured vision that is Karen he stops and gazes lustfully at her nude form. She is stretched out across the large bed. Even though he is captured by the craving in his loins Grant is also cautious as he approaches the bed. Stopping at the edge of the bed he stares down at Karen. Looking up she wears a lascivious smile. "God must surely have a sense of irony to make something as evil as you so damn beautiful," he notes. Karen crooks her finger, signaling for Martin to join her on the bed. "Come into my parlor ..." she teases her lover. "Are you going to devour me?" Martin jokingly asks as he kneels down upon the bed. "The adulterous woman

The Surprise

reaches out and unzips Martin's pants. "Yes I am," she assures him.

During the next two weeks Daryl Hannon III leads his mother and the other ex-slaves north to a town outside of the city of Baltimore, Maryland - the town of Elton. Here they pay a black stable hand to hide them out in his barn while they buy the supplies that they will need for their arduous journey.

The two weeks in New York have passed. Karen is glad to be home. The evil woman jumps from the carriage elated and looking forward to taking over Hannon Manor after the matter of her husband's murder is finished. A more attentive Martin Grant feels that something is amiss. He hasn't seen any white workers since they arrived and only a handful of the slaves, those who had stayed simply because they have known no other kind of life.

Hurriedly Karen runs into the house calling Daryl's name with Martin following closely behind her. The door to the main house swings open. "Daryl! Daryl!" Karen calls out. Grant looks suspiciously around the empty house. "What the hell is going on? ... Daryl!" the angry frustrated man yells out for his boss. The two become deathly quiet as they hear footsteps coming toward them from the dining room. The door to the dining room opens slowly. An ever cautious Martin takes out his gun.

It is then that Daryl enters the hallway where Martin and Karen stand. An apprehensive Daryl spots Martin's gun. "Calm down. It's just me." The overseer doesn't put away his gun. "What the hell is

The Surprise

going on around here?" Martin echoes his earlier plea. The evil vixen places her hand on Martin's shoulder. She quiets him. Karen smiles broadly at her husband. "Where is everyone?" she asks, pretty sure of the answer by now. "They're around. I gave them the day off," Daryl lies. Karen laughs. A puzzled Martin looks back and forth between Karen and Daryl not yet having a clue as to what's going on. "Somehow I don't think so. I guess I was pretty stupid to fall for your plan. I don't know why I didn't see it coming." Losing patience with the two adversaries Martin screams at them, "Will someone tell me what's going on?!" The husband looks at his wife's lover and laughs.

"Do you want to tell him or should I?" Daryl asks Karen. Instead of giving her husband an answer she turns to Grant. "My husband sent the two of us away for two weeks, so dat his slaves would have a head start on the bounty hunters he knows dat I am gonna send after 'em." The overseer shakes his head, still not understanding. "But I wasn't s'posed to go," he points out. "That is where my husband was at his cleverest. He guessed dat I'd find a way to have you accompany me if I was left to my own machinations," she turns to Daryl again. "Ain't you a clever boy?" She notes.

The master of Hannon Manor walks over to a large chest which sits in the hallway then opens it up. Reaching inside Daryl takes out a smaller box. Carrying the smaller box he walks over to Karen. His wife looks at her lover who still holds a gun on Daryl. Inside the small box is a fortune in jewelry and money. "There's a small fortune in this box. Walk away from here today and it's all yours," he

The Surprise

offers the two villains as he flips open the box showing them exactly what is contained within. Having never imagined he would ever have the chance at a fortune such as this Martin smiles. Not so easily bought off is Karen. Walking over to Daryl she takes the box from his hands then turns her back to him and walks toward the front door. Without turning around she issues Daryl's epitaph, "I'm gonna take this box and everything else dat was yours. After all a widow does inherit her husband's estate." This wasn't enough for one as foul as Karen. For her it couldn't end so esily for the man whom had refused her love. Stopping she turns to face Daryl one last time. "By the way, my slaves will be hunted down and returned to work in my fields, all but one. I'm gonna watch while the bounty hunters rape yah black whore then after they're through I'm gonna have 'em tie her to four horses 'n have those horses rip her apart," Karen threatens. "I'll see you dead first," Daryl warns then jumps toward her. Martin raises his gun and Daryl stops. "I don't think so." Karen replies as she turns and exits the house.

In front of Hannon Manor, anxious for Grant to carry out the horrific deed, Karen stands looking out over the grounds of the plantation. Two shots ring out from inside the house. Moments later Martin exits the house and walks toward Karen. "First go into town and tell the sheriff dat while we were gone the slaves kil't my husband and ran off with some of my valuables. After you've done that, my father is on the road, so go to the telegraph office and wire him to send me his best bounty hunters to recover my property," she further instructs Martin.

The Surprise

Her husband had truly surprised her, but she tells herself that this is just a small bump in the road. Soon she will have everything she has dreamed of since first meeting the handsome, wealthy Daryl Hannon Junior, except a lifetime as his wife.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 13
Two Scoundrels

The times after war are more wicked than others. Men do what they feel that they must do in order to survive. That is why there are two scoundrels kicking up dust as they cross the Maryland/Virginia border into Maryland. The two men are sure that the posse has given up on them by now, but when getting caught means a date with the hangman's noose you don't depend on being sure. You don't stop until you know that you are safe.

The former Judge, Michael Thomas- born a gentleman from the Commonwealth of Virginia- and his slave, Samuel Thomas, barely escape the town of Norman, Virginia two steps ahead of the sheriff, the posse and a lynch mob. The judge has taken up the profession of card shark, but his skills far from match his aspirations. This is about the sixth or maybe the seventh time the man has been caught cheating, Samuel notes.

This time he shot the man who accused him of cheating. This time the man he shot had died. If Samuel hadn't covered his back and helped him to escape the judge would probably be right now hanging from a gallow's rope.

Twelve hours earlier the sheriff and his posse had given up on chasing the two men. After all the man whom they had killed was a drifter and a gambler also. The sheriff wasn't about to spend anymore of the town's money on a posse to catch the drifter's killer. Little did he know that the two men that he chased had run into some bad luck and if he had continued on for just a few hours more he may have

Two Scoundrels

caught them.

It turns out that Samuel's horse had gotten a stone in its shoe. The man had to get off and walk. "Yah know if I see any sign of dat posse I'm gonna high tail it out of yere?" the judge tells Samuel. The slave laughs. "Like I should have done back in Norman when yah shot dat drifter?" he asks. "You belong to me boy. Yah suppose to risk yah life for me," the diseased thinking of the man is made apparent. "Ain't you heard. Mr. Lincoln freed all slaves," Samuel points out to the former southern gentleman. "Ain't no northerner give me no money to pay for my slaves, ain't no northerner gonna free 'em. You'll be a freeman the day I die and not a minute before." Michael instructs Samuel.

It is starting to get dark, so the two men stop and make camp. Samuel takes the grub he has in his saddle and begins cooking them dinner. The former slave watches the man who still considers himself his master and wonders if he truly needs the man anymore. Instead of leaving the man or worst he decides that he will be patient. There are worst things than pretending to be a slave to a fool, he concludes.

After a good night's rest in the morning the two men look out into the distance and see no sign of a posse. They are now positive that no one is pursuing them any longer. As they ride Samuel tries to advise Michael on his card skills, "I gave you the rouge so that you could mark the cards. That way you don't pull down a card from your sleeve dat's in play already." The white man doesn't care for being lectured to by a black man. "You ain't even allowed

Two Scoundrels

to sit down at most tables, so don't tell me how to play cards boy," arrogantly he answers Samuel's advise. Shaking his head Samuel warns, "If you don't give a man his proper respect don't be surprised if you can't count on him in a pinch." Michael answers without forethought to the possible consequences, "A nigga ain't no man."

An icy silence becomes an invisible companion to the two men.

It is early morning when Samuel and Michael ride into Elton, Maryland, a small town outside of the Baltimore City Limits. Michael hands Samuel a blanket and tells him that later he is to make camp on the outskirts of town while the judge gets himself a hotel room in town. Still being patient Samuel follows Michael's instructions. Later that day after setting up camp Samuel goes into town, starting on the black side of town where he knows that he can get himself a meal.

Meanwhile Michael has settled in at the bar. The former judge is looking for three things; a whore, a bottle and a card game. While the black scoundrel is eating he hears talk of some southern blacks who will be heading west to settle in the Oklahoma Territory. The conniving Samuel figures that there will be plenty of opportunities for someone like him in the frontier, especially among naive settlers like the ones he has heard about. The best part of the rest of his day he spends searching for these settlers.

The hour is getting late. Michael has had his drink and laid with a whore for a good part of the day,

Two Scoundrels

now his thoughts turn toward finding a game and getting down to his crooked business, cheating at cards. As the former slave owner walks down the stairs of the whore house - gambling house - bar he spots Samuel as he enters. The cheat thinks to himself, "I feel a lot more comfortable now that my boy is here to back my play." The black man, Samuel, goes over to the bar and orders a bottle then waits for the inevitable. The cheat, Michael, sits down at a game.

The day and the game is pretty quiet for most of the evening. The poor card player, Michael, is just holding his own even though he cheats at every opportunity. It is early into the evening when the dealer deals everyone at the table a good hand. Everyone is betting. This is going to be a fat pot. The cheat has three queens. He's sure that it's not enough to win, so he pulls the fourth queen from beneath his sleeve. The betting becomes fierce. Only the cheater and a leading citizen of the town, Hemp Tanner, remain in the hand. Hemp calls the last bet of Michael. Everyone watches as Michael turns over four ladies. To everyone's surprise and curiosity Hemp laughs. Everyone looks at the storekeeper and wonders what he has. "Ace high flush," Hemp announces. Michael begins to rake in the pot. The storekeeper reaches across the table and grabs a hold of Michael's hand. All eyes are now fixated on Hemp. The man begins turning over his cards. "The funny thing is ..." then he turns over the last diamond and it's a queen of diamonds. "... I have a queen of diamonds too." Hemp goes for his gun. Michael shoots the man with his gun from under the table. One of the other card players grabs Michael. As the players escort Michael from the bar he looks

Two Scoundrels

at Samuel with pleading eyes. The black man turns his back then continues his drinking.

The following day the courthouse is full. An angry mob, filled with Hemp's friends and neighbors, are grumbling that the trial is just a waste of time. They're all in favor of taking the card shark out to the great oak and stringing him up. The sheriff looks around wary as he makes his way into the courtroom with his prisoner. Still hopeful Michael looks around then smiles when he sees Samuel standing at the back of the court. Despite all of his verbal abuse he still believes that his slave is going to come through for him by breaking him out of this mess. The sheriff pushes Michael down into his seat then steps back and stands behind the prisoner.

The trial goes quickly with all of the card players and a few of the bar's bystanders testifying that Michael had cheated then shot Hemp with a gun which he had hidden beneath the card table. The jury was out for all of three minutes before they came back with a verdict of guilty.

Judge Michael Thomas stood before another judge this day as the other judge reads the sentence of the court. "Michael Thomas you have been found guilty of the murder in the first degree of Mr. Hemp Tanner by a jury of your peers. This court therefore sentences you to be hanged by the neck until you are dead. May god have mercy on your wretched soul." The trial is over and the judge's fate seems sealed.

That very same night, after the trial, Michael sits in his jail cell having his last meal. The door to the cell area opens and the sheriff enters with the

Two Scoundrels

scoundrel Samuel at his side. An elated Michael stands up grinning. "Dis nigga says that he's your boy. Do you wanta see him?" The excited condemned man answers, "Yesss! Yesss!" The sheriff faces Samuel. "You jus' come on out when yah finish wit' yah goodbyes. Don't take too long." Samuel grins at the sheriff because he believes that is what is expected of him. "No sir. I's sure won't." Samuel affects the mannerisms of an ignorant servant.

The sheriff exits the cell area. The door closes behind him. The one time judge sees the irony in his situation. "I sent a few men to the gallows in my day. I'm jus' glad dat yah here to see dat I don't end up dat way," he mistakenly assumes. "You don't listen do you. None of you white folks do. I just came by to say my goodbyes, like a good boy should do. I also wanted to thank you for your horse, your law books and the bankroll you had stashed in the saddle of the palomino. I got those things right after they arrested you," he informs his onetime owner.

Glaring at the black man Michael Thomas lets fly the fury of his frustration, "God damn niggas! Ain't got a loyal bone in yah whole damned bodies. But I promise you dat you'll come to a bad end." Samuel laughs, "Not as bad as yours or nearly as soon," he mocks the man.

With one last display of his true nature Michael spits into the face of the only man who may have saved him. Samuel wipes the spit from his face then laughs. "That truly hurt, but not as much as that rope is gonna hurt when it tightens around your red neck in the morning." The terrible black man laughs

Two Scoundrels

again as he turns and exits the cell area, closing the door after he leaves.

One scoundrel sits watching the last hours of his wasted life slip slowly away. The second scoundrel lies on a blanket bequeathed to him by the first and drinks the rye whiskey he bought with the money he stole from his former owner. Raising the bottle into the air Samuel raises a toast to the condemned man. "May you be in hell an hour before the devil knows yah there, Judge Michael Thomas - gentleman from Virginia." He gulps down some of the liquor, pours out a symbolic swallow for Michael, makes a pillow of his saddle then lays back and sleeps the sleep of an innocent babe.

CHAPTER 14
LITTLE AFRICA
21 EVIL MEN

On the same day that the former Judge Michael Thomas, a gentleman from the Commonwealth of Virginia, is being tried for murder a plague is visited on the town of Kelly Louisiana in the form of 20 ruthless bounty hunters. These men have been sent here by the grand dragon of the Knight Ghosts as requested by his daughter, Karen Marshal Hannon.

The sheriff nor the citizens of Kelly welcome these men. Though most sympathize with the cause of the south few condone the actions of these vigilante - mercenaries.

The man known only as Walker is the leader of these cutthroats. Dismounting his horse outside of the town's bar he is followed by his men. It had been a long hard ride and men like this need to burn off some steam or worst because of it.

The doors to the bar open and the patrons look up to see the likes of Walker and his men. The smart ones quickly exit the bar. The rowdy men enter loud and grabbing at the bar maids. They take bottles of liquor left by those who had beaten a hasty retreat and from some who still sit there. A few of the town's men start to say something, but think better of it. The bar wenches laugh and make merry, for it is men like these that spend most freely on women such as them.

The music is loud, the liquor runs freely and an occasional friendly yet vicious fist fight breaks out among Walker's men. Near to closing time all of the town's men have long since left the bar to the

21 EVIL MEN

dangerous bounty hunters. The owner stops the piano player from playing then turns to Walker and his men. "Sorry boys, but I have to close up, town ordinance," he informs the men. Walker stands up menacingly. "I don't think so," he answers the owner. The doors to the bar open again and the sheriff enters with his guns drawn. "The party is over boys. If you would like to come back tomorrow then you can start over again, but for now let's pack it in."

The men look to Walker for his lead. There is an evil smile on the face of the leader of the bounty hunters. The killer knows that if he wants his men will kill the sheriff and go on like he had never entered the place. Walker has no fear or respect for the law, but he has signed up to do a job for Albert Marshal and for powerful men like him Walker does have a respectful amount of fear. "I guess it's time we went on out to the Hannon place," Walker tells the others. Disappointed the others grumble, but file out of the bar ahead of him. The sheriff turns to Walker. "What business do you have with the widow Hannon?" he asks. The bounty hunter laughs. "Don't press your luck sheriff. Don't press your luck," he warns.

The sheriff watches as the bounty hunters ride out of town toward the Hannon plantation. Now he knows in his gut that he is right, Karen Hannon did have something to do with her husband's death. Even if he had any proof of it he knows to pursue the matter would be taint amount to suicide. Challenging the likes of the Marshal clan is something the sheriff is not inclined toward doing.

21 EVIL MEN

There is an air of foreboding at the Hannon plantation when the 20 evil gunmen ride in. The few slaves who have remained know that life will never be the same. Even the socialite, Lilly Longstreet, is tempered in her appreciation of what remains of the once magnificent estate. This doesn't stop Lily from her attempts to ingratiate herself with the now sole owner of Hannon Manor ... or from seeking gossip to spread.

The two women sit at the magnificent dining room table about to feast on venison, fruit, vegetables and drink. "You should hear the terrible thingsj that Maggie Hart and others are saying 'bout you," the two faced woman begins her gossip. "I don't care what that witch or her carpetbagger friends may have to say," Karen insists. "I jus' thought you would want to know who yah true friends are," Lilly says apologetic. Changing her mind Karen says, "I guess I should know." Lilly smiles because she is all so anxious to please her wealthy friend. "I heard the words from her lips myself. The hussy said dat either you or yah lover, Martin Grant, is the one who killed poor Daryl. The wench had enough gull to exonerate the niggas. Her exact words were ... say what yah will 'bout da coloreds dey loved dat man more den dey love themselves." The mistress of the manor pretends not to be bothered by the accusations of the Kelly elite. "I guess she would defend da niggas since she has taken a black lover herself." Though she is lying Karen intentionally passes on this piece of gossip, knowing that it won't take Lilly much time to spread the word among her crowd. True or not it doesn't matter. It will serve to take the sting out of any further gossip the nosy woman might care to spread about her.

21 EVIL MEN

Just then Martin enters the dining room. "Mr. Walker and his men are here," Martin announces. Before Martin can finish Walker and several of his men push their way pass him. Feigning manners Walker takes off his hat and tips it toward the two women. "Good evening ladies. I hope dat I'm not n'trudin on yah evening." Lilly looks up at the rough menacing looking men then turns to Karen apprehensive. A mischievous smile lights Karen face. "Not at all ... Mr. Walker, isn't it?" she pretends not to be upset by his presence in her home. "Dat's right mam. I lead the bounty hunters your father sent you," he informs her. "I wasn't really expecting you 'til 'morrow," she informs him. Fearful of what may follow Lilly gets up and starts to leave. "I think I'd better be goin'," the nervous socialite tries to get away from this unsavory gathering. "Lilly! Sit down!" Karen orders the woman, figuring that if she's a part of whatever happens here tonight she can't gossip about it. Not wanting to offend Karen or anger these rough looking men Lilly sits back down and pours another glass of the expensive sherry that they have been drinking. "We weren't gonna show up 'til tomorrow, but yah sheriff closed down the bar on us so we were left at loose ends," Walker explains. "Why don't you and Grant join me and my friend for dinner and I will have my staff rustle up something for yah men." Walker moves to the table followed by Martin. After he's seated he turns to Karen. "True, my men would like some food and drink, but what they'd 'specially like mo' is to get to know some of yah nigga women, if you know what I mean?" Lilly blushes, while Karen nods her head in approval. "Dat can be arranged. Not dat we have the quality or quantity that we had before the war," she offers in answer to the villain. "They'll make do

21 EVIL MEN

and we will correct yah wrong," he promises Karen.

The grounds of the Hannon Plantation is the scene of debauchery unlike anything Kelly, Louisiana had ever seen before. Walker's men chase after the few female slaves who remain. They drink and carouse. Women scream while the male slaves are being beaten. This is what the 19 evil men call fun.

Meanwhile inside the manor Karen and Martin leave Lilly and the bounty hunter alone in the dining room. Grinning lasciviously at his prey for tonight Walker crosses over and picks the woman up into his arms. "I can't do this. I'm engaged to be married. I'm a virgin," she pleads with him. "Not after tonight," he assures her.

Come the first morning light Karen enters into the guestroom where Lilly lays naked beside the hairy nude man, Walker. The socialite pulls the covers over herself attempting to demonstrate a degree of modesty. Karen merely laughs then exits the room. Gregoriously Walker slaps the woman playfully upon her behind. Her reaction is mixed, half smiles - half grimaces.

Later that morning and outside the Hannon plantation it appears like Carthage after the siege. The bounty hunters have wrecked havoc during the night. Now they sit upon their horses wearing grins much like mischievous little boys. First the two women exit the house. Right behind them follows Martin and Walker. The bounty hunters cheer. They are very confident that their leader has slept with at least one of the fancy ladies.

A somewhat reserved Martin remains on the porch

21 EVIL MEN

beside Karen and Lilly. After marching down the stairs Walker joins his men. "I'm sure my father tol' y'all dat you'd get \$100.00 each today and a thousand dollars a head for each slave dat you'll bring back to me alive, only \$50.00 for a dead one. Well, what he couldn't have tol' yah is dat I will pay you \$5,000.00 if'n y'all bring me the black woman called Clarise back alive," she informs them. Smiling his evil smirk Walker asks, "Alive doesn't mean untouched, does it?" The cruel woman laughs a knowing laugh. "Well, I wouldn't deny hard - working men like you a little pleasure," she half-kids them. The bounty hunters all laugh. "Is dere any incentive to get them back quickly?" Walker asks. "If yah get 'em back yere 'fore spring planting ...," Karen unbuttons the top three buttons to her blouse, exposing the tops of her breasts. "I have a special treat for you Mr. Walker," she adds suggestively. "Wooo ... wooo!" the other bounty hunters exclaim.

In a show of bravado Walker rides up onto the porch, reaches down and takes Karen about the waist. He then lifts her up and kisses her passionately. The other bounty hunters cheer their leader as he rides down from the porch. "Yaaa hooo ...!" They fire their guns and toss their hats into the air. Looking back Walker throws Karen a kiss. All twenty of the bounty hunters ride hard away from Hannon manor. A jealous Martin runs down from the porch and mounts his horse glaring back at Karen with scorn. The harlot smiles mockingly at her lover. Angrily Martin grabs the reins of his horse. The horse rears up. The dejected man rides off with the others. In his heart he knows he can no longer trusts Karen, but he hopes that if he returns with the slaves she will keep her promise and marry him.

21 EVIL MEN

As Karen watches 21 evil men ride off to their truly evil goal she realizes that it is in times like this that she most envies men being men. Because her wicked heart would have her ride along beside them.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 15

"Trust no one!" his father's words echo through Daryl Hannon III's mind. He looks around the large barn at his mother, his girlfriend - Debra and the other slaves who travel with him. At his mother's bidding he has allowed other ex-slaves to join them since leaving the Hannon plantation. A single kerosene lamp lights the barn. Hiding is expensive. He has paid as much for them to hide here as one would pay for a grand hotel room in the big city, but he isn't resentful for he is also paying for the black man's silence.

Young Daryl crosses the barn and sits down next to his mother. "Are you comfortable?" he asks, more making conversation than overly concerned. "I've slept in worst places," Azizza laughs. "We should have all of our supplies in a couple of days," he tries to reassure her. "Doesn't matter ..." she admits her lack of enthusiasm for this adventure. "You are worried about my father ... aren't you?" he asks. Azizza turns away from her son. "What's going to happen to him?" Daryl questions his mother further. Not wanting to lie to him she answers truthfully "Someone evil is probably going to kill him." Confused he asks, "Why did he stay behind?" A smile of pride comes to the lips of Daryl's beloved. "To buy us enough time to get away," she answers. Tears form in his mother's eyes. The young man wonders aloud, "Why didn't you stay? I know that you wanted to stay." The mother takes her son's cheeks in between her hands and squeezes them. "Would you have gone if I had stayed? ... or Debra if you had stayed? Would her parents have left if she had stayed? So we all would have ended up being killed sooner or later if each of us refused to leave for

Trust No One

the sake of the other," she explains. The son hugs his mother tightly. He asks, "What can we do to help him?" Shaking her head in resignation the mother answers, "All we can do now is pray." They didn't know that the self sacrificing man was now beyond needing their prayers.

Early the next morning Daryl is walking the streets of Elton, heading toward the general store. The streets are more crowded than usual. A hanging scaffold has been swiftly built and the towns folk are out in force to see this man hung.

The sheriff escorts Judge Michael Thomas up the stairs of the scaffold. Just as the two reach the platform level of the scaffold Daryl is approached by a stranger on the street. The stranger is Samuel Thomas. "Mister ... mister." Samuel calls out as he grabs Daryl's shoulder. The younger man spins around to face Samuel and pulls his gun on the unknown man. Timidly the rascal steps back and throws his arms into the air. "No ... no ... no need for that, I don't mean you any harm," he assures Daryl. The stranger even opens his coat to show the leader of the settlers that he is unarmed. "I don't even carry a weapon." Samuel had thought to leave his gun in his saddle, so not to be mistaken for a gunman. The young leader puts away his gun then Samuel lowers his arms. The younger man watches the shifty older man carefully. "What can I do for you?" Daryl asks. "I hear that you and your people are headed for the Oklahoma Territory ..." before the stranger can finish his sentence Daryl grabs him and slams him against the wall of the nearest building. No one notices the altercation because all eyes are upon Michael Thomas, who is about to be hung. "Who the

Trust No One

hell told you that?" Daryl demands. "Don't worry. Only black folks know about you." Samuel tries to reassure the irate leader. This doesn't make the young man feel any better. Releasing Samuel's collar Daryl turns to walk away. The scheming reprobate grabs his arm again. "I want to go with you," he informs Daryl. The young leader looks down at Samuel's hand on his arm. The slicker removes his hand from Daryl's arm. "Mister I don't know you from Adam. Why in the world would I trust you?" he asks of the all too knowledgeable man. "Cause just like you I'm an ex-slave." Looking over toward the gallows Samuel answers. "Or I will be soon." The scaffold floor drops. Michael Thomas falls through, his neck snaps. The one time gentleman from Virginia is dead. "Now. I'm a free man," Samuel declares. "Seems that him being your master is less call to trust you," is Daryl's response. "Before he got himself hung for killing a man my master was a judge. He taught me the law. You are going to be needing someone with my knowledge to help you file your claims and settle disputes," the sly reprobate describes his value to the leader of the ex-slaves. Again he looks Samuel up and down, suspiciously. "I am gonna have to think about this. Where can I find you if I decide to let you join us?" he asks. "Just ask any black in town where to find Samuel Thomas. I'm an easy man to find," Samuel assures him.

The two part company heading in opposite directions. To finish preparing for his party's departure Daryl heads for the general store for supplies. The scoundrel heads for the saloon.

A few hours later Azizza, Daryl and Debra sit around the barn, apart from the others, discussing the

Trust No One

stranger whom Daryl had met. "He sounds like a scamp," the astute mother has concluded from Daryl's description of their encounter. "I have no doubt that he is definitely a rascal, but he may be a rascal of some considerable use to us. A lighthearted Debra interrupts the heavy discussion. Taking Daryl by his hand she pulls him up saying, "We aren't leaving tonight, so why don't you decide about Mr. Thomas another time." The sweetheart pulls Daryl by his hand toward the barn door. Happy for them Azizza smiles, but warns them, "Don't let too many white folks see you out and about." The son looks back at his mother. Reassuringly he answers her, "We'll be careful. I promise." Then the couple exits the barn, closing the door after themselves.

It hadn't taken the lovers long to find the best place in town to be alone. At the edge of town there is a lake. The waters are crystal clear, but icy cold. Despite the temperature of the water the two young sweethearts splash about as if it were the middle of July. Their laughter and horseplay fill the night. They're unaware that the sleazy stranger from earlier, Samuel, watches them from the bushes where he has made his camp. "Brr ... I think I'm gonna get under the blanket for a while," Debra tells Daryl as she bounds from the lake totally naked. The lecherous older man delights in his act of voyeurism. Right behind Debra a nude Daryl follows. The two cuddle together under the warm blanket. The bold young man kisses his love passionately. She returns his kiss just as fervently. Debra is surprised when Daryl pulls away then stares into her eyes. "Can you guess what the first thing I am going to do when we reach Oklahoma is ...?" he quizzes her. Still a little frustrated

Trust No One

over Daryl breaking their kiss to talk Debra shrugs her shoulders. Uninterested at that moment she answers haphazardly, "Stake a claim on your land?" The enamored young man smiles then shakes his head and answers, "Nope." The ardent lover takes Debra's face in his hand, stares into her eyes and whispers, "The first thing I'm going to do is marry you." Then he gently kisses her lips.

A delighted Debra pulls free of his embrace then asks nervously and excitedly, "Ohhh ... ohhhh ... do you really mean it?" Laughing he kisses her again. "I love you and can barely stand waiting to begin sharing my life with you," he replies. Excitedly she wraps her arms around his neck then showers his face with kisses. "I love you too," she mimics him. Then she pushes Daryl down flat onto the blanket kissing him then leaps up jubilant rushing to the water's edge. Stopping she looks back at her now fiancée.

Exposed to the elements Daryl still lies on the blanket. Debra gazes lovingly at him as the nineteen year old gazes at her with a look of pure love. Turning around she dives into the icy waters once more. It's then that Daryl climbs up from the blanket, runs and dives back into the water also. They laugh and splash around. The pervert, Samuel, continues to spy on the young couple. The wretched villain watches the two for more than fifteen minutes as they play and splash around in the water. The evil man is bored by the innocence of their foreplay, so he leaves quietly for town.

Never aware that they have been spied upon, but soon after losing their audience, the two lovers become more ardent. Picking Debra up into his arms Daryl

Trust No One

carries her from the water. Though this isn't the first time for these two lovers Debra shyly hides her face on Daryl's muscular chest like a timid virgin. When they reach the blanket the young man kneels down and all so tenderly lays her upon the blanket. Starting from her toes he kisses softly and lingeringly up her body. The young woman shivers, but not because of the coolness of the night. Gently she holds his head, pressing it against her body as he moves ever and ever higher. Finally their lips meet then she feels Daryl's hands urging her legs apart. A sigh escapes Debra's lips as he climbs in between her legs. Her hands explore his back until they reach down and cup his powerful hips. "I love you." Debra gasps. "I love you too." Daryl assures her. The night is filled with the sounds of the two enthralled lovers consummating that love.

Meanwhile the mother, Azizza, sits up still awake and worried about the two young adults. She knows that by now someone is in pursuit of them. Although she is proud of the job that her son has done leading them she also knows that these kind of people will never give up. Someone has to die.

The town celebrates the hanging. The piano player bangs out a loud tune upon the saloon's piano. The dance girls kick up their legs in merriment. Whores sit on the laps of the male patrons, urging them to buy more liquor or to keep playing the games of chance. Patrons stand around the roulette wheel as the roulette boss checks the bets then spins the wheel. All of this and more goes on around Samuel Thomas as he stands at the bar pouring himself a drink from the bottle of rye he has just bought. A stranger approaches Samuel. This stranger is a white

Trust No One

man named Bishop, a hustler. The stranger walks up to Samuel at the bar. Turning to the bartender Bishop says, "Barkeep bring me a clean glass. I think I'll join my new friend here in whatever it is that he's celebrating." After jokingly instructing the bartender he then turns to Samuel and says, "That is if you don't mind." Samuel finds the strange little man amusing and to his surprise he misses the company of his dead owner, so he answers, "A man can never have too much money, too many women or too many friends." The hustler slaps Samuel on the back then waits for the bartender to return with his glass quickly the glass appears then Bishop pours himself a drink while introducing himself, "Bishop. That's my name not my occupation." the two men laugh at the corny joke. "Samuel Thomas," Samuel replies extending his hand to the white man. Just as quickly as he took the drink Bishop takes Samuel's hand and shakes it, which is unusual for a white man to a black man in these times. "I took one look at you and I knew that we were kindred spirits," Bishop tells Samuel.

As the hour gets late the saloon begins to quiet down. The two men have moved to a table and sit alone in a corner drinking and talking. A new bottle of rye sits in between the two men on the table. This time it is Bishop who has bought this bottle. He first pours Samuel a glass then pours himself one. "Do you know what Mr. Thomas?" Bishop begins. "Call me Samuel, Mr. Bishop," the new friend interrupts. "Since we're being so damned friendly just call me Bishop. People have called me that for so long I don't recon' I recall my given name." The hustler clicks his glass against Samuel's glass. Laughing Samuel replies, "Then Samuel and Bishop it

Trust No One

is." The hustler begins his spiel, "You not only strike me as a friendly sort, but also like myself, I see the entrepreneur's spirit in you." Being a con man himself Samuel recognizes the start of a hustle. "I fancy that to be true." Samuel goes along hoping to find out if the funny little man can be of some use to him. "It is not my intent to offend you Samuel, so I need to first ask you a question before I talk to you about a very lucrative venture that we may work together on." Bishop pauses. Samuel waits for the other shoe to drop. "You may ask away, my friend." The con man takes Samuel's black left hand and places it beside his pale white right hand. "How black are you?" Bishop asks. The ex-slave looks down at the two hands side by side and knows that he is going to be asked to do something that will hurt other blacks. That doesn't bother Samuel in the least, but he still wants Bishop to be the one out on that limb first. "What do you mean? I don't understand." he feigns being stupid. Bishop grins because he's sure that Samuel does understand and hasn't yet taken offense. "Would you let your skin color keep you from making a lot of money?" It is out there, the beginning of some foul proposition being offered. "My being black is an accident of birth. The only color that means anything to me is green, as in money." Samuel assures his new acquaintance. The evil man laughs. "That's what I'm talking about, kindred spirits. We entrepreneurs know what is important," then the con man takes a folded piece of paper from his pocket and hands it to Samuel. The amoral Samuel laughs when he reads it, "Wanted RUN AWAY SLAVES - Large REWARDS." The former slave turns to Bishop. "How do I know that I won't end up one of the slaves turned in for this reward?" the cautious man seeks assurances. "You are

Trust No One

a lot more valuable to me as a freeman. You can get close to the blacks and help me and the bounty hunters catch them alive. Slaves are worth a lot more alive," Bishop explains.

The ruthless black man sits pondering the despicable proposition. "I'll think about it," he answers Bishop. "Think about this ... at \$100.00 a head a piece we can become rich men." the hustler tempts him. "At \$200 a head we become richer sooner," Samuel counters. The two men laugh. They extend their hands and shake signifying a deal has been struck. "This is going to be a very lucrative friendship," Bishop acknowledges and Samuel is quick to agree.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 16
Too Many Ears

A worried Azizza has sat up waiting patiently, but wary, for the two young lovers to return. The door to the barn creaks slowly and quietly open. The mother turns over onto her side and pretends to be asleep. As soon as the door closes behind Daryl and Deborah they spot the nervous twitch of the mother's cheeks and realize that she is not asleep. The two cross the barn until they stand over the feigning parent. "We know that you're awake worry wart," Daryl teases his mother. The relieved mother laughs then sits up. "I try not to worry, but for a mother that's nearly impossible," she excuses.

The girl's parents and others are awakened by their conversation. Richard Harris, Debra's father, asks, "Is something' wrong?" The mother and the couple shake their heads no. "... just me worrying more than need be," Azizza answers. Debra's parents come over and join the couple and their friend. The others turn back over and go back to sleep. Looking at his little girl Richard sees that she wears a smile big enough and bright enough to light the night. "Oh yes. Something' is up. I can tell by the mischievous glint in yah eyes," he notes. Displaying her hand for all to see Debra shows off the diamond engagement ring that Daryl has given her. It was among all of the jewelry his father had given to him. The ring is a family heirloom. His grandfather had given it to his grandmother. His father had wanted to give it to his mother, but she refused it because she knew that she could never wear it - that would have exposed the true nature of their relationship for all to know. The day before they had left Hannon Manor his father instructed him to

Too Many Ears

give this ring to the woman that he would marry. Debra's parents hug the betrothed couple. The two mothers cry tears of joy.

At last Azizza begins to believe that some happiness may come of their leaving Hannon Manor, even though it will not be for her. She hugs her daughter - in - law to be.

It is at that moment that the barn door creeks open once more. Moving swiftly Daryl pulls out his gun and waits to see who the intruder could be. The other ex-slaves sit up frightened and anxious. Phillip Carter, the town's blacksmith, along with two of his sons, Mark and Donald enter the barn cautiously. The Carters close the barn door after themselves.

Looking across the barn Phillip finds himself staring down the barrel of Daryl's 45. "Woo mister. We don't mean you no harm." says the blacksmith. The leader of the black settlers is anything but trusting of these unknown intruders. "What the hell are you doing coming in here this time of night?" Daryl demands of him. In an attempt to establish his friendly intent Phillip walks toward Daryl with his hand out in friendship. The young man ignores the gesture and waves his gun menacingly. "Talk first," Daryl demands. The more trusting Azizza takes her hand and presses her son's gun lower. Only then does Phillip smile once more and answer Daryl, "My name is Phillip Carter. I'm the town's blacksmith." Growing very impatient the young man insists of the older man, "Just answer my question. What are you doing here?" The blacksmith moves toward a bale of hay. "May I at least sit down?" he asks, but sits

Too Many Ears

without waiting for an answer. "Me and my family want to go with you," he finally answers Daryl's inquiry.

A skeptical Daryl reminds the man of what he has here in Elton, "You own your own business. Why would you give that up and risks your lives to go with us?" Daryl can't begin to know the burdens of born free black men, but Phillip tries to explain. "A little thing called dignity, son. I make more money than most of the white folks around here, but to them I'm still jus' da nigga who shoes dey horses. In this new territory me and my children will have a chance to be respected as men and women."

Anxiously Daryl paces the barn. His mother walks closely behind him. "This is getting out of hand! Hell I already have more than twenty people that I have to care for now. Besides, how come everyone in this town seems to know about our plans?" he questions. "We'll be more help than trouble." the blacksmith promises.

Turning her son to face her Azizza tells him how she feels, "Every man is deserving of a chance for dignity." Still hesitant, but convinced, Daryl lowers his head in resignation. "Okay, but we're leaving later tomorrow night. Too many people know about us. We have to be moving on quickly," Daryl insists. Turning to the father and his two sons Daryl tells them, "Meet us at the north end of town tomorrow at one am If you are late we will leave you behind." The delighted man hugs Daryl and shakes his hand vigorously. "Thank you. Thank you." Phillip repeats again and again. "We'll be there on time." The father assures him. "Hold your thanks. In a few

Too Many Ears

weeks you may be cursing the day that you met me." Daryl warns the Carters. "No matter what happens we will never curse you. It's better to die a man than to live your life without ever being respected," Phillip says to the young leader.

Unaware of the events unfolding Bishop has gone to his room for the evening. The contemplative Samuel sits in the bar alone drinking and wondering what he will do next. Unnoticed by the selfish man Daryl enters the bar and walks over to his table. It isn't until Daryl speaks that Samuel becomes aware of him. "I would guess that you spend a lot of time in establishments like this," Daryl comments. After taking a big gulp of the glass of rye that he holds Samuel looks up at the young man. "Helps wash away the world's ugliness." The judgmental Daryl answers Samuel's cynicism, "Instead of washing away the ugliness of the world how about coming with us and helping to build a better one." For a moment the con man feels a part of something good that offers him hope. He gets up and shakes Daryl's hand. Speaking in whispers Daryl tells the man to meet them at the north end of town tomorrow at one am and warns him not to be late. "You won't regret this." Samuel promises. Daryl turns and walks away. As he goes Samuel thinks he hears him mumble, "I had better not."

The door has barely hit Daryl in the butt when this treacherous traitor heads straight for the back stairs of Bishop's hotel. He sneaks up to his new partner's room under the cover of darkness.

Bishop sits on the edge of the bed facing away from the door. The door creeps quietly open then closes

Too Many Ears

behind Samuel. There is a wash pan on the night table next to his bed. With soap lather on his face Bishop holds a straight razor to his face. The villain is startled by Samuel's voice. "They leave tomorrow night." The villain cuts himself slightly. "Damn you Samuel! I could've cut my own throat." Bishop warns him. "How many?" he then asks. "20. It could be more." Samuel answers truthfully. "Woossss! That's a great start to our little partnership!" the scoundrel exclaims.

Getting up from the bed Bishop takes a washcloth and wipes what is left of the lather from his face. He walks over to the door where Samuel stands and places a hand on the black man's shoulder. "It's gonna take some time to get the bounty hunters up here and catch up with y'all. Besides that they like doing their dirty work out on the frontier, where the blue coat soldiers ain't likely to interfere, so leave a trail dat will be easy for us to follow," he instructs Samuel. "I'll leave a trail a blind man can follow," the treacherous fiend promises then describes the mark. Samuel then reaches for the doorknob. Bishop grabs his hand. "You be very careful leaving here. You ain't no good to me if yah people don't trust you," he is quick to remind Samuel. "My people are whomever is paying me," the villain reminds Bishop. The white man laughs. The black man leaves the hotel room cautiously skulking down the back alley staircase.

Finally the hour arrives to leave. The streets are empty except for a staggering drunk, two ladies of the evening and a thin dirty brown stray dog. Around one corner comes six horse drawn covered wagons with

Too Many Ears

Daryl's party inside of them. The wagon wheels are covered with thick burlap and well oiled so as not to make much noise.

The six wagons stop at the edge of town. Daryl holds the reins of the lead wagon as Debra sits beside him. "Are we really gonna leave the Carters?" she asks Daryl. "If they don't get here soon we won't have any choice. We can't sit here waiting for white folks to get wind of our plans. "I hope dat Samuel man doesn't show up. I don't trust him." Debra notes. "My daddy always said, keep your friends close and your enemies closer." Daryl is interrupted by the sound of horse's hoof beats. He pulls his gun out as a rider comes closer. It's Samuel Thomas riding hard. The man rides right up beside the lead wagon. "I thought you might have left me already," he comments. "We almost did. Why are you late?" Daryl asks. "I had a little luck at the tables so I decided to leave a little of that money with my favorite female entertainer," he jokingly admits. The conservative young man can do nothing but shake his head. The two men jump nervously when the muffled sound of burlap covered wagon wheels roll their way. The young man spots the father of the Carter clan, Phillip. The father sits holding the reins of the lead wagon of four more wagons, which carry his brood and their supplies. Turning and facing the road ahead Daryl cracks his whip and all wagons begin to pull away from Elton. Following closely behind the wagons on horseback is Samuel leading the palomino of his former owner.

The black settlers no longer have to worry about how many ears are listening to them. There is a snake among them that they need to fear now.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 17
The Price of Doing Business

The first couple of days on the trail Samuel marks a trail for Bishop and the bounty hunters to follow, but then something unexpected happens. The man who had never cared about anything or anyone in his entire life found himself falling in love with Azizza. Instead of marking the trail for the ones he had been waiting for now he would ride off and leave a false trail.

The settlers have been traveling for two weeks now. No longer does it seem necessary to Samuel for him to double back. If he hasn't led those who follow them far enough away from their trail by now he probably won't be able to do so.

The going is getting a little rugged. Most of the women are driving the wagons now. The men are on foot with machetes or makeshift blades cutting a path through the wilderness. The ex-slave Samuel has mostly been a pampered man. The arduous task has him stopping to wipe the sweat from his brow. The con man's hands are not accustomed to hard work. His soft hands blister and bleed. A hard working Azizza helps to hack a path side by side with the men, matching them in their efforts. She also carries the water for them and medicine for those who may need it. "Damn! I never dreamed that it would be so hard," Samuel complains. Going over to Samuel she takes the makeshift blade from his hands. A sympathetic Azizza turns his palms upward. Taking a salve from the medicine bag she carries Azizza applies it to his blistered hands. "Yes ...! That feels so good. Thank you mam." The grateful greenhorn tells her. She laughs at him because she

The Price of Doing Business

is unaccustomed to a black man who cannot handle hard work. "You ain't use to hard work, are you Mr. Thomas?" she more accuses than asks. The confident man answers truthfully, "Not ashamed to admit it ... no I'm not mam. My master taught me two things, gambling and the law. Being a gambler has served me well to this point. Now I'm hoping that the law will do even better by me." Holding a dab of hope for this scamp causes Azizza to smile. "Neither will serve you until we get where we are going and until then you have to pull your weight," she assures him. "I'm like a chameleon. I adapt," Samuel boasts confidently as he reaches for the blade. The protective woman moves the blade out of his reach. "You're gonna need a few days for those hands to heal. Until then you can take over my duties teaching the children. I'll take up your duties." she offers. Seeing his mother with this rascal causes Daryl to stop his cutting duties and come back to find out what is going on between the two. "My father always said -soft hands on a man is the mark of a scoundrel," he mocks the con man. Samuel knows better than to allow himself to be drawn into a competition for the mother's favor, instead he answers, "Your father was right." Then he walks away. Turning to his mother he warns her, "He's not to be trusted." The lonely woman answers her son, "We all did what we had to do to survive the yoke of slavery. Don't be so quick to judge another man's path."

With money and patience running low Bishop sits alone in the bar in Elton awaiting the bounty hunters he had telegraphed two weeks before. The union soldiers watch the sleazy looking little man carefully. The saloon doors swing open. In walks

The Price of Doing Business

Grant alongside Walker and three of his men. The others scour the countryside for any trace of the ex-slaves. Heads turn in the direction of the dangerous looking men. "I'm looking for a man named Bishop," says Walker. The man stands up and signals for Walker to come join him. "Over here. I'm Bishop." Martin and the leader of the bounty hunters make their way to Bishop's table. They sit down. The other three men head for the bar. The soldiers at the bar look at the men suspiciously. Bishop hands Martin a wanted poster. Walker glares at the little man. Nervously Bishop looks away from Walker. "Do you know where we can find our slaves?" Walker asks. "First let's talk money." The curious little man has no idea what he has dealt himself into. "Suppose instead of paying you we let you live?" Walker warns. "While we are supposing, suppose I tell the captain over there that you and your men are bounty hunters for ex-slaves?" Bishop threatens. "And don't think about not paying me later. There is nothing these union boys would like more than to come down to your plantation and arrest you." he assures Martin. "How much are you asking?" Martin asks. "\$500.00 a head." Bishop states matter of fact like. "That's awful steep for a man who isn't taking any chances." The overseer points out. "I have a partner, whom I want returned to me, who is risking his life to make it easy for you to find your slaves." Bishop explains the price, all but the extra hundred he built in for himself. "You partner up with a nigga?" Walker asks with disdain. "Me and my partner are entrepreneurs. The only color we care about is green." the hustler tells the evil man. "You have a deal," Martin agrees. Walker glares at both men.

The Price of Doing Business

Near the edge of town the slave hunters have ventured. It is dusk when Bishop, Martin, Walker and three of the remaining bounty hunters stop to search for Samuel's mark. "You have more men than this don't you?" Bishop questions. "They're gonna meet up with us here in a couple of hours. You said that you don't ride with us so how are you gonna earn your money?" Martin asks. The little man walks over to an oak tree. He moves away a broken branch. An upside down V is carved in the tree. This is the mark you'll be looking for along the trail. They have a two week head start, but they have the burden of supplies, women and children," he explains.

"How will we know your man?" Walker asks. "His name is Samuel Thomas." the man answers "Thanks," Walker remarks then in cold blood he shoots Bishop in the top of the head. The little man falls backward, much like a fallen tree. The man lays on the ground dead staring up lifeless at the heavens. Martin has never seen anything so ruthless in his life, but he has just started out with these wicked demons, the worst is yet to come. "Why in the hell did you do that?" Grant asks Walker. "The same reason I'm gonna skin dat nigga, Samuel, alive ... I can't stand a man with a traitor's heart. He's no man at all." Even men such as Walker have a creed that they live by, despite its perverse nature.

About three hours later the rest of Walker's men show up. For sport the evil men shoot the coyotes which feasts on Bishop's dead body. Tiring of the games Walker turns to his men and shout out, "The hunt begins! Yii Hii! Martin and the other bounty hunters follow Walker riding off hard toward the southwest. The real trail leads northwest.

The Price of Doing Business

The loathsome Martin knows he has further depths to which he must sink before this trek reaches its inevitable conclusion. Somehow he knows he will never be the same, but he tells himself that it's simply the price of doing business.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 18
A Bad Choice

It has been hard going for the black settlers. The weather has been anything but kind to them. Still their spirits are high. And there are moments when the weather does break for the better - even though ever so briefly. The group makes camp for the night. A blazing fire burns in the center of the encampment. Deep in her private thoughts Azizza sits alone staring at the blaze. The scamp, Samuel, comes over to her and sits down. "It is hard for me to believe that a woman like you is traveling without a man," he compliments her. "Don't waste your charms on me Mr. Thomas. You ain't getting into my drawers." The blunt, but honest woman assures him. Samuel laughs. "If I had met you when I was a young man you could have molded me into the kind of man that would be worthy of being loved by a woman like you," he adds. The lonely woman softens toward the con man. Standing up she looks down on him and says, "I still might Mr. Thomas. I still might." A smile brightens the hopeful man's face as Azizza walks away.

A displeased Daryl watches the exchange between his mother and the reprobate from across the campfire. The loving Debra comes up behind Daryl at that moment and playfully places her hands over his eyes. Surprised and already annoyed he all too roughly pulls her hands away from his eyes. "Ow! What's the matter with you?" she demands of Daryl. The preoccupied young man doesn't answer his fiancée. He simply continues to watch his mother and the man he is growing to despise.

His fiancée sits down next to him. The astute young

A Bad Choice

woman sees that he is all too embittered over the growing closeness of his mother and the scamp. "Doesn't she deserve a little happiness too?" Debra asks. "She deserves a hell of a lot more than the likes of him," Daryl insists. The young woman laughs at his protective nature. "That's for her to decide, not you." Then Debra takes Daryl's hand and pulls him up from where he sits. "Come. I feel like a swim." she smiles mischievously. He hesitates for a moment, but knowing that Debra means a lot more than a swim he decides to follow.

The break in the weather is all too brief. A few days later the ground is covered with a blanket of snow. The going is bleak. The black settlers are startled when the spearlike icicles tear heavy branches from the trees around them.

Still weeks behind and on the wrong trail Martin along with Walker and the other bounty hunters wander aimlessly through the wilderness. As they exit the woods onto the open plains the snow is still falling. There are frost clouds formed each time the men breathe or speak. "Haven't seen any sign of a mark for over a week now. Do you suppose that nigger was just fooling Bishop so that he could feed us a false trail?" Walker asks Martin. "Don't know. Maybe you should ask the nigga before you kill him. If we ever find them," Martin mocks the bounty hunter. "It doesn't matter. We may not know where deys are, but I would bet my last dollar dat like a lot of other niggas deys headed for dat free land the blue coats set aside in the Oklahoma Territory."

Meanwhile hundreds of miles away the Hannon party consisting of ten covered wagons cross the snow

A Bad Choice

covered plains. The snow is falling heavy. You can barely see more than three feet ahead of your nose. A shroud of foreboding has settled over the black settlers. Some have already been taken by pneumonia. Worst still Azizza kneels beside Debra who she has covered in several blankets, trying to sweat the sickness out of her. The young woman shivers under the blankets.

Mother Jasmine had taught this caretaker much about home remedies along with what she had learned from the doctor while caring for the slaves on the Mirador her education was as complete an education as any slave could have known. From her medicine bag she takes an orange powder that she has made from some special leaves. She pours it into the canteen and shakes it up. The woman urges the drink to the lips of the girl she thinks of as her own daughter. Cautiously Debra takes small sips from the canteen then lays back, coughs then closes her eyes and falls asleep.

After Debra falls asleep Azizza exits from the back of the family's wagon. Della, Debra's mother, stands there with tears in her eyes. The two women move away from the wagon, so that they can talk in private. Once away the caregiver turns to the mother and tells her, "It's in god's hands now." The mother weeps some more. As the women console one another the worried fiancée approaches. The expressions the women wear tells all. Without speaking Daryl climbs into the covered wagon. He finds his sweetheart asleep under the covers. Silently he makes his way to her side and gets under the covers with her. Then he places her head against his chest. The young woman awakens. Debra peers into the eyes of her

A Bad Choice

concerned lover. "I don't know why everyone is looking so worried. Nothing is going to happen to me. You promised me that the first thing that you were going to do when we get to Oklahoma is marry me. I have no intention of allowing you to back out now." Debra jokes with him. "I've changed my mind. I want to marry you here and now." Daryl declares. The young woman cries tears of joy. "I love you and I will marry you anytime and anyplace." Debra assures him. Closing his eyes, so that she can't see him cry Daryl leans down and tenderly kisses her lips.

A few hours later a sickly Debra sits on the edge of her family's wagon. The bride is dressed in a beautiful white wedding gown. Her husband to be stands beside her wearing his same old clothes except a bow tie he has borrowed. Richard stands beside his daughter. Acting as justice of the peace, Samuel stands in front of the couple holding a bible in his hand. The other black settlers stand around the wagon. "As a duly sworn officer of the courts I pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss the bride." Because of Debra's weakened condition Samuel completes an abbreviated ceremony. The groom leans down and kisses his new bride. Everyone cheers and crowds in on the couple. They all want to hug and kiss and congratulate them. The specter of Debra's illness is almost forgotten by all, that is until she collapses into Daryl's arms.

When Debra awakens she and Daryl are alone in his family wagon and he is dabbing her head with a wet rag. She pushes his hand away. "Help me out of this dress." She commands her new husband. A few minutes later the two of them are naked under the covers. "I so want to make love to you at least one

A Bad Choice

time as man and wife." Debra ominously predicts. "I am going to make love to you over a thousand times more for many years to come, starting with tonight." Daryl makes his own prediction. The young woman laughs. "You are such a liar," she admonishes him. Not wanting to speak anymore Daryl kisses Debra's lips. The new bride's head slumps limply away from her husband's kiss. He lifts her head and cradles it against his chest. There is nothing more to do, but bow his head and cry.

As if in homage to the loss of Debra the snow stops.

The wagons are atop a hill that overlooks a valley that they believe must be grassy and green in the Spring. The black settlers are gathered around a graveside, Debra's graveside. The women cry. The men stand stone faced. Samuel holds Azizza in his arms, comforting her. They all sing, "Amazing Grace ...". Debra's parents won't be going any further with the others.

Though the spirits of everyone are low the wagon train of Daryl and the black settlers forge ever ahead. The snow has worsened. It is so heavy now that one can barely see more than a foot ahead of one's self. Suddenly Daryl spots a half buried body in the snow. Holding his hand up Daryl then pulls his wagon to a halt. The others follow his lead, stopping their wagons. Untying his horse from the back of the wagon Daryl gets on the horse and rides ahead until he reaches the half buried - half frozen Indian, Screaming Eagle, son of the chief of the Blackfoot Nation. He lifts the man from the snow and places him across his horse. On foot he leads his horse back to the others. Many get down from their

A Bad Choice

wagons to help move Screaming Eagle into Daryl's family wagon.

Hours later inside the Hannon family wagon Azizza kneels beside the still unconscious man. Gently she dabs his forehead with a wet cloth. The man stirs. His eyes open slowly. Seeing the beautiful black woman he smiles, reaches up then caresses her face. "You're real." he remarks amazed. The woman laughs. "Yes I am." She assures him. "I thought I was dead and the white man had been right about being raised into the heavens by angels." he compliments her. Azizza cannot help but smile as the red man's eyes close. "You rest. You aren't out of the woods yet." She tells her patient. A bit startled is Azizza when he takes her hand into his and holds it against his cheek.

The back flap of the wagon is up. Unbeknownst to Azizza or her patient her son has been spying on them. "How is your patient?" Daryl startles his mother. The nurse pulls her hand free of Screaming Eagle's grasps and bounds to her feet. Once she is standing she puts her finger to her lips, "Shh ...!" shushing Daryl.

A few more days pass. The settlers are around the campfire. They are enjoying each other's company. Phillip and his three sons, Mark, Donald and the youngest son, Clark, all sit across from Samuel and Azizza. Even so, they aren't close enough to hear the conversation between the two. "Should I be jealous of the attention that you've shown the savage?" Samuel asks. "That sounds like somethin' white folks might say about us." A disappointed Azizza admonishes him. The jealous suitor ignores

A Bad Choice

this and continues to pursue his inquiry. "That doesn't answer my question." Angry she decides she will leave no doubt as to her position in this matter, "Screaming Eagle isn't a savage. As far as the other, you have no claim on me. Lastly, if you would like the same kind of attention that he's getting all you have to do is go out into the wild and freeze half to death. Now have I answered all of your questions Mr. Thomas?" Frustrated the woman starts to get up. The ardent suitor reaches out and tenderly grabs her hand. "You say that I have no claim on you, that I don't believe. I care deeply about you and unless I've been fooling myself I believe that you have feelings for me too," he answers her. "You don't care about anyone or anything except what's important to you and I just can't be with a man like that," she tries to make him understand.

"I can be a different sort of man if you would love me." He promises. Was it loneliness or love? The proud woman isn't sure herself, but she smiles then leans over and kisses Samuel on the cheek. The sound of a twig breaking in the woods behind them makes them turn around. Screaming Eagle stands there wearing an expression of hurt. "You surprised us sav ..." Samuel catches himself and changes his words, "... Indian ... Screaming Eagle." The concerned woman stands up and walks over to her patient. "Are you strong enough to be up?" she asks. The proud man answers, "I'm plenty strong now. In fact I see that there is no more reason for me to stay, so I will be going back to my people. Reaching out Azizza caresses Screaming Eagle's cheek. "You don't have to rush off. You are welcomed to travel with us for as long as you would like," she offers. The Indian takes

A Bad Choice

takes her hand from his cheek and kisses it. "My angel, still watching out for me," the Indian acknowledges. He stares into her eyes as she looks back and forth between the two men; one she cares for, but doesn't respect - the other she has great respect for, but doesn't love." If the fire in your eyes burnt for me I would never leave, but I suspect all that I can ever hope for is an ember." Screaming Eagle turns to the villain, Samuel. "You wouldn't begrudge me a single kiss to carry me through this empty plane." But before Samuel can answer the Indian kisses Azizza then releases his hold on her and runs off into the woods.

On the other side of the woods Daryl has watched the entire scene and had hoped for a different victor. Shaking his head he disapproves because he believes that his mother has made a bad choice.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 19
The Last Hurdle

During the last month of this passed Winter many died while others wept. The snow came and it left. They buried loved ones and moved on toward their new lives. Now Winter has passed. Now the sun shines brightly and warm. At last Spring is upon them. The wagons move more quickly across the open plains. To lighten the mood and lift spirits Daryl, Donald and Mark are doing some trick riding to entertain the others. The women and children sit in the front seats of the wagons. They watch, laugh and cheer the men on. It seems truly a new season, filled with promise and hope.

After this long day is over all of those who have survived the arduous trek thus far gather around the campfire. Phillip plays on his harmonica. Clark plays his guitar. Several people sing and dance, including some of the children. The son and mother, Daryl and Azizza, dance together. Everyone laughs. Without any indication of why the mother's mood suddenly changes she takes Daryl by his hand and leads him away from the dancing, the laughter and the campfire.

The two of them stop in a clearing, only a few feet away from the festivities. Azizza reaches out and tenderly caresses her son's cheek. "It's nice to see you smile again," she notes. "I'm happy for everyone whose dreams have survived the journey. The mother pulls her son down onto a log beside her. "It's a funny thing about dreams ... as long as you live and are willing to chance losing them you will always find another one." The son smiles a half smile. "What if you aren't willing to risk losing again?"

The Last Hurdle

he asks. The mother frowns. "... then you may as well climb down into that grave with Debra. If that is your choice don't fool yourself into thinking that you're making some grand tribute to your love for her. It's the opposite. You're saying that what you had isn't worth risking everything to find again," she instructs her son. Leaning in he kisses his mother's cheek. "Even when I want to give up you find a way to make it impossible for me to do so," he admires her tenacity. "That is a mother's job. By the way I noticed that Carter girl, Sandra, staring moon-eyed at you," she points him in a new direction. He laughs. "I'm gonna take a little time to let go of the dream that I lost before I start looking for another one," he laughingly informs his all too pushy mother. The mother gets up from the log then looks down at Daryl. "Don't take too long. Time and life have a way of getting away from you," she advises him. "I don't think you'll let me go too long without a gentle reminder." Daryl knows his mother all too well. The well intentioned mother turns and walks back to the others leaving her son to reflect on her words. As she rejoins the festivities the heart broken son remains sitting alone on the log. He thinks of his lost Debra, lowers his head into his hands then weeps.

For most of the survivors of the journey the grass seems greener, birds in flight fill the sky, the sun shines brighter and fragrant flowers are in full bloom. They near their journey's end, but they do not know that they have one last hurdle to leap.

Just miles behind Daryl's party, atop a hill, Martin and the bounty hunters spot the black settlers. The cruel men ride hard toward the unsuspecting group.

The Last Hurdle

The young man, Donald Carter, is on horseback. He looks back and is the first to spot the men. The young Mr. Carter rides back screaming out a warning, "Riders coming! Riders ...!" Daryl is also on horseback. Looking back he recognizes the look of bounty hunters. "Bounty hunters ...!" He screams. "Circle the wagons!" he shouts out instructions to the others. Readying himself for battle Daryl takes his rifle from his saddle and begins shooting at the killers. The wagons form a circle. Men and women jump from the wagons with their guns and rifles. To everyone's surprise the gun men stop just out of range of the fire of Daryl's party. "Hold your fire!" Daryl gives the order. Phillip comes from behind the circled wagons and runs up to Daryl on horseback. "Are they gunmen? What are we gonna do he asks. "They get paid more for bringing us back alive. On the other hand we have no reason to want them alive," is the young leaders reply. A tired Phillip simply cannot believe that another trial awaits them. The dishearten man declares, "As if the elements weren't enough of a challenge. When will it all end ...?" Daryl laughs the laugh of a cynic. "The price of dignity is high Mr. Carter, very high indeed." Daryl assures the once idealistic man.

Night has come. The shooting has stopped. The bounty hunters have set up camp just out of range of the gunfire of Daryl and his party. Some of the black men stand watch at the side of the wagons. Around the fire in the center of the circled wagons Daryl, Clarise, Samuel and others sit. "If we give ourselves up to them no one will be hurt and in between here and the south we are bound to run into union soldiers who will make them release us." the cowardly Samuel offers as a solution. "Then what ...?"

The Last Hurdle

Start over again? How many will die the next time? We've given up too much to turn back now. I say we fight," is Daryl's answer to their present circumstance. "Sounds like the words of a man who has lost his reason for living," Samuel accuses. The younger man jumps toward Samuel. The mother steps in between them. As usual Azizza offers the most reasonable solution, "Those of you who value their new freedom and dignity let me tell you ... they are not gifts. You have to be willing to fight for them." Most of them shake their heads in agreement with the older woman. The young leader does the only thing that is honorable, he turns to his followers and gives them a choice, "If you wish to leave you are free to do so. I am sure that if we put up a white flag the bounty hunters will be more than glad to see some of us surrender. That is what being free is about, making choices. No one here is gonna judge you for your choice," is his promise.

A slave named Billy, whose family joined with Azizza and Daryl after they had left the plantation, walks over to Daryl with his wife - Martha and their children, Hank and Flo. "I gotta go, Daryl. If 'n was jes us' me and Martha, we would stay, but we gotta think of the chil'en' safety." Daryl tries to comfort the man. He puts his hand on Billy's shoulder. "It's okay Billy. Hell, if I had kids I'd probably make the same choice.

Moments later Daryl along with Billy's family make their way to the edge of the encampment. The young leader steps out of the circle of wagons carrying a white rag tied to a stick. He yells out to his pursuers. "We have people who want to come over!" The bounty hunter - Walker and the overseer - Martin

The Last Hurdle

step out in front of their horses. "As long as their hands are in the air and they don't have any weapons on them they'll be fine." Martin answers Daryl. The leader of the ex-slaves turns to Billy and his family and says, "It's up to you, Billy." The father and husband believes that he has no choice. Taking the stick and white flag from Daryl he then steps out and begins walking toward the bounty hunters followed by his family.

The former slaves cross the fifty or so yards between the two encampments. An embittered Walker crosses over to Billy. "Is your name Samuel?" he asks. "No sir. My name is Billy," the family man answers. The evil leader of the bounty hunters kicks Billy in the butt. "Move on." He orders. Billy and his family walk hurriedly ahead of Martin and Walker. They enter the other encampment. Martin leads Billy and his family over to the campfire then asks, "Have you eaten?" Hesitantly Billy answers, "Yes sir." The cruel Walker pushes Billy to the ground. "You and your family sit your asses down." He orders then turns to Martin. "Don't pamper dem. Dey didn't have no business leavin' the plantation in the first place." Is his rationale for his mistreatment of them. "I want dem to be able and willing to work when we get dem home," Martin instructs the bounty hunter. "Dat's why dey make guns and whips." The wicked men all laugh.

It is only now that Billy begins to wonder if he has put his family in more danger by trusting these ruthless men. Martha and the children crouch down on the ground next to the the father and husband. Daylight comes quickly. There are men keeping watch on the bounty hunters for Daryl's party and bounty

The Last Hurdle

hunters keeping watch on the ex-slaves for Martin and his men. A grouchy Walker gets up from the hard ground and tugs at his gun belt. "It's been a long hard winter. I ain't had a woman or a drink in over 2 months. Today this is gonna end, one way or 'nother," he threatens.

Martin doesn't like what he is hearing, but he has learned that when the man Walker is angry one had better steer a wide path around him, so he says nothing. Many times the man Walker has faced death. The idea of dying does not faze him, but he has reservations about his death not being avenged. Turning to Martin he gives last instructions in case of the worst, "You take the nigga and his family into the woods dere." Walker points to some trees behind them. "Today those other niggas gonna surrender or we'll kill as many as it takes 'til dey do." Grabbing Grant by his collar Walker gives him a despicable task to do. "If somehow dem niggas kill us all 'den I want you to kill dat nigga 'n his whole family." he points to Billy and his family. "...da kids too?" Martin asks. "Dem 'specially," the evil man insists.

The die is cast. The 20 bounty hunters are mounted and riding toward Daryl's encampment. Inside the wooded area Martin stands with his gun pointed at Billy and his family. The children cry. "Don't hurt us mista," Billy pleads. A confused and frightened Martin Grant turns his emotions on the ex-slaves. "Shut up! You shouldn't have run! You shouldn't have run!" he excuses his intent.

The wicked men have had a lot of practice putting

The Last Hurdle

fear in the hearts of those they pursue. It is fear that they hope to inspire when they form a straight line across the open plain. This makes their numbers seem greater. The black settlers are under cover behind the wagons with their weapons raised to the ready. Most of the women and children either hide inside the wagons or beneath them. The leader of the bounty hunters leads the first charge, guns blazing. "Waaa hooo ... yahoo ...!" like a mad man he screams as he rides into the gunfire of the ex-slaves. The other bounty hunters follow Walkers lead. The screaming and the gunfire unnerves the peaceful settlers. Most of their gunfire misses the mark. One of the bounty hunters is hit and falls from his horse. One of Daryl's men is hit and slumps over the side of the hitch to his wagon. The bounty hunters reach the wagons and jump into the encampment. Both sides continue to fire at one another. After a second bounty hunter is killed the other gun men ride through the encampment then jump out on the other side.

A brief break is taken while both sides assess the losses of that first attack. Two of the bounty hunters are killed and two more are wounded. Four of Daryl's men are wounded but only one is dead. Azizza and Sandra tend to the wounded men inside of one of the wagons. Daryl and most of the men have moved to the other side of the barricade while some stay to protect their flank.

This is far from over. The savage Walker and his men prepare to charge again. Waving his rifle in the air the wild man hoots and hollers once more. "Yeehiiii ... yeehiiii ... oohhheey ... oohheey!" then charges forward like a hell cat. His men follow seemingly

The Last Hurdle

fearless or too evil to know any better.

As the bounty hunters charge the circled wagons a howling of voices comes from every direction. A confused Azizza looks out over the open plains to see Screaming Eagle leading a horde of Indian warriors over the tops of the surrounding hills. They are on an intercept course with the bounty hunters. Arrows are raining down upon the bounty hunters. They are dropping from their horses like flies. An elated Daryl's party cheers. The unrelenting Walker and two of his men manage somehow to clear the barricade once more. Determined that if he's going to die others are going to die with him Walker takes dead aim on Samuel. A shot rings out. The leader of the bounty hunters falls dead from his horse. Turning to see who his savior is Samuel finds that it is Daryl who has saved his life. The con man quickly turns and shoots the second bounty hunter, but not before he kills Clark Carter. The last of the bounty hunters clears the barricade only to be met by an arrow through the heart.

The skirmish is over. Samuel rides out while Daryl and others walk out beyond the edge of the encampment. Bodies of dead Indians and bounty hunters lay all around. A relieved Azizza climbs out of the wagon and walks out to where Samuel sits on his horse and her son stands looking out over the carnage. Smiling Daryl then walks further out to greet and thank their friend and rescuer, Screaming Eagle. The son of the Blackfoot chief sits on his horse among the dead bodies.

Everyone is startled when four shots ring out from the woods. A concerned Azizza tugs on Samuel's arm.

The Last Hurdle

"Billy and his family," she reminds everyone. Quickly Samuel turns his horse and rides hard toward the woods. It isn't because he is concerned for his fellow travelers. It is because he wants to be sure that there isn't anything remaining that can tie him to the bounty hunters, such as a man named Bishop. Suspiciously Daryl watches Samuel as he rides off. The young black leader chases after a horse with no rider, one that is left over from the battle. It takes a while for him to catch up to it.

Meanwhile in the woods a regret filled man stands over the dead bodies of Billy and his family. Grant can barely believe that it was him who had done this awful thing. The gun weighs heavy in his hand. Down to the ground he lets it drop. "What have I let that woman make of me?" he excuses his own actions. From behind Martin comes the sound of a gun being cocked. The killer of children stands staring down the barrel of Samuel's gun. "We're gonna try you nice and legal. Then we're gonna hang you from the highest tree in the Oklahoma Territory," Samuel declares. Out of sight but coming ever closer Daryl calls out to the traitor. "Samuel! Samuel!" Martin Grant begins to laugh. "I hope that they have two ropes because you're gonna hang right next to me, after I tell them about Bishop." Daryl's voice grows closer still.

"Call him in yere, so I can tell him it was you who marked the trail that led us yere" Samuel knows the man is lying for he had marked a false trail. "That's a lie. Even if it wasn't I didn't kill no babies," he defends himself. "Jus' as sure as if you had pulled the trigger," Martin assures him. Samuel crosses over to Martin. Angered he hits him with the

The Last Hurdle

butt of his gun. The weapon cuts a v shaped scar into the man's face. Hoof beats grow closer. Anxious Samuel turns in the direction of the rider. With hopes of escaping Martin dashes for the woods. Turning Samuel shoots at him, but misses. Martin disappears into the woods. The wretched Samuel starts to pursue the murderer, but at that moment Daryl appears from the other side of the trees. Not wanting him in on the pursuit Samuel halts his pursuit of Martin. The anguish filled leader marches his horse over to where Billy's family lay. "Dear god. What kind of animals were these men? Did you get any of them?" Daryl turns to Samuel and asks. "Naa. They were long gone. I was spooked by a rabbit and I fired at it." He lies hoping he can protect himself. There was no reason to take a chance on them catching Martin and him telling them the same story he had just told him. "I guess we had better bury our dead and move on," the young leader resigns himself to this task.

After all of the dead are buried Daryl stands next to his Indian ally, who still sits upon his mount. "I don't know what would have become of us if you hadn't come to our aid?" he tries to thank the warrior. "I did no more for you than you did for me," Screaming Eagle answers him. Watching Screaming Eagle watching his mother, Daryl says, "I guess we were lucky that you happened to be close by. The Indian continues to look adoringly at the young man's mother. "Tell my angel that this is truly good-bye." Then he turns and rides away. His braves follow.

As Daryl stands watching the braves ride away his mother walks over to her son. "We were lucky he was

The Last Hurdle

close by," she notes. Daryl nods and answers,
"Yeah ... lucky." Then he turns and walks away.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 20
Life Goes On

A few weeks after the massacre of the bounty hunters on the Oklahoma plain Martin drifts home to Hannon Manor. As he rides onto the plantation he sees a few hands, black and white, working in the field. The main house is barely visible from where he sits on his horse, but he believes he can make out Karen, sitting on the porch with a drink in her hand.

The mistress of Hannon Manor, Karen, had began to grow impatient with waiting for news. Now she sees Martin drawing nearer to the house. Assuming the best she can't hide her elation. Jumping up from her seat and running to the top of the steps she cries out his name, "Martin!" The overseer has reached the bottom of the steps. His lover smiles down at him. Then Karen looks to him for her slaves and the bounty hunters, especially the woman-Clarice. The smile fades. A frown replaces it as she looks down on Grant. "Where are my slaves?" she demands. "Where are the bounty hunters dat I sent with you?" she questions further. The tired man dismounts, walks up the stairs and sits down. "Can I get something' to drink at least?" he wonders aloud. "Girl ... Girl!" Karen calls for one of the house slaves who had chosen to stay. The slave that Karen calls Girl exits the house hurrying. "Mam?" Girl questions. "Bring massa Grant a glass of yah special lemonade." The special lemonade is spiked with rum. "Yas mam." Girl turns and enters the house. The two lovers stare at one another silently, each making assumptions about what the other is thinking and neither being far from right in their assumptions.

Girl soon returns with the special lemonade. Martin

Life Goes On

takes it from the slave and guzzles down its contents. Some of the drink spills from the glass. The slave woman turns and goes back into the house. Now Karen grows more impatient with Martin. She glares at the man. "Now will you answer my questions?" she insists. His head bows in resignation he begins to weave his tale for an uncaring audience. "The niggas found them some Indian friends. The Indians killed the bounty hunters. I was lucky enough to get away with my life."

The woman doesn't care for any of the hired man's excuses. "You ain't of much value to me without the slaves," She coldly and matter of fact like states to Martin. "Don't dismiss my value jus' yet. On the way back I gave dis all a lot of thought." the wicked man begins. "What did you come up wid ...?" the woman asks, not expecting much from this seemingly dimwitted man. "We can pay them a small fee for working the land ..." Karen interrupts him, "And soon they will ask for mo' and mo' 'til they ask for so much we go broke." Now it is Martin who becomes impatient. He snaps at Karen, "Let me finish, will you! We provide 'em with food and lodging at inflated prices. Dey will owe us every cent dat dey make and be indebted to us for more den dey can ever pay. Dey will be worst off den dey were as slaves. Hell, we can even hire poor white folks under the same conditions," he adds.

The woman runs to Martin and wraps her arms around his neck and kisses him passionately. "You ain't da fool I took yah to be," offering a left handed compliment. She kisses him some more. Suddenly the woman pushes him away. "What of the black whore?"

Life Goes On

whore?" a vindictive Karen wants to know. "I saw many graves of the black slaves along the way. My guess is dat she's long dead," he lies hoping this will appease Karen. The wicked woman wears an evil grin, takes Martin's hand and leads him to the door of the main house. "You're gonna like being da Massa of Grant Hall ... jus' you remember da fate of yah predecessor," she warns him. "Maybe I should have kept on running," the man rethinks his choice aloud. Karen laughs as the door to the main house closes behind the two of them.

Finally the black settlers have reached their journey's end. Out before them as wide as the eye can see is the greenest, most beautiful land most have ever imagined. They stand atop a hill looking out for miles and miles over the unspoiled plains, valleys and woods. Azizza takes one of Daryl's hands into one of her hands and one of Samuel hands into her other hand. At last she is beginning to believe that life can go on, even without her one and only true love. "Isn't this beautiful!" she shouts. An almost solemn Daryl answers, "Yes it is mother. Yes it is." The scamp Samuel has already began his evil plotting. "The first thing to do is hold a drawing of lots to see who gets to stake a claim on which parcels of land and in what order," Samuel announces. Being the fine leader that he is Daryl offers to stay out of the drawing and accept the last of the parcels of land, so that no one can complain about the fairness of the lottery procedure.

The black settlers have constructed a tent in which to hold the lottery. After a few days Daryl and some of the other men have also surveyed all of the lands

Life Goes On

that can be reached within a day's ride in each direction. They have also drawn a map according to the requirements of law as Samuel has laid them out. Today there is a large hat on a table, which contains slips of paper with numbers. Surprisingly there is order to the line being formed to pick numbers. The wicked Samuel manages to secure the third position in line. No one realizes that he has palmed a slip of paper. "We are drawing numbers to see in what order each of us will select our parcels of land. I will not participate in the lottery. As the one who leads I believe it is my responsibility to see to it that no one can have call to complain about the fairness of this procedure, so I will take the last parcel of remaining land." Daryl then explains how the map is drawn and the size of each parcel. "When I and three others take the map to the nearest assessor's office the map will be based on this process," he instructs all who are gathered there. An impatient Phillip yells out, "Let's get started!"

The luck of the draw has two of the Carter family members at the front of the line. The second oldest son, Donald, is the first to select. He looks down at his number and shouts out proudly, "Four! I got four!" as the young man passes his father, Phillip, pats him on the back. "That should be a prime piece of land, son," Phillip congratulates him. Next the younger sister, Sandra Carter, picks a number. When she looks down at the paper she is disappointed. "Twelve," she calls out with no cheer in her voice. The supportive Azizza stops Sandra as she passes by her. She takes Sandra's hand then whispers into the young woman's ear, "You did well my dear. Believe me the twelfth lot will still be an excellent piece

Life Goes On

of land." It means a lot to her that Daryl's mother has taken an interest in her. Smiling Sandra makes her way to the map side of the lodge. It is the villain's turn to pick his number. Dipping his hand, with the numbered slip palmed inside, into the hat Samuel draws his hand out then takes a look at the slip and yells gleefully, "One! Number one ...!" All look at the man suspiciously. Shaking his head Daryl looks at his mother. Ashamed for Samuel she looks away.

The lottery soon concludes and everyone moves out over the range of lands literally staking out their claims. Each settler places wooden stakes at the four corners of their parcels of land. The scoundrel Samuel has selected the prime center parcel of land. There he drives his stakes into place. The young leader walks over to Samuel. "Already I'm regretting my decision to allow you to come with us. How did you do it?" Daryl asks. "Do what?" Samuel feigns innocence. Laughter accents Daryl's disbelief of the man. "Draw the one. You palmed it. Didn't you? I should have expected as much from a card shark," he accuses. "Why couldn't I have just been lucky?" Samuel asks. "Not a single person in the entire settlement believes that," Daryl makes plain everyone's assessment of the man's character. Unnoticed by the two men the mother stands nearby and has heard all they have said. "I do," she answers her son's charges. Looking at his mother Daryl says, "You want to believe, but even you know the truth," he turns and walks away from his mother. Samuel looks at the woman he cares for with hope. "Is he right?" Gently she caresses Samuel's face. "No. I believe in you because I love you, so I must." The happy man pulls his new love close and

Life Goes On

kisses her hard upon the lips.

Over the next week everyone has began work on their homes, but the work is stopped for now. They gather in the tent where the lottery was held. Daryl enters waving the map over his head. "Here it is everyone! The finished filing map with everyone's claim listed," he announces. Daryl hands the map to Phillip. Looking at it he grins then passes it on. The next person does the same and the next and the next and so on. "Donald, Mark and Samuel ...". Daryl's announcement is interrupted by a chorus of boos for the man everyone believes cheated the lottery. "... are going with me to register our claims. While I'm gone Phillip will be in charge. Remember that you all are your brother's keeper. If one person needs help with one thing you will help them because you may need help with something else and they will help you," he instructs everyone.

Surprising everyone Phillip, raises his voice, "We don't feel right about the plot of land that you got stuck with ... what can one grow in that black mud?" An optimistic Daryl smiles, "Don't worry about me. I'm sure grass will grow fine there, so I'll go down to Texas when I return and buy some livestock," he answers. My daughter and the rest of my family want you to have her parcel. After all we have more than most as a family." Daryl walks over to Sandra and caresses her cheek. "I do thank you, but believe me it's alright. I will be fine," he assures everyone.

Unfamiliar with acts of nobility Samuel turns to Azizza and mocks her son, "Your son is a damned fool!" he tells her. She understands both men, so all she can do is frown and ignore the man she has

Life Goes On

placed too much of her trust in.

Weeks later a festive mood has returned to the place once known as the Hannon plantation, soon to be the Grant plantation. Long wooden tables covered in fine linen tablecloths line the grounds outside of Grant Hall, formerly Hannon Manor. The table is covered with an abundance of food and drink. Fifty or so White guests mill about the grounds. Black servants are formally dressed and carry things back and forth to and from the main house. Two villains, Albert Marshal and Martin Grant walk along the main road of the now reinvigorated plantation. "I was sorely disappointed in you when I heard dat you had let dem slaves get away, boy." Albert reprimands his soon to be son-in-law. "It couldn't be helped, sir." Martin assures him. What upset me even more was the possibility dat yah was a coward who had run out on good white men, leaving em to die at the hand of niggas and savages," the older man added. "Dat ain't how it happened," Grant insists. Laughing, Albert tells Martin Grant, "To be perfectly honest I don't give a shit 'bout dat anymore. Da men dat went with you were the worst the white race has to offer - poor white trash, but you, yah somethin' special. Way you figured out how to still work the niggas without paying 'em notin' ... well is jus' short of genius," the wicked man compliments Martin. "Thank you sir."

Martin is just glad that he hasn't angered the powerful leader of the fanatic Knight Ghosts. "I want you to join my organization," Albert tells Martin. "No disrespect 'tended sir, but I've kil't for the last time," the too late repentant man answers. The father-in-law sits to be sits the

Life Goes On

anguish filled man down and talks to him. "You ain't listening, boy. Dis ain't never been 'bout hate or killing'. It has always been 'bout money and power. Hell, if'n you had come up with yah idea before the war a whole lot of lives could'a been saved and misery 'voided." Martin thinks about all the men who had died and he laughs cynically. "It couldn't have been jus' 'bout money," he insists. "Son if'n a man tells you dat yah better than another man hold onto yah wallet cause he's trying to get inta yah pocket. The elite need the money and sometimes the lives of the masses to maintain their positions of power. The masses have notin' else so dey wanta believe dat de're somehow better than the next poor slob. It's a symbiotic relationship," Albert explains. "Why are you telling me all of dis?" Martin questions Albert's motives. "Yah smart and yah marrying my daughter. Da smaller the circle of power the greater yah individual power is. The smallest community unit is da family," he explains further.

A resolute Martin looks Albert in the eyes. "I won't hurt anyone again." Martin holds to his newfound convictions, such as they are. "Maybe not you personally," Albert hints of things to come. Martin believes that he doesn't truly have a choice, so he answers his soon to be father-in-law, "I'm in." The leader of the Knight Ghost nods his head in approval. "See. I told yah ... one smart son of a gun."

The two men hear the wedding march begin to play from across the plantation. Their business is done. New business is to follow. "I guess we had better get to our places," the father of the bride tells the groom. Martin sees himself as a man taking his

Life Goes On

death march to the gallows. The condemned man and his executioner walk the few hundred yards to the foot of the steps of the main house. The guests are all gathered around the two men as the door to the main house opens. Angelic in her appearance, Karen exits the house. The sole friend, Lilly, trails Karen holding the train to her beautiful white wedding gown. Albert turns to Martin Grant and says to him, "The two of yah gonna make one hell of a couple." Martin flippantly replies, "One could take dat literally." The father didn't hear him. "What?" Albert questions. "Never mind ..." Martin answers as he watches his beautiful yet evil wife-to-be move gracefully toward him.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 21
Building A Future

It has been some time now since Samuel has seen the hustle and bustle of a large city. He, Daryl, Donald and Mark have come to Philadelphia because it is the closest place to their settlement for a black man to file a claim without worrying about the papers being misfiled or disappearing altogether, at least that is what Daryl hopes. The four men ride up to the front of the office of the Assessor. They get off of their horses and tie them up. The tired travelers head up the stairs then inside.

The first one of the group through the door is their leader Daryl. He carries his saddle bag with claim papers and maps inside. There's only one customer at the claims window, an elderly white man. Steven Parker, the county assessor, grimaces when he sees the four black men enter. Handing a certificate to the elderly white man Steven then smiles. The elderly man takes his certificate and heads for the door. After the elderly man leaves Daryl moves up to the counter and begins emptying the papers onto the counter. "I'm sorry. This is the assessor's office. You want the Free Man's office across the street." Steven feigns politeness. "No. We're here to register claims on land in the Oklahoma Territory," he informs the clerk. Steven frowns. "I'm not sure that blacks are allowed to file claims in this office. I'm afraid you will have to get a judge who will give you something in writing before I can accept your claims." In answer to the man's suggestion Daryl ruffles through the papers. Taking out case notes that Samuel had written down he shows them to Steven. "Right here, it says-the appellate court of Pennsylvania rules that Marcus Turner, a

Building A Future

black man, also being a Free Man is entitled to the protection provided by the registration of a claim to property open to settlement by any citizen of these United States." The bureaucrat has no intention of allowing them to file no matter what their rights may be. "I don't care what dem papers say until you bring me a court order I ain't gonna allow no nig ... Negroes to file a claim in this office." Now, frustration sets in for Daryl and the others. The bigotted man smiles. Having lost his patience Samuel starts to go for his gun. The clerk is frightened, but foolishly determined. Daryl grabs Samuel's hand. The black settlers reluctantly exit the assessor's office.

Once down on the street the four angry black men contemplate what their next move should be. "You should've let me kill him." Samuel tells Daryl. "Just maybe whomever replaced him would be a little more reasonable." Daryl glares at Samuel. "And maybe they would have hung all four of us and become more determined to stop blacks from registering a claim?" Exasperated Samuel tells Daryl, "He knows that ain't no judge gonna write that order." A smile comes on Daryl's face. "Maybe we won't need an order.", a plan forms. Turning to the others he asks, "Can the three of you stay out of trouble for a few days?" The other three men nod their heads. "Sure," they answer in unison. "Ain't looking for no trouble," the brothers add. "I hope not," Daryl sighs. The leader mounts his horse then turns to the three men once more. "I'll meet you here in front of the assessor's office at ten o'clock the day after tomorrow." he instructs them then Daryl rides off.

Building A Future

Unsure of what comes next Donald turns to his brother and questions him. "Well, what do we do now?" The card shark answers for himself, "I think I'll go find myself a card game. Mark grins at his brother. "It's been near on ta four months since I've had a drink or a woman. The twenty dollars dad gave me is burning a hole in my pocket." All three of them declare, "The saloon!"

Meanwhile back at the settlement much has been accomplished since the four men left. Most of the homes are completed. The blacksmith, Phillip, has built a drill with which to dig wells for each of the properties. Some of the settlers are working as a group to finish the last homes. Azizza carries water to some of those workers. The leaders mother stops when she reaches Phillip's side. "It's time for you to take a break." The black woman advises the hard working temporary leader. Phillip laughs heartily. "I'll stop long enough for a drink and some encouragement, but I can't stop any longer than that. I'm in charge. Gotta set a good example, like your son always has." He reminds the mother. After handing him a cup of water from the bucket Azizza can't help, but admire the man. "Your wife is a lucky lady." Again Phillip laughs. "I'd like to think that we both are. We have a lot of love. One that we can acknowledge to the world. A love that we draw strength from." Smiling his fellow settler knows that someone has told him about Daryl's father. "The man I loved was a good man and I am proud to have loved him," she declares. "I know he was a good man. After all, he gave up everything for the woman he loves and his son." Answering her with a cloaked warning, "I just hope that you aren't wanting the next man you love to be black so much

Building A Future

that you're rushing into a relationship without any caution," he offers less than subtly. Tired of defending her choice she takes the bucket of water and continues on in a huff.

In a Philadelphia saloon miles away from the settlement Samuel sits playing cards with several white men. Donald and Mark have staked out a spot at the bar and are having drinks with two white dance hall girls. Trouble seems to find men of principles. A Knight Ghost gun man, Dennis Branch, walks into the bar. Spotting the two black men with the white women at the bar Dennis crosses over to them. The gunman ends up behind Donald. Looking for trouble he intentionally bumps into Donald. Turning around the young black man faces the gun man glaring him down. "Are you trying to start something nigga?" the arrogant gunman spews the foul word at the young man. Remembering his promise to stay out of trouble Donald smiles, deciding to let it go. "No sir. If I accidentally bumped into you I am truly sorry." He plays the role of a compliant jig-a-boo. Dennis is looking for trouble and won't be put off. "Not as sorry as yah gonna be," he insists. Facing the gun man down Donald has his hands beside his guns. "Mister I don't want to kill you. Step aside and live," Donald warns the gun man. An arrogant Dennis laughs. "Yah either don't know who I am or yah one crazy jig-a-boo, either way yah dead." The bounty hunter goes for his gun. The black man draws and fires his gun. The white gun man drops his gun and grabs his bleeding belly. He wears a look of surprise as he stares at Donald. "Didn't no nigga outdraw me," is his last words. The man who had killed many an innocent black man now lies on the

Building A Future

saloon floor, dead at the hands of a black man who didn't want to kill him.

A wary Samuel grabs his money from the card game and hurries over to the brothers' sides. Looking around the saloon Donald puts away his gun. "I think that we had better get the hell out of here," Samuel advises them.

Miles away from the city of Philadelphia the gate to the army base Fort Ranklin closes behind Daryl Hannon III. This is the command center for the union troops in the north central and north eastern United States, which includes the city of Philadelphia and the Oklahoma Territory.

Asking a private he meets along the way for directions Daryl makes his way to the base commander's office. At an outer desk sits the first sergeant Bose, just outside of the captain's main office. "I need to see your commander," Daryl informs Bose. "What about ...?" the grumpy sergeant wants to know. "About violations of Free Men's rights," the black man answers the sergeant. The man doesn't see this as pressing business for the union army anymore. "The captain is too busy. You will have to come back another time," he instructs Daryl. The head strong young man has come too far and sacrificed far too much to be put off by one more stupid man.

Ignoring the sergeant Daryl heads for the captain's office door. Bose jumps up and bars his way. "I said come back," he speaks menacingly. "I'm going to see the captain today, one way or another. You choose," Daryl offers. The soldier swings at Daryl. The young

Building A Future

man ducks, grabs the sergeant's arm then slings him onto his own desk, making quite a ruckus. The soldier jumps to his feet. The door to the captain's office opens and Captain Eugene Stanford exits. "What is all of this racket?" he demands of the two men. His subordinate is quick to point the blame at Daryl, "I told this nigga he had to come back another time and he tried to force his way into your office." Captain Stanford glares at his subordinate. "Let that be the last time that word ever passes your lips in my presence," he states vehemently. "Yes sir," Bose answers meekly. Stanford turns to Daryl. "Now what is it that your U.S. army can do for you mister ...?" the captain doesn't yet know Daryl's name. "Hannon ... Daryl Hannon III, sir. Me and a group of Free Men have staked claims on land in the Oklahoma Territory, but when we went to register our claims the clerk refused our claims because we are black." Daryl explains. "We will just have to do something about that, won't we? After all that's why we just finished fighting a war, isn't it?" Daryl finds it amusing that the man ends every statement with a question.

Captain Stanford puts his arm around Daryl's shoulder. The black man smiles.

In a barn in Philadelphia Donald sits on a stack of hay, his head down, sullen. Samuel sits across from Donald staring at him in awe. Mark is elated and jumping up and down. "Shit! Do you know who you killed? That was the bounty hunter, Dennis Barnes! He's one of the fastest guns around." His brother doesn't find anything to celebrate in what he has done. "Killing a man is never anything to rejoice over," Donald assures his brother. Mark stops and

Building A Future

stares at his brother. "How many black men has he killed for no other reason than the fact that they were black. Hell, if you were slower he would have happily killed you too." The brother is all too happy to point out. "I have to agree with your brother," Samuel adds his opinion. "I didn't say it wasn't necessary. I said that it's no call for celebration. Our father would say the same," Donald reminds Mark. "Why not rejoice over the death of a mad dog like Barnes?" Mark insists. "Because then he wins. He's made you just like him," Donald warns.

It's ten thirty in the morning. Two days have passed since Daryl rode off. Outside the assessor's office Donald, Mark and Samuel await his return. The three men are nervous as a result of the shooting. They don't tie up their horses. Instead Mark holds them. "I can't wait to put this city behind us," a guilt ridden Donald remarks. Suddenly Daryl appears mere yards away with twenty union soldiers, led by Captain Stanford. The older of the two brothers, Mark, spots Daryl and the soldiers first. "It won't be long now." The younger brother and the rogue look in the same direction that Mark is looking. They see Daryl and the soldiers. Each of the men sigh with relief. The soldiers and Daryl ride up to the three men then dismount their horses.

A short time later as Steven stands behind his counter the assessor's office doors open. The black man from a few days earlier is the first one Steven sees. Having not yet seen the captain or the soldiers the arrogant man is quick to dismiss him. "Without that paper you may as well take your ass on boy." Captain Stanford then enters the assessor's office. Three soldiers, Samuel and the two brothers

Building A Future

follow the captain inside. "I think that you had better change your tone of voice sir. You are a public servant and you are talking to a Free Man." The officer reminds the assessor. Nervously Steven stares at Stanford and his men. "Whooo ... the hell do you think you are?" Steven stutters. The officer declares who he is, "I am Captain Eugene Stanford, commander of the 4th regiment of Pennsylvania and the military law in this region. I protect the rights of all of the citizens of the north central and northeastern territories of these United States, including those of Black Free Men."

The pencil pusher doesn't want to recognize the captain's authority. "This is a civilian matter. You have no authority here!" Steven tells the captain. "It was a civilian matter until you denied these Free Men their right to file a claim in this office. Now sir you have two choices, either assist these men with the filing of their claims and issue them their stamped certificates of filing or go to a military stockade while my men take over your duties. Either way these men will have their claims registered in this office ... today!" Stanford assures Steven. A confident Daryl walks over to the counter and dumps papers onto the counter. Grimacing Steven picks up the papers and begins to sort through them. "I'll file your damned claims. Hell, out there in the middle of nowhere you ain't depriving white folks of notin'." The bigot notes.

The petty man has searched for a legal reason to deny the claims, but Samuel was as astute a law pupil as he had been a student of gambling. As the day nears its end the white clerk stamps the last of the certificates and places them in a large box

Building A Future

along with other claims. The conniving man then hands Daryl the registration certificates for their claims. Turning toward Captain Stanford the clerk declares with a smirk, "That's the last of them." Being an astute judge of human nature, Captain Stanford, walks around the counter then takes the box with the certificates of registration from the shelf where Steven had placed them. Handing the box to one of his men the captain declares, "I'll take these." The agitated clerk snaps at Stanford, "What the hell are you doing?!" Smiling his own knowing smile the officer answers, "The military is going to hold onto these records." Then the captain turns and heads for the door. Stopping at the door Stanford turns to Steven. "Five minutes after we had left you would have had yourself a little bonfire, using these documents as the fuel," the captain acknowledges what he has deduced. "More like two minutes," a sarcastic Steven replies.

Outside the assessor's office Stanford stands talking with Daryl while his men, Samuel and the two brothers stand watching. A grateful Daryl offers his hand to the captain in friendship. "I want to thank you for your help." Daryl tells him. "Just doing my job," the captain insists as he takes Daryl's hand and shakes it. "A lot of men would've turned their heads the other way." The young black man assures the soldier. "If there's ever a dispute over your claims you know where to find me." Stanford reassures Daryl. The two men smile. "Sure do," he answers.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 22
Learning Respect

The trail back has been long and hard, so Donald, Mark and Samuel are glad that it is behind them and that now they can begin their new lives. As they ride into the settlement they are delighted to see all of the progress the others have made in their absence. People are still hard at work. Azizza, Sandra, Phillip and the some of the others drop their tools and come running to greet the three men. Then the mother stops. She is visibly upset. "Where is Daryl?" Is something wrong? Did something happen to him?" she rattles off one question after another. Right behind the mother is Sandra and she is almost as upset as Azizza. "Calm down. He's fine. Everything went well. He decided to go on to Texas to buy his cattle and a bull before the spring," Samuel explains. The mother and Sandra sigh, both relieved.

It is then that Samuel reaches inside his saddle bag and takes out the registrants' copies of the certificates and tosses them into the air, laughing gleefully. "Here they are, our copies of the certificates of registration for our claims!" he exults. People laugh, cheer and chase after the windblown papers, everyone except the two concerned women. They watch somberly.

A few weeks later in a Texas saloon the doors to the saloon swing open and Daryl Hannon III enters. There are only a handful of cowpokes at the bar, two pretty dance hall girls and the bartender. The black man makes his way to the bar. Everyone stares at him. It isn't often that one sees a black man in this part of Texas in these days. The stranger walks

Learning Respect

over to the bartender. "A drink, a meal and some information . . .," Daryl tells the man what his needs are. "A drink is two bits, in advance, a meal you will have to go to the other side of town at Momma Lucy's. Information is a buck a question and you already owe me three." The bartender answers. Daryl hands the man a five dollar gold piece. "Let's start with a whiskey for me and you." The bartender smiles as he sees the opportunity to earn several months wagers off of this black man in a single afternoon.

The bartender and Daryl stand together having drinks. "Who has the best livestock in the area?" Daryl asks the man. "What exactly are you looking for?" the bartender asks. "First and foremost a great bull after that some excellent cattle," the black man informs the bartender of his needs. The other man laughs. "You must be a long way from home to ask that. Anyone who lives within 200 miles of these parts knows that Mr. David Lee has the most spectacular animal bred anywhere, General Lee. He named him after his cousin, THE General Lee," the bartender explains as he pours more drinks for himself and Daryl. "You don't mind . . . do you?" Daryl laughs and shakes his head no. "If yah lookin' to buy though I gotta tell yah he ain't gonna sell General Lee to nobody, 'specially not no nigga. No offense." Daryl understands that if he is going to do business with whites in this part of the country he had better get accustomed to their casual use of the offensive term. He frowns and answers, "None taken. Tell me more about this David Lee." The bartender relays his assessment, "Other than being richer than sin he's like most men . . . loves women, drinking, money and a sporting wager. Not necessarily in that order." A smile comes to Daryl's

Learning Respect

lips as the formulation of a plan begins. "What about honor?" he asks. "Everybody knows dat yah ain't gonna find a more honorable man than Mr. Lee no matter how far yah look," the white man insists.

Pumping the bartender for as much information as he can get Daryl spends most of his day in the saloon. Times haven't changed that much, so he spends the night in a rooming house on the colored side of town. In the morning he gets an early start, heading out to the Lee ranch.

By eight o'clock most of the chores are done on the Lee ranch, so David Lee and several of his cowhands, including one named Terry Hawks, are sitting on a fence of the pin that holds the magnificent bull, General Lee. The men barely believe their eyes when they see a black man riding down the road onto the ranch. Terry jumps down from the fence. "Well I'll be damned!" the man exclaims. The others can only stare dumbfounded. "A spook on the Lee ranch I never thought I'd see the day." Terry declares. The owner of the ranch can only shake his head in disbelief. "He sure has balls." David admires the man's courage. The black man rides up to Terry, who is the only one standing on the ground. Getting down from his horse Daryl turns to Terry. "May I speak to Mr. David Lee?" he asks. The fool man marches menacingly toward Daryl. He stops a few feet away from the black man. "You better get yah ass off of this property before I put my foot in it," Terry threatens. Calmly Daryl asks, "Are you Mr. Lee?" Surprised by the question Terry answers truthfully, "No, but ..." Daryl interrupts him, "Then you don't have a damn thing to say about who comes or goes. Now do you?" Angry Terry charges at

Learning Respect

Daryl. The man side steps Terry and kicks him in the butt. An embarrassed Terry falls to the ground. Quickly Terry jumps back to his feet. Without thinking he goes for his gun. Daryl draws first. The cow hand freezes with his hand on his gun, still in the holster.

Finally David Lee climbs down from the fence. "I'm David Lee and I'm asking you nicely, get off my property," the owner insists. Putting his gun away Daryl turns to David. "That's your right Mr. Lee, but I heard that you are a man who favors a good wager. You have something I want, so I thought that we might enter into a friendly contest," the bold man chooses to trust his instincts.

David and the cowhands all laugh at the boldness of this black man. "I told them that you had balls, but even I didn't know how big they are," David compliments the man's courage. The owner walks over to Daryl. "OK I'm listening," he waits to hear the proposition. "I've been told that you would never think of selling General Lee there." The young deal maker begins by pointing to the bull. "That is General Lee, isn't it?" He wants to be sure. Beginning to become suspicious David insists that Daryl continues with his proposition. "What would you call a fair price if you were going to put a value on him?" Daryl asks. "What has that to do with the wager?" David asks. "Everything sir," Daryl insists. The owner paces back and forth looking Daryl up and down. The ranch owner considers himself a darn good judge of character, so he's trying to assess the character of the black man who stands in front of him. "If you're some kinda city slicker trying to con me I'm gonna have my men gun you down

Learning Respect

like a mad dog." The cow hands all place their hands on their holsters. "I'm no con man. An honest wager ... Win or lose." Taken by this bold black man's courage David smiles and answers him, "\$5,000.00 would be a fair price." Sighing Daryl answers, "That's a lot of money." Believing he may have ended the proposition David points Daryl the way off of the ranch. "If you can't afford to play ride on," the owner instructs the black man. Turning and reaching inside his saddle bag he takes out three bags of gold coins. Daryl walks over to David then opens the first bag then pours the contents from it, gold coins, into the palms of David's hands. "There's two thousand dollars worth of coins in each bag." Again the white man looks at Daryl suspiciously. "So what's the wager?" Not sure Daryl looks around the ranch. Spotting a beautiful black stallion it comes to him. "That's a pretty fast looking animal that you have there," he comments. David laughs. "I must look ten kinds of stupid. I'm not going to race my horse against yours. I've never even seen your animal run." It is Daryl's turn to laugh. "That isn't exactly the wager I had in mind." he begins.

A short time later everything is set up for the wager. David Lee and his cow hands stand around waiting for the improbable wager to begin. Terry sits astride the black stallion - Lightning. Next to Terry and the horse Daryl stands with his shirt off and barefoot. The owner cannot believe the wager, so he repeats the terms to Daryl, "Let me get this straight. You are going to race Lightning on foot. The first one of you to clear that fence down there ..." David points to the fence some fifty yards away. "... wins. Also, no matter which of yah

Learning Respect

wins I get the \$5,000.00, but if you win you get General Lee and I sell you forty head of prime cattle at a fair price." The man laughs and shakes his head in disbelief. "That's the bet." Daryl answers. All of the cowhands laugh.

Shaking his head in disbelief David looks Daryl in the eyes and asks, "Have you ever done this sorta thing before, boy?" Daryl glares back at the man. "My name is Daryl Hannon III and no I haven't, but I want to have the finest ranch in Oklahoma territory, so I'm willing to take some risks," he answers. "Well, Mr. Daryl Hannon III, I believe you. And what's more I'm gonna take you up on yah bet," David turns his back on Daryl and continues, "After all I gets me \$5,000.00 in free money."

All is ready. David takes out his gun and points it into the air. "One ... two ... three!" David fires the gun. The atmosphere of the race is filled with the electricity of elation and expectation. The cowhands couldn't help but hope to see the uppity black man brought low. It is what they've been taught their whole life long. Secretly David Lee roots for the strong proud man to win his wager. He believes that courage of this nature should be rewarded.

The first few yards Daryl pulls away from the horse, Lightning. Terry begins to dig his heels cruelly into the horse's side. The horse catches up to then passes the struggling man. Sweat glistens on the sinewy rippling muscles of man and horse. David Lee can see the determination in the man's eyes as he begins to put forth a seemingly super human effort. Again Daryl pushes by the horse once more.

Learning Respect

The expression on Terry's face is one of amazement and disbelief when mere inches ahead of Lightning and Terry, Daryl leaps over the fence.

The exhausted man falls to the ground in a heap, his mouth dry and his heart thumping like a large base drum. All of the other men stand frozen in awe of the amazing feat that they have just witnessed. Terry is embarrassed and angered by his defeat at the hands of the black man. Turning Lightning around Terry heads toward his boss and the other cowhands. Still winded Daryl gets to his feet then heads toward David Lee also. By the time Daryl reaches the men Terry is seated there upon the horse, Lightning. Intending to cheat the black man Terry takes out his gun and points it at Daryl. The other cowhands follow suit. The ranch owner, David, is alight with admiration for the black man. "Ain't never seen such a thing in my life," he says. "Lightning won!" Terry lies. "Shut up, Terry!" David orders.

"A man told me that you were the most honest man in these parts." Daryl paraphrases the bartender's words. "I don't know 'bout that, but you don't have to worry about me welshing on our bet," he assures Daryl. The black man directs David's attention to the men's guns. "Yeah I'm a little worried." he points out. The rancher laughs then orders his men, "Put them things away!" His men all put their guns away. The troublemaker, Terry, gets down from Lightning and walks over to Daryl. The black man is apprehensive of the approaching man. After realizing what Daryl has accomplished even Terry is impressed. His expression changes from stern to jovial. "Shit! We should call you Lightning!" the man jokes. Everyone laughs.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 23
Unlikely Friends

As a tribute to the man who had led them to this promise land the black settlers have named their town Black Mud Gap after the black mud piece of land Daryl ended up owning. Imagine the surprise of everyone when their small out of the way settlement is visited by the pony express. The rider has mail for Azizza Hannon. Sandra and the others gathered around. They figure it must surely be a letter from Daryl because he is long overdue. The mother shoos the others away. "After I've read it I will tell you if there is anything of concern ... or any special hellos in the letter," she says looking at Sandra. The young woman smiles in anticipation, hopeful that Daryl has made mention of her.

"Dear mom, hope you and the others are all well. I know that you were expecting me back soon, but my new friend, David Lee, has invited me to stay over 'til the spring thaw. He says that way I will lose fewer of the cattle that I bought from him. It's a surprise to me to hear myself refer to him as a friend. The man was one of the biggest racist I had ever met when I first got here. I guess I had my share of racial resentment too. I think it all comes from ignorance. He had never truly known any blacks and the only whites that I had known, other than my father, had been brought up believing that racism is simply the way of the world. We both know better now.

You are getting this letter courtesy of my new investment in the pony express. I own the northeastern and central United States franchise. Communication is going to be one of the keys to the

Unlikely Friends

growth and success of our settlement. I love you and I miss you every minute that I'm away. Tell Sandra that I said hi. I have thought about what you said about life having a way of getting away from you. Maybe by the time I get back I'll be ready to move on with my life. My suggestion to you is the opposite, don't be in too much of a hurry to get on with your life. There is someone wonderful out there for you."

As Azizza reads Daryl's letter she cries. Samuel walks in. He wraps his arms around her trying to console her. "Don't worry. He'll be home soon. Your son is a strong and resourceful young man. There isn't anything that he can run into out there that he can't handle." It is a comfort to Azizza having this man in her life despite what others may believe.

The Christmas season has come. In Black Mud Gap Daryl is sorely missed by his mother and Sandra. Meanwhile Daryl spends all too much of his time alone in the guestroom that David Lee has made available to him. Tonight he lies across the bed reading a letter from his mother that was delivered by his pony express rider. "Dear Daryl, I am missing you too. Sandra was delighted that you mentioned her in your letter. I am well. Things here are going better than any of us could have ever imagined it would.

I hear what you're saying about slowing down, but each of us must choose our own path. That is why you had to go to Texas. Why you are waiting to forget before you begin again. No matter what path I choose you will always be the most important person in my

Unlikely Friends

life. I'm glad that you and your friends are learning that the measure of a man is in his deeds and not in the color of his skin. If this country, no, if this world is going to be a place worth living in we all have to learn that Friendship begins with Respect. Don't learn to like them so much that you stay away too long from me. I am looking forward to seeing your handsome face once more. Hurry home! Love, Your Mother." She writes.

Just as Daryl puts the letter from his mother down onto the bed the door to his room opens and David enters. "How are you doing?" the man asks. Daryl holds up the letter. "Fine ... just reading a letter from back home," he answers. The new friend crosses the room and sits down in a large comfortable chair. "You don't mind if I join you for a moment, do you?" the host asks. "Of course not." the young man answers. With a fatherly demeanor the older man begins to share his wisdom with the younger man. "I know that a lot has happened to you in the last two years. You probably think that you're not ready to forget all that you've lost and move on. Well let me tell you something ... a man needs women in his life. Sometimes you need someone to love and be with solely, sometimes you need a female friend who can give you a perspective on life that a man can't, but sometimes you simply need sex- the touch of a woman to remind you of the ultimate joy of being a man. It hurts me to watch you sit 'round yere month after month. You do more than yah fair share of da work, share a meal with us den up to dis room to hide from the world. It's not healthy. I've learned to respect and like you Daryl and I know you deserve better than this. Besides yah father and dat lady of yours are probably turning over in their graves in torment

Unlikely Friends

thinking that their loss has taken away yah willingness to live."

The young black man smiles and gets up from the bed and walks over to David. He hugs the man then steps away. "You're right. It's time for me to start living again." Daryl admits. "Terry and the others are going into town for a drink and whatever they can get into. Join them," David advises. "They won't mind?" the young man questions. "Who cares? You're going to find you a woman, right?" the two men laugh. Daryl answers, "Maybe."

As Daryl, Terry and four other white cowhands ride toward town Terry feels the need to define the relationship that is starting, "I was impressed with what yah did and Mr. Lee likes yah so yah must be alright, but I don't want yah getting the idea dat I'm gonna ever be friends wid no nig ..." Terry's words are cut short by Daryl's glare. "... wid no Negro. Not dat dere's anything wrong wid' yah I jus' wasn't raised dat way," he explains his backward upbringing. "I ain't looking for no friends, got enough of 'em already. I'm jus' going to town to have a drink and to share the company of a woman," the black man hopes to end this ignorant conversation.

The beautiful dance hall girl - Elena has heard a lot about the black man who had outrun a horse and made friends with the biggest racist in these parts and she is intrigued. Daryl has sat down at a table, alone and in a corner. The white dance hall girl makes her way over to Daryl's table. She smiles down at him. "May I join you?" she asks. He looks up and returns her smile. "If you'd like. Sure," he quickly

Unlikely Friends

answers.

Everyone is surprised because Elena never sits with anyone. The woman dances and sings then makes her way back to her room. Many men have tried talking to her, buying her gifts, some even proposed marriage, but not since she had left Boston had Elena shown interest in anyone.

The white men in the bar, including Terry and the cow hands are jealous of the black man. For some it even goes beyond jealousy. They wonder how she could dare to turn them down then now show interest in this black man.

For hours Daryl and Elena sit talking, laughing and drinking. Unlike the way these two usually are with others he has been able to talk to her about the loss of Debra while she has also been able to talk about being left at the altar by the man she had given her virginity. To Daryl's surprise Elena admits that she has not been with a man since that first time.

The two of them go to Elena's room. Both of them know that tonight isn't going to lead anywhere, but they need to be with someone who respects them for who they are.

At first they make love tenderly. Later their lovemaking becomes more fervent, more passionate. When they part they understand that they may never make love again, but they will always be friends.

It is almost one o'clock in the morning when Daryl makes his way down the stairs and into the bar area

Unlikely Friends

again. Terry smiles at the man then shakes his head in disbelief. Others are less impressed. Instead they are angry over Daryl's conquest. The barber, a man nicknamed Slice because he has cut several men during bar fights, marches toward Daryl menacingly. The cowhand, Terry, steps in front of Slice. "What's going on Slice?" Terry asks, though he already knows. "I'm gonna cut me a spook," Slice answers. "Can't let you do dat. Mr. Lee tol' me to watch out for him, so I gotta do jus' dat." Terry explains. "Well seems to me dat Mr. Lee done gone and become a nigga lover. How 'bout you Terry? Are you a nigga lover too?" Pausing for a moment as if to ponder the question Terry then turns to Slice and answers, "You know what? I don't care too much for that word anymore," then Terry hits Slice knocking him to the floor. Slice takes out his razor as he lies on the floor. The cowhand kicks the razor out of the man's hand then begins kicking him while he's down. A general free for all breaks out.

The subject of the fight, Daryl, has made his way across the bar to the corner table where he had sat before. He sits watching the fight. Two guys have dragged Terry over to the table where Daryl sits and are beating on him. "Do you think I could get a little help?" Terry asks. "I only help friends," Daryl teases. Terry looks at the man in amazement. "I'm only in this mess because of you," The cowhand insists. "Didn't ask for your help." Daryl pulls Terry's leg, he intends to help him. At last Terry offers his outstretched hand. "Friends?" the two men laugh then shake hands. Only then does Daryl knock one of the men down while Terry handles the other.

The fight is over. Slice and his friends lay on the

Unlikely Friends

floor well beaten. Terry, Daryl and the remaining Lee cowhands are heading out the bar doors victorious. At the top of stairs Daryl sees Elena in a robe. Having heard the commotion she came out to investigate. She tosses Daryl a kiss then turns and goes back to her room. The Lee ranch hands all laugh then exit the bar.

The holidays have come and gone and the spring thaw is beginning. There has been many an adventure this winter for the cowhands of the Lee ranch thanks to their guest. Now Daryl makes ready to leave. David Lee stands next to the prize bull he had once owned. He looks up at Daryl. I don't know which one of you two rascals I'm gonna miss the most, referring to the bull and Daryl. The two men laugh. It's been a pleasure getting to know you Mr. Lee," Daryl sincerely admits. David smiles again. "It's been a pleasure and an experience getting to know you Mr. Hannon," He says with genuine respect.

Looking at the forty head of cattle and the bull then back at Daryl, the ranch owner asks, "Are you gonna be able to handle them by yourself?" he ask. "Don't have much choice," Daryl answers. Just then Terry rides up on his horse. "Well, are we going or what?" Terry asks. The two men stare at Terry. "Are you sure you wanta do dis boy?" David Lee asks Terry. A smile lights up Terry's face. "I love yah like a father Mr. Lee, but I am young and looking for adventure. Somehow I know dat it's gonna be a lot more interesting working for Daryl than anything I can imagine happening 'round yere," Terry answers his former boss. David smiles at the two young men he has grown to care about like sons. "A man has to do what a man has to do." David and Terry look at

Unlikely Friends

Daryl for his answer. "I guess we had better get going. We've got a long way to go before we reach home."

The two men, Daryl and Terry, get behind General Lee and the cattle and scream out, "Yee hii ...!" General Lee and the cattle all begin to move out. The two men wave back at David Lee and the other cowhands of the Lee ranch as they disappear into the sunset.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 24
Coming Home

Amazingly the two men have returned with General Lee and thirty two head of the forty cattle they had started with. None of the eight had been loss. Two head they had eaten themselves. Six head they had given to Screaming Eagle and his men when they had met them on the trail. When Daryl recalls the look on Terry's face when the Blackfoot Indians appeared he laughs every time. Terry was sure his adventure was going to end before it began.

Finally they are home. The two men enter Black Mud Gap with General Lee and the cattle leading the way. All of the homes are finished. Many dirt roads have been made smooth, so more suitable for traveling. Sandra and her father Phillip lead a group of the black settlers who have come out to greet and welcome Daryl home. Running, Sandra reaches the side of Daryl's horse first. She smiles up at him. Daryl and Terry stop. "I've missed you." she boldly admits. Phillip walks up behind Sandra and places his hand on her shoulder. "God girl give the man a chance to get settled back in before you jump on him," the father teases. Everyone laughs except Sandra. "Daddy ...!" she whines. Phillip and some of the black settlers gather around Terry. They stare up at him, curious. Daryl breaks through the encirclement with his horse. "Don't make the man feel like some kinda side show attraction. He's going to be working for me," Daryl explains. Everyone except Daryl and Terry burst into laughter. The cowhand doesn't like being the brunt of a joke, especially one he doesn't understand. "What's so dang funny?" the annoyed man demands. Stepping forward Phillip explains. "I have to apologize. We

Coming Home

don't mean no harm. It's jus' dat none of us believed that we would ever live to see the day when a white man would be working for one of us," he explains. Now that the man understands Terry smiles. "I never imagined the day when I would work for a nig ..." Terry stops himself. "... Colored person either," he restates. The others laugh a nervous laughter. "You almost stepped in it ... almost." Phillip warns. "Bad habits are hard to break." Terry admits. "You jus' keep working at it." Phillip instructs him.

The son looks around. It is disturbing to Daryl that his mother is nowhere to be found in the crowd. Turning to Phillip he asks, "Is my mother at home? I can't imagine her not being here to greet me." The befuddled older man answers, "Sort of ..." A puzzled Daryl wonders aloud. "What does that mean?" Phillip answers, "I think it'll be better if I let your mother explain. Before that we need to get you, your livestock and your hand settled in at your place."

To Daryl's surprise and delight the others have finished building his home, his barn and a pin for his livestock. Terry leads General Lee into the pin while the cattle are allowed to graze on the little grass that grows in the black mud soil of Daryl's ranch. Closing the gate to the pin Terry languidly leans against the fence admiring the bull. Phillip and Sandra walk over to the fence and stare curiously at the white man. Finally Daryl joins them. The cowhand turns toward Phillip and Sandra. Feeling a bit uncomfortable Phillip tries starting a conversation. "That's a magnificent animal," he notes. "We're going to have a fine ranch," Daryl states confidently. Laughing Terry asks, "Did he

Coming Home

write you about how he got General Lee?" The curious young woman is baffled. "Who's General Lee?" she asks. An impatient Daryl states, "It's the bull's name," then he turns to Terry. "You're going to have to tell them that story another time. Right now I want to see my mother and find out what's been going on while I've been away." A look of concern crosses the father and daughter's faces. They know that Daryl won't be happy with one change that has occurred since he left.

The young wanderer wonders why Sandra and Phillip are leading him and Terry away from his mother's plot and toward Samuel's plot.

A small house is built next to the framework for a large casino/hotel. It's no surprise to Daryl that Samuel has gone back to his first vocation, that of a gambler, but he is surprised to find his mother is acting as hostess for this man whom he loathes. They all take a seat except Azizza. She brings out more food then places it on the table. Staring up at his mother Daryl remarks, "You seem pretty comfortable in Samuel's home." An annoyed Samuel answers, "Why wouldn't a wife be comfortable in her own home?" The son stands up. Anger is evident on his face. "Your wife?" he questions. The two men stare at Azizza, both angry. "Didn't your mother tell you about our marriage in her letters?" Samuel wants to know. "I'm afraid that's the one thing she left out." The disappointed son answers his new step father.

The atmosphere in the house is thick with rancor. "I'm sorry folks, but I have a lot of things to do over at my place. Thanks for the warm surprise welcome home," sarcastically Daryl comments. The son

Coming Home

jumps up and dashes out of the door. The cowhand stands up. "I'm sorry. It was nice meeting all of you. I better be going too." Terry stutters through his excuses then leaves out after Daryl. Sandra follows quickly after the two men.

The husband is just as angry at his wife as her son is. "Why didn't you tell him?" Samuel demands. Phillip starts to get up. Suddenly Samuel turns to Phillip. "Don't leave! You're our guest!" Samuel screams at the man. Hoping not to aggravate the situation Phillip sits down and sips from his glass of wine.

Meanwhile outside of Samuel and Azizza's home Daryl stops. He stares off into space. Terry is about to go to him when Sandra signals for him to continue on. The cowhand heads back toward Daryl's ranch. The young woman walks over to Daryl and takes his hand into hers. "I know that you wouldn't have picked this man for your mother, but the choice was never yours to make." Daryl interrupts her. "After all she's been through she deserves better," he insists. Smiling Sandra points out the one thing that Daryl has overlooked, "He makes her happy. Give him credit for that. I know how empty a woman's life can be when the man she loves is unable or unwilling to return that gift," she speaks of the two of them. Reaching out Sandra takes Daryl's face into her hands and kisses him. The foolish man pulls away from her then turns and walks away. The hurt young woman stands there alone with tears in her eyes.

Back inside of the home of Samuel and Azizza the couple stands glaring at one another. An uncomfortable Phillip still sits sipping wine. "Are

Coming Home

you ashamed of loving me?" the man asks of his wife. She walks over to Samuel and wraps her arms around him and pulls him close. "Never. I just wanted to tell him face to face, not in a letter. The truth is I know that he doesn't see in you the things that I see, not yet." Samuel pulls away from his wife's grasp. "Do you know how frustrating it is for me ... trying to put my past behind me and knowing that the man who most of my neighbors take their lead from, my wife's own son, isn't willing to give me that chance?" he asks. "Be patient. He will come around," she assures him. He looks at her with pleading eyes. "And what if he doesn't come around? Where do your loyalties lie?" he asks of his wife. "You're my husband. I vowed my life to you," she pledges, knowing that it isn't true.

Most of the settlers want to celebrate Daryl's return. Because of the animosity between Daryl and Samuel, Phillip feels it will probably be best if they hold the festivities in his barn. No one disagrees. Some play their instruments while others sing. The barn is filled with food, drink and decorations. Most dance. Some stand around enjoying the friendly ambiance. Alone in a corner Daryl stands glaring at his mother and Samuel. Across from Daryl staring lovingly at him is Sandra.

The cowhand, Terry, has seen enough. He walks up to Sandra and begins, "He's a ..." Sandra is startled and turns suddenly toward Terry interrupting him "Ohh! You startled me," she tells him. The cow hand looks over at Daryl then at Sandra once more. "I was just saying, he's a great guy, but he is stupid as hell." The two laugh. "I can't believe that you said

Coming Home

that," she replies. "He's a good man and my friend, but believe me if I had to choose between loving a living beautiful woman and a beautiful ghost I'd choose the live woman every time." Terry makes plain his feelings. Sandra smiles.

"Thank you. I needed to hear something just like that. Would you care to dance?" she asks Terry. "Yes mam!" the man answers elated. Reaching out Sandra takes his hand and leads him out onto the dance floor. Phillip and some of the other black settlers are unhappy with the way things seem to be progressing.

Wanting to clear his head Daryl exits the barn. The sky is crystal clear. One can see the big and little dipper overhead. Leaning against a fence Daryl stares at the pale white full moon. He turns when he hears footsteps. It is his mother coming to join him. "It's a beautiful night," she tries to break the ice between them. The son turns to his mother and smiles. "Yes it is," he answers. "Is it alright if a mother gives her son a proper welcome home?" They both laugh. "Of course it is," he assures her. The two of them hug one another and laugh. "I'm sorry that I've acted like such a jerk." Daryl begins his apology. "It's just that I want the best for you," he assures her. Azizza laughs. "I understand that, but you have to understand that I am the one who has to decide what or who that is, not you," she is firm in her convictions.

"There must be something special about him or you could never have fallen in love with him," the son concedes. "He is special. In time you will see that," she predicts. "I told my father that I would

Coming Home

protect you, but I guess there are some things that a person has to be willing to take risks for ..."

Azizza interrupts her son. "And when are you going to heed your own advise and start taking some risks again?" The mother looks toward Sandra, who is dancing with Terry just inside the barn. "I'm taking baby steps," he excuses. "You had better start taking some bigger steps or you might get left behind," she warns. A naive Daryl asks, "What does that mean?" Again his mother laughs. "Your friend is dancing with Sandra and I can tell by the look in his eyes that he is a man falling in love. And from her expression I would say that Sandra doesn't seem to mind," she warns. "Funny thing, I always thought that whenever I stopped mourning for Debra that I would probably end up marrying Sandra, but now ..." he stops in mid-sentence. "Now what ...?" the mother wants to know. "It doesn't bother me that Terry cares about her or that she might care for him. I guess that means that I don't," he concludes.

The mother takes her son's hand and leads him back toward the barn and the party. "Don't fret it. When that special someone comes along you'll open up your heart again. In the meantime dance with your mother. Samuel can't dance a lick," she half kids. They laugh then reenter the barn.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 25
A Question of Black & White

The settlers of Black Mud Gap are prospering. The only one who seems might have a right to complain is their leader. Though his pony express investment is paying off and he still has a large amount of the wealth his father gave him still intact his dream of a ranch is dying with his cattle.

The magnificent bull Daryl owns - General Lee - as well as some of the cattle which have survived so far graze on the black mud grass of Daryl's ranch. The cowhand- Terry and Sandra walk along beside them hand in hand. Terry turns to Sandra. "Do you mind all of the strange looks that people give us when we're together?" he asks serious in his demeanor. Not wanting to allow anything to darken their romance Sandra refuses to let him worry about what others think. She makes light of it. "No. I know the only reason they look at us strangely is because of that ten gallon head of yours." Then she laughs and takes off running. The enamored young man can't help but laugh too. He gives chase. When he catches Sandra he grabs her up and twirls her around in mid-air. They laugh gleefully. "Ten gallon head, huh?" he questions. "More like twenty, but I didn't want to hurt your feelings," she kids him. Tickling her the two collapse to the ground laughing. Terry stares into her eyes. "I love you." It is the first time either of them have said the words. Sandra decides to torture him a little. "I know," she answers. "... and?" Terry solicits a like response. "And I think that your kinda cute," she teases him some more. Although he knows she is teasing he frowns and turns his back on her. Fooled Sandra tries to tickle him to get a lighter response. He

A Question of Black & White

shrugs her away, playing his own game now. "I was only kidding. I love you! I love you! I love you!" she exclaims again and again. Turning around he wears a huge grin. "I know," he states matter of fact like. The two of them kiss then laugh some more in each other's arms.

The loving mood is broken when Sandra and Terry stand up only to see another of their friend's cows lying dead. "What's wrong with it?" Sandra asks, concerned for the well being of her friend Daryl if this continues. "I think it's the black mud. I think it poisons the grass," Terry explains. "What can Daryl do about it?" she asks. "For now he's going to have to move all of his remaining livestock onto one of his neighbor's grazing land. After that I don't know what to suggest. He surely can't raise anything on this land," Terry assures her. "After all he's risked for so many. Now he ends up with nothing?" Sandra can't see the justice in this. "Doesn't seem fair, does it?" Terry asks.

It has been a great year for Phillip and his family. The patriarch of the Carter family and Daryl stand together looking out over the lush fields of his land and he smiles. The younger man is growing impatient with his older friend. They have stood there for more than fifteen minutes just staring out over the land. Finally he turns to Phillip. "You asked me over here, so I assume there is something that you want to talk to me about," he initiates the conversation. "I heard about your troubles," Phillip begins. Daryl laughs a disbelieving laugh. "I think everyone has," he assures his friend. "... but I can offer you a solution." He seems more secretive than need be. "I'm listening," Daryl answers.

A Question of Black & White

The men go inside the comfortable Carter family home. They sit at the dining room table with a bottle of whiskey between them, food on the table and Phillip smoking a cigar. Phillip fills one glass then the other. "Do you know why I offered to exchange my daughter's plot for your plot after the lottery?" he asks Daryl. "I believed it was because you thought it was the fair thing to do." The ex-blacksmith laughs. "You give me way too much credit. I did it because we all figured that you and she were going to end up being together. The land was going to belong to both of you anyway." Now it's Daryl who laughs. "Well things have changed since then," The friend to Terry and Sandra answers the father. "Yes they have. And if truth be known, not to my liking. Don't get me wrong, I like your friend, Terry. I believe that he's a good man and that he loves my daughter, but I'm not quite ready to forgive and forget the harsh history that stands between our two races."

"If we are going to build something good and lasting here we have to let old wounds heal." Daryl advises Phillip. Unburdening himself Phillip explains, "You are able to say that because your father was a white man and he treated you as well as the times would allow, but it wasn't that way for all of us. Before my father bought his freedom there were awful trials for our family. Even if there hadn't been I would still believe that we have to regain some of what we have lost as a people because of slavery before we can think about healing any wounds. The only way that is going to happen for us is if we work together, trusting only one another. That's what every other race does," the more experienced man answers. "What are you proposing?" Daryl asks. Funny

A Question of Black & White

you should use that word ... I want you to marry Sandra." The father replies. "You are right about us needing to work together to regain what we lost, rewards for labors not paid, our self worth and the unity of a people with a like heritage, but I love Terry and Sandra and I will not be the one to come in between them," Daryl is firm in his stand.

As a father Phillip is disappointed - as a black man he is fearful of what is to come. Phillip states what he believes to be the truth, "Then your friend will divide us and you will end up with nothing." This is Phillip's ominous prediction. "If that's god's will," Daryl resigns himself. "Too often black people fail to act in their own best interest then they blame the end result on god's will. No my friend. What happens here is because of your will, not god's will."

While people plot behind their backs the two lovers are oblivious to all. Sandra and Terry grow closer and closer. To everyone else if the two of them should be together seems to be a question of black and white. To Sandra and Terry it's merely a question of loving and being loved.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 26
The World is Changing

Things are changing in Black Mud Gap. Because of the success of the settlement other blacks and some whites are moving here seeking work and opportunity. Samuel is building a business empire that revolves around his luxury hotel-casino. Other black businessmen are meeting with equal success because of ventures they would never have had the opportunity to pursue before the war. As a safeguard Daryl invests a part of his finance in the political arena to assure them friends and to promote the career of a proven friend, the now Colonel Eugene Stanford.

The Carter brothers - Donald and Mark ride into town for a night of fun. The two men are surprised to see how many men are working on the new building Samuel is putting up. No one knows yet that this is going to replace the small casino/hotel he already operates. Men, black and white, work side by side. Some carry lumber. Others are working on the framework, hammering or carrying water. The place is a beehive of activity. Samuel stands off to the side watching his dream come to life. Standing beside Samuel are two black gunmen, Josh Tatum and Wallace Hue. The Carter brothers stop in front of Samuel. "What are you building Samuel?" Donald asks. Beaming with pride for what he anticipates this scoundrel points to his building then answers Donald, "This is going to be one of the finest hotel/gambling houses anywhere, including New York, New Orleans or San Francisco." Then he waves his hand up and down the main street. "And around it I'm going to build the most impressive business empire anyone has ever seen, a Black Wall Street."

The World is Changing

The younger brother is not impressed even though his brother Mark is. Instead Donald points to the two gunmen. "How do they fit into your plans?" he asks Samuel. Smiling Samuel answers Donald, "A smart business man always buys insurance." An overzealous Mark sees in Samuel an opportunity to make his own mark in the world. "If you teach me the Law I can help protect your business without a gun. Wanting the Carter family on

his side Samuel decides to recruit the two brothers to work for him. "I'm gonna take you up on that Mark." He then turns to Donald. "... and what about you son? I've got plenty of room in my organization for ambitious young men. You don't strike me as a farmer or a rancher," Samuel speculates. An astute Donald believes Samuel has helped him decide what he wants to do with his life. "With all I see happening 'round here I think dat we're gonna be needing a lawman. I'm going to asks Daryl if I can take on da job," Donald warns Samuel. Frowning, Samuel knows this young man is most dangerous because of his principles. "You'll make a fine lawman. You have my vote," he lies.

The gunman Josh walks down from the wooden walkway and onto the street. He stares up at Donald on his horse. "A law man has to be able to shoot," Josh points out. Bending down the gunman picks up a rock, tosses it into the air then shoots it. The rock splits in half, falling to the ground. Walking down to the street level Samuel watches in hope that his men can intimidate Donald even though he knows better. "Can you pick up those two halves and toss them in the air for me Sam," he intentionally cuts the man's name to show disrespect. Ignoring the slight Samuel does as Donald asks, except purposely

The World is Changing

tosses the two parts into the bright sunlight. The light glimmers off of the two half rocks. Despite the bright sun Donald shoots the two halves into halves then those quarters he shoots, splintering them into dust and rock particles before they can hit the ground. Mark claps. The two gunmen walk away. "Impressive," Samuel remarks.

As if the world hasn't already had its fair share of changes the industrious Mark has been doing some research that will turn Black Mud Gap and a lot of the rest of the world upside down.

The mother, Azizza, stands alongside Daryl who leans against the fence to the pin which once held General Lee and Daryl's dreams of a ranch. Turning to Azizza he unburdens himself, "For me this land is cursed. It's brought me nothing but pain and disappointment. The wealth I have left from what my father gave to me along with the profits from the pony express is more than enough to make me comfortable, but I think that I'm going to sell General Lee and the remaining cattle. No sense in keeping livestock when you don't have a ranch. I may even head for California ... like my father had said that he wanted to do."

Just as Azizza is about to tell him not to give up Mark comes riding up the path to Daryl's ranch laughing and screaming at the top of his lungs, "I knew it! I knew it!" He reaches the side of the mother and son, barely able to catch his breath. "I knew it!" the young man repeats again. Daryl turns to his mother. "He knew it," Daryl mocks Mark. Azizza laughs and turns to Mark. "You knew what? Have you been drinking already this morning?" she accuses. "No mam. I'm just drunk with happiness," he

The World is Changing

answers. Mark turns to his friend. "Yes ... happiness for you!" he exclaims. "Why would anyone be happy for me?" Daryl cannot think of a single reason. "You know how everyone passed on this plot because of the black mud ... well ... it's oil!" Mark shouts at the top of his lungs. "Oil?" Azizza is quietly amazed. All Daryl can do is bursts into laughter. "Black gold! Ain't that appropriate ... a black man owning black gold," Mark rattles on. "I sent a sample of your soil to this company in New York and they sent me this letter ..." Mark takes two pieces of paper from his pocket. "... and this check. They said that they are sending someone out to survey the land. The check is just for an option to drill. You're going to be the richest man in these parts ... maybe in the country!" Mark excitedly informs Daryl. The leader of the settlers is amazed at how many twists and turns life has taken for him. He takes Mark down from his horse and twirls him in the air. As Mark looks down on Daryl he asks, "Can I be your lawyer?" The new oil baron smiles and says, "I wouldn't trust anyone else to represent me." The young lawyer declares, "This calls for a party!"

By tradition the Carter barn has become the place to throw a party. The old settlers and the new workers are all gathered to help celebrate the town's founder's good fortune.

Almost everyone is welcomed. The mood of the party takes a small downward spiral when Samuel comes in with his hired guns at his side. Whites and blacks share the same disdain for the gunmen. The three men walk over to Samuel's wife, who had arrived earlier by herself. Azizza takes Samuel by the hand and starts to walk outside. The gun men start to follow.

The World is Changing

The wife turns to the men and glare at them. "I want to speak to my husband ... alone!" They look to their boss. He nods his head and they back away. Once outside the woman demands of Samuel, "Why did you bring those killers here?"

Meanwhile inside the barn Josh and Wallace stand side by side surveying the party guests. Josh stops looking when he spots Sandra. The gunman is enchanted by the lovely black woman yet appalled at the same time. He resents that she is hugging on a white man, Terry. "This could be an opportunity for some sport," he thinks.

Outside Samuel makes excuses for Josh and Wallace to his wife. "They aren't hired guns anymore. They are the men who will stand between us and white folks when they try to come in here and take from us what we have sacrificed so much to earn." A tender touch of Samuel's cheek Azizza uses to convey her feelings. "I would prefer to lose everything that we have then to see you go back to being the man you once were," the wife confesses. "I'm not quite as generous as you," Samuel mocks her feelings. "I'm not going to ever be that man again, but neither am I going to be naive enough to look at the world through rose colored glasses," he assures her.

The elated couple - Sandra and Terry are dancing up a storm. They decide to take a break. As they exit the barn for some much needed fresh air they are laughing and sweating. The two lovers are so much into one another that they don't notice the evil gunman, Josh, whom is watching their every move.

The skies are a royal blue with a necklace of pearl

The World is Changing

white stars. A slight night chill sends shivers through Sandra. Considerate Terry wraps his arms all so tenderly around her to warm her, both body and soul. Pointing to the fence he says, "Let's go over there." Tugging gently at Sandra's hand he leads her to the wooden fence. Then Terry picks her up and sets her upon the fence. Laughing Sandra asks, "What are you doing, silly?" The young white man kneels down in front of the beautiful young black woman. Now beginning to understand his intention she cries tears of joy. "I know that I don't have a lot to offer, but I offer my love completely. Sandra Carter will you marry me?" he asks. The elated young woman jumps down from the fence and begins showering Terry's face with kisses. "Yes! Yes! I will marry you!" she answers excitedly. From the shadows near the fence comes a snicker. The two lovers turn in the direction of the annoying sound. Josh steps into the light. "Just can't get enough of screwing the slave whore, can you Massa?" Josh mocks their love. An angry Terry steps away from Sandra. "You'd better apologize to my lady!" Terry demands. "Or what ...? Yah gonna whip me massa?" he hopes to goad the man into a fight. "Don't Terry! That's what he wants. He's a paid killer." Unafraid Terry demands again, "It's your choice mister, apologize or draw." The black gunman stands there laughing at him. The unthinking lover goes for his gun. Josh draws and he shoots. Terry's gun never leaves the holster. He is hit twice in the belly then falls forward onto the ground, dead.

The sound of the gunfire has brought everyone running out of the barn. Donald and Mark lead the way. Sandra is on her knees over the body of Terry. Josh is putting his gun back into its holster. "What

The World is Changing

happened?" Donald demands. "Not that it's any of your business, but he drew on me first, so I killed him," the arrogant gunman answers. Sandra looks up at her brother screaming, "He's a liar. He provoked Terry into drawing on him then he murdered him." The gunman insists, "He drew first!" Again the sister looks to her brother to make this right. "He called me a whore!" she tells her brother. Laughing a cynical snicker the brother moves away from the crowd. "You call my sister a whore?" he demands of the gunman. Stepping out into the open Josh asks Donald, "Do you think you can do any better than he did?" Still laughing Donald answers, "If the gunman Dennis Barnes were still alive I'd tell you to ask him, but he had the same problem as you ... bad manners. It got him killed." With a death stare Donald glares at Josh. "Unlike my friend, this time you get to draw first or I will shoot you down like the yellow belly coward you truly are," Donald assures the gunman. Turning to the crowd Josh yells, "You heard him! He's calling me out!" Beads of sweat form on his head. Donald stares unblinking. Finally Josh works up enough courage to go for his gun. The gunman fires one shot. It's into the ground. The faster Donald has shot him twice through the heart. The killer will kill no more. He falls to the ground dead.

As Donald puts away his gun he turns to Wallace, the other gunman. "Is this over?" he asks. "The only time I draw my gun is when I'm being paid." the icy man answers. Wallace then turns to Samuel. "Is this something I'm being paid to deal with?" he asks. Everyone waits silently. The businessman Samuel shakes his head, no. Wallace turns his back on Donald and walks away. Sandra runs to her brother

The World is Changing

and hugs him.

It is a sorrowful day in the township of Black Mud Gap. Women and children weep and the hearts of men are heavy. They have come together to bury a friend near and dear to everyone's heart, Terry. The rancher David Lee couldn't get there in time for the funeral, but he had sent Daryl a return telegram to say that the world will be poorer for Terry's passing.

Most of the town is gathered around the grave site. Appropriately absent is Samuel and his gunman. The friend of the deceased, Daryl, stands stone faced. Each person walks by the grave and tosses a handful of dirt onto the casket. Phillip is the last to do so. As the funeral ends Daryl turns and walks away from the others. Not willing to let this opportunity pass Sandra's father runs after the man. When he catches up to Daryl he grabs his arm. "Sometimes a tragedy can be turned into a victory," Phillip tells Daryl. Angry he spews venom filled words at Phillip. "I don't want to hear about your black utopia right now, Phillip. My white friend was killed by a black man for no other reason than the fact that he was white. Is that how your black utopia begins?" Phillip laughs at the irony. "Son, how many black people have been killed by white people simply because they were black. I feel for your loss and my daughter's loss, but we have to face reality. We're making so much money now and much more will come after the railroad comes through here. It is just a matter of time before someone tries to take everything we've earned from us. Together we can make it. Divided we're finished," he assures Daryl.

The World is Changing

There is no denying the logic in the man's words. Faced with reality Daryl surrenders to the idea. "If you can convince Sandra to marry me then I'm willing to work with you to create this black utopia, this Black Wall Street."

Less than a month after Terry's death the town gathers again in the Carter's barn. This time they are gathered for a wedding. Never was there a more solemn or less happy wedding ceremony than this one. The bride and groom manage to force a few smiles during the whole proceeding, including the reception. Though everyone is dressed in the splendor their newfound wealth can afford the dress of the day is truly regret.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 27
Black Wall Street Business Group

The wedding ceremony is over. People mingle, eat or offer their congratulations to the bride and the groom. After an hour or so Daryl makes his excuses and he exits the barn to walk and clear his head. His new father-in-law follows him.

Outside the two men walk together. Just ahead of them they see the ominous figures of Samuel and Wallace walking together. The two villains discuss the past and the future. "I'm glad that you didn't kill Carter's son." Samuel remembers the events of the night Terry died. The gun man laughs. "I'm not sure that I could have," he admits. "In any case it's working out better this way. If you had killed him there would've been no chance for an alliance and if my empire is going to be strong I need them by my side," the hopeful Samuel explains to the gunman. "They won't join with you. No one trusts you," Wallace points out. "Mark Carter does and he can get them to listen to me. If they listen to me they will know that I am right. We need each other." Samuel is confident that he is right and that everything will work out to his favor.

The father-in-law walks along with Daryl behind the two reprobates. "What do you suppose the two of them are talking about?" Daryl wonders. "How Samuel can use your marriage to my daughter to his advantage." Phillip seems to read Samuel's mind. Not believing the man to be that shallow Daryl laughs and answers, "You're joking, right?" Phillip shakes his head. "You're the only one who doesn't seem to understand the threat we face. Like most of us Samuel realizes that everything I've been telling you for the last

Black Wall Street Business Group

year or so is coming to a head. Our individual survival depends on how united we are. Alone a single bullet can bring down all that you've built. Together we can weave our magic in the halls of power. We can change laws, control armies, even mold the minds and hearts of the masses," the older man explains. "All of this begins with us?" Daryl is still skeptical. "We aren't the only ones trying to create a better world, but in this time and this place, yes, it begins with us," Phillip assures him.

Days later the power brokers of Black Mud Gap are gathered together; Daryl- who's fortune is from oil, Phillip- who's money is from farming, Samuel- who is building a more diversified business empire and a late comer- George Sumner- who's new fortune is from lumber, but who is now building a relationship with the railroad people. They all sit around a table in the private dining room of Samuel's completed luxurious hotel/casino.

The newcomer is the least trusting of Samuel and his motives. "Why are we here, meeting secretly, like some black Knight Ghost group?" Sumner wants answered. Samuel glares at the man as he stands to speak. "We are all businessmen so we know that with the kind of success that we are realizing it won't take long before someone tries to take what we've earned. Together we can protect one another. Separate they will prune us like the limbs of a tree." Again Sumner is waiting to find out what this will cost him and if it makes good business sense. "Metaphors aside what does this union entail?" he asks. The gambler explains, "We use our collective wealth to buy influence, create a self sufficiency wherever possible and keep the wealth within this

Black Wall Street Business Group

circle. We will always assist the weakest link in his time of need." A smile comes to Sumner's lips." It sounds good. Let's see your plan of operation." It is then that Samuel points to Mark, who has stood off to the side during the initial part of the meeting. Mark goes to his desk, his law duties for Samuel has him working in the casino at times. He takes out the plans that he helped Samuel draw up for the Black Wall Street business group. Mark and Samuel spread the papers out over the large table. All of the principals move in closer. "This is the beginning outline. Of course I expect to have everyone's input into sculpting the evolution of our union. The men read the proposal. All like the initial concept. Delighted at the initial response Samuel and his gun man, Wallace, smile.

Everyone has benefited from the union of the black business men. They have influence and power beyond anything they could have foretold. The black and white citizens of Black Mud Gap have jobs and business opportunities unlike anything that they can find elsewhere. The streets are now smooth asphalt and the walk ways paved for the most part. The town is busy with foot and horse traffic. There are even two horseless carriages in town. Yes. As a result of the black businessmen this once small town is a growing metropolis.

An older George Sumner rides through town in his brand new Grey horseless carriage. An older Donald rides by him on his horse. The marshal, Donald has been appointed to the post, turns and faces George and his mechanical beast. "Those things are just a passing fancy." Donald insists. "I hope not." the businessman answers. "I just invested \$50,000.00 in

Black Wall Street Business Group

to a company making 'em." George drives on.

A train pulls into the Black Mud Gap station. Investments made by all of the members of the Black Wall Street group into the railroad persuades the railroad to divert from its planned route and go through Black Mud Gap instead.

Not only does Mark Carter have Samuel Thomas as a client he represents all of the members of the Black Wall Street group and most of the citizens of Black Mud Gap come to him with their legal problems. That is why he has an office in the center of the business district of Black Mud Gap. The sign on the window to his office reads, "MARK CARTER ATTORNEY AT LAW."

An older Mark Carter sits at his desk writing. Behind him stands his beautiful, but spoiled niece, Patricia Hannon - Sandra and Daryl's almost grown daughter. Patricia plays with her uncle's ears, preventing him from working. He laughs and slaps her hands away. "Patricia will you please leave me alone so that I can finish this contract for Mr. Sumner?" he pleads. Defiant and spoiled she denies him, "No I won't. Mr. Sumner will have to wait. You promised me that you would go riding with me today.

Besides it is much too pretty a day to be inside." The young girl pulls on her uncle's arm. Reluctantly he surrenders and let's her pull him up from his seat and toward the door.

Uncle and niece exit his office. He closes the door behind himself. As he exits one of the hands from Daryl and Sandra's cattle ranch, Tim Smith, walks by

Black Wall Street Business Group

"Good morning Miss Patty ... Mr. Carter," Tim greets them. The two of them answer him in unison. "Good morning Mr. Smith." An elated Patricia gleefully exclaims, "We're going riding!" The hand replies, "It's a mighty pretty day for it." Patricia smiling as if she has won an argument says, "That's what I told my uncle." Mark reminds her, "As you kidnapped me." The hand has one more thing to offer, "You're a lucky man to have a lovely niece who won't let you drown in the tedium of work on a day like this." Then Tim walks on.

Patricia playfully licks her tongue at her uncle. "See. You're lucky to have me," she mocks him. Mark laughs. "You aren't too big to spank," he threatens. "Oh yes I am," the niece teases. Mark jumps at her. She runs away. The uncle chases after her down the streets of Black Mud Gap. As they run they pass first a white woman then a white man. "Morning Miss Patty," the woman knows her. "Good morning," Patty answers because she doesn't recognize the woman who has done sewing for her mother. "Good morning Mr. Carter," The woman greets Mark. He doesn't recognize her either. "Good morning," he says as he rushes by still in pursuit of his niece. The same scene is repeated with the unknown white man who works in Daryl's oil fields.

In Black Mud Gap, like everywhere else, there is a pecking order. Here and now the original black settlers are at the top of that hierarchy. Some are unaccustomed and resentful of this being true. In the cold hearts of these fools sleeps the seeds of discord which is to follow.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 28
Joining the Game

The seasons pass for all, even the wicked. Life isn't always fair. Just like the deserving sometimes even the wicked often prosper. At the Grant plantation life is good. Using Martin's tenant farmer idea they're able to make the plantation profitable once more.

The evil Karen and the weak Martin have been blessed with a son, Ian Grant. The father has tried to pass on to his son the folly of arrogance and ambition. His son loves his father more than life itself, but it is his mother who he emulates. He mistakes her cruel and evil nature for strength and determination.

The parents sit having breakfast in the main dining room of Grant Hall. Their now twenty-one year old son enters. Walking over to his mother he leans down and kisses her on the cheek. Reaching up she hugs her son. The sun rises and falls on Ian as far as Karen is concerned. "Good morning mother," the young man greets her. "I'm tiffed at you," Karen begins her reprimand of Ian. "What grand faux pas have I committed now?" he wonders aloud. "You didn't attend the cotillion like you promised me that you would. All of the finest young ladies in Louisiana were there. And you ... you thought that you were too good to make an appearance," she admonishes him. "Mother, you know that the persistent rumors of your first husband's most convenient demise makes me a social pariah," he reminds his mother. " ... not that I haven't had most of those so called ladies that you speak of anyway," he adds. Karen is appalled that Ian has brought up her unspoken past. "I asked

Joining the Game

you to never speak of those horrible rumors," she tells Ian. Turning to Martin the wife is angry about the persistence of those rumors despite the passage of time. "I would think that people would have tired of that old gossip," she remarks to Martin. The husband is more realistic. "Some rumors are too scandalous to die," he admits. Ian turns to leave. Karen turns to her son. "If you can't or won't marry to improve our situation at least go with your father and grandfather to their meetings," she urges Ian. Martin gets up from the table and walks with his son toward the door. "If that's what my father wants. I will." Ian answers. "What about what I want?" Karen is jealous of the relationship between her husband and son. Without answering her Ian and Martin exit the dining room.

A gentle rain falls upon the Grant plantation as the father and son make their way down the steps of Grant Hall. If only the rain could wash away the horrors past or crimes yet to come this place might be worthy of its grand sounding name. "Is that what you want or what mother and grandfather want?" the young Mr. Grant asks his father. Martin smiles. "Sometimes I'm not sure where their demands end and my desires begin." The two men walk down to the lake where another father and son had so often shared loving moments. Sitting down on the bank they turn to one another. "I told you that long ago I killed two black children for no other reason than I thought it was expected of me. I've lived with the nightmare of what I did. If you join these people you should understand that they don't truly believe that they're better. Everything is about money or the need to lift themselves above someone, anyone else." Martin explains. "Why did you join them?" his

Joining the Game

son wonders. "I like money and power just as much as any other man. Besides, your grandfather promised me that I would never have to kill anyone ever again," the father excuses his choices.

In the game of chess the piece most likely to be sacrificed is the pawn. Some men seem to be born for that role. A great distance from the Grant plantation in Black Mud Gap, Daniel Grissom, a onetime plantation owner who lost everything in the war, sits playing cards with Tim Smith and four other white men. "I bet a dollar." Tim makes his wager. The first two white men throw their dollar into the pot. The third man turns down his hand. Grissom, the fifth man in the game, stares at Tim angry. "I lost my plantation, my wife and my three sons in the war. Now who's gonna free me? The niggas get rich and me, I sit here with a winning hand yet fearful of letting go of my last dollar. There was a time when I would drop a thousand dollars in a single night. Afterward I would go home laughing," he goes into a tirade. An impatient Tim says, "Yeah, we've heard it all before. Learn a new conversation then call or fold." The disheartened man tosses his dollar into the center pot. "I call." he answers Tim. Grissom turns up his first three cards. "Three aces." The first two men throw their cards into the discard pile. Grissom begins dragging the money from the center of the table. Tim grabs a hold of his hands. One by one Tim turns up his cards; a nine of clubs, a ten of clubs, a queen of diamonds, a jack of hearts then lastly the king of spades. "If that ain't the last straw ... beaten by the king of spades," the small man makes light of his misfortune.

Joining the Game

He glares at one of the most ardent supporters of the black businessmen, Tim. "How much do those spooks pay you Tim?" Grissom asks. "Mr. Hannon pays me better than I've ever been paid before," Tim answers him. "Well think about this ... how much more would you have if they couldn't hold a claim on that land and Black Mud Gap was ours?" after planting the evil seed Grissom marches out of the bar. The other men look at one another saying nothing but thinking about what the jealous man had offered as food for thought.

The red paint that covers the barn at the Grant plantation could easily have been perceived as a metaphor for all of the blood the evil men gathered here tonight have spilled. The cowards stand there with hoods covering their faces and identities. Ian makes his way through the crowd. He wears his regular clothes and is without a mask to hide his face or his intent. His father wears a white hood. Albert Marshal, his grandfather and the leader of this group, wears a green hood to signify his position of authority. The three generations walk side by side up onto the makeshift stage inside of the barn. As they make their way through the crowd Albert shakes hands with each man he meets along the way. He attempts to make them feel important. The crowd cheers them. The grandfather raises his hand, signaling for silence. A hush falls over the proceedings. Albert speaks, "Brothers I am proud to present my grandson for your consideration as a member of this noble order." Ian steps forward. "I say to you, long live the confederacy!" Unbeknownst to the others Ian is mocking them. The members all cheer and clap. Ian turns his back on the crowd and winks at his grandfather and father. Albert frowns.

Joining the Game

Martin smiles.

After hours of derogatory speeches about blacks and other none white groups polluting their American way the meeting is adjourned. The massive doors to the barn open and the men all file out. Leading the way is Albert Marshal followed by Ian and then comes Martin and the others. The grandfather and father have taken off their hoods. As one of the members walk by the three men the man acknowledges his approval of their newest recruit, "He's gonna make a great addition to our organization." Albert answers him, "Thank you, brother."

The Knight Ghost all disband, heading across the Grant plantation for their homes. Ian, Martin and Albert head for Grant hall. The grandfather looks at his grandson then laughs with pride. "Long live the confederacy! That was a nice touch," he compliments the young man. All three men laugh. "Be careful that they never find out that you are mocking them. They would kill you. Besides that, they are the key to our family's legacy of power," he points out to his grandson. "How can you build anything lasting on a foundation of hate?" Ian questions. "Don't be naive. A man will kill, spend his last dollar or more importantly turn his back when you do wrong to another man if you can convince him that the other man is deserving of his contempt, his lesser." the grandfather answers. "How do I get into the game?" the young Mr. Grant asks. Albert laughs. "You just played yah first hand," he assures his grandson.

In the game of power you don't always know who all the players are or how complex the game can become until you sit down to play.

Joining the Game

In the executive board room of Taney Oil in New York City another player is about to join this game between the old south and the new north.

Cosmos Stone is CEO of Taney oil. For almost ten years now he has been trying to acquire all rights to the oil land that Daryl Hannon III owns. The black man knows that he will make more money in the long run by holding on to the land. Besides, this is now his dream come true. One doesn't easily part with your dream.

Stone stands before his executive board, which includes his arch rival at the company- VP Reginald Dutton. "One of our most valued crude oil resources is Black Mud Gap, so far they have resisted my every effort to buy them out. Their position in this matter is a threat to this company," he warns. "Not true." Reginald contradicts him. "If we don't buy from them we buy from others," Reginald wants pointed out. Cosmos goes into a tirade, "If we control the source we control the prices. Besides, these people are accumulating vast riches. This puts them in a position to tap into some of our power bases." The CEO walks around the large conference table until he stands behind Reginald. He puts his hands on Reginald's shoulders then continues, "Would you like it if Black Mud Gap oil men decide to compete with us instead of selling to us. If our competition controls the lawmakers, the courts or the military that we now control, would that be alright?" He draws an ominous picture for his board members. Releasing his VP Cosmos begins to pace again. "We know that it can happen. Those people will sell out to the highest bidder," he reminds them. Reginald has had enough of allowing Cosmos to

Joining the Game

control this game. "If they aren't willing to sell how do we acquire their land?" he asks his rival. "Give me twenty million dollars and a free hand to operate and in five years I will acquire that land," he boldly guarantees.

The board members lean in and whisper to one another. Then everyone except Reginald gets up and leaves the room. As the door closes behind the last of the board members Reginald turns to Cosmos and smiles. "This conversation that you and I are having, it never happened. The board is giving you ten million dollars in order for you to begin probing the feasibility of acquiring the oil lands in Black Mud Gap

We understand that you may need to act quickly, so you won't have to report to us until after the study is complete." Again Reginald smiles. "If anything goes wrong we will serve your ass up on a silver platter to whomever may demand it," the VP assures Stone. "... the higher the stakes the more exciting the game," Cosmos explains his credo. "I will take the moderate gain for the moderate risk every time. In the end you achieve the same end. It just takes a little longer," Reginald cautions him.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 29
A Seedy Alliance

This morning there is the unusual sight of a Yankee walking across the Grant plantation grounds. Cosmos Stone and Karen Marshal Hannon Grant walk across this beautiful quiet setting. The quiet is misleading for with this meeting the games intensify.

"My son and husband are away in New Orleans on bizness for a few days, but I'm sure dat my husband would want me to show an important man such as yahself a taste of southern hospitality," Karen says suggestively. The shrewd businessman plays modest, "You flatter me Mrs. Hannon ..." Karen frowns and corrects him, "That's Mrs. Grant. My first husband was named Hannon." The faux pas is quickly forgotten as Cosmos apologizes and continues on with his spiel, "I'm little more than a glorified pencil pusher, but the ingenuity that you and your new husband showed ...taking the gross disadvantages presented to you by an unfair war then turning it into a positive for your business, that's impressive," he cons the gullible woman. He then reaches down and takes Karen's hand and kisses it. She smiles coquettishly at the man then answers, "Necessity is truly da motha of invention. Without a new way of doing bizness we woulda lost everything," she admits.

"I admire you Mrs. Grant ..." the man flirts in return. "Call me Karen, Mr. Stone," she replies. "I insist that you call me Cosmos," he says. Again they smile at one another flirtatiously. Walking together their looks reveal the mischief in each heart. As he stares at Karen, Cosmos says, "It's beautiful here.

A Seedy Alliance

It's going to be hard for me to leave." Batting her eyelashes as southern belles tend to do Karen says suggestively, " 'stead of talkin' 'bout leavin' why don't we enjoy the time dat we have yere together ... alone."

After a long day of walking and talking together Karen dares to invite the stranger to have dinner with her and to stay the night. Cosmos and Karen sit at the dining room table having dinner. They haven't eaten all that is on their plates or finished their wine, but now their appetites are turning in a carnal direction. Enticingly the amoral woman nibbles on a strawberry, hoping to seduce the powerful business man. Stone smiles and licks his lips. She then picks up a banana and slowly peels it. Tilting her head back brazenly she inserts the banana in her mouth then nibbles on it. Girl enters and sees the shocking behavior and gasps. The slave then walks over to the table and slams the food down in disgust. The mistress of the house glares at Girl. "I don't wanna be 'sturbed a'gin by anyone!" she orders. Staring at her mistress Girl does not speak. It is then that Karen stands up and shouts at her servant menacingly, "Is dat 'stood?!" Meekly Girl backs away from the table nodding her head. "Yes mam." she answers then turns and leaves the room.

The visitor gets up and walks around the table to Karen. He takes her hand in his. Looking down at her fingers, red from the juice of the strawberries he says, "You seem to have gotten some juice on your fingers." Taking her fingers into his mouth he then licks them. Smiling up at him Karen answers him, "You seemed to have gotten some of the juice on your

A Seedy Alliance

lips." Karen stands up, licks his lips then she inserts the tip of her tongue into his mouth. They kiss and embrace passionately. The two wrap their arms around each other's waists and make their way upstairs to the master bedroom. The servants can hear the sounds of lust that echo throughout Grant Hall.

Later in the master bedroom Cosmos and Karen lay side by side naked. The adulterous housewife then straddles Cosmos hips. As she sits above him she stares down lewdly and asks, "Are you enjoying our southern hospitality, Mr. Stone?" The two laugh. Cosmos answers, "I shall have to make sure that my business brings me down here more often, so that I may enjoy much more of your hospitality," he assures her. "If it doesn't den I will have to convince my husband of the necessity of our coming to New York," the vixen plots an adulterous rendezvous. Karen then leans down and rubs her breasts across the man's chest then kisses him again.

The sounds of lust filled couplings continue unabated throughout the night.

The whorish wife and the scheming businessman seem to have an insatiable appetite for one another.

In the morning the two have dressed and are seated at the dining room table eating breakfast when to Karen's surprise Martin and Ian return home from their trip early. Curiously Martin looks at the unknown visitor. Ian looks at his mother disapprovingly. Karen feigns innocence. The husband crosses over to Karen and kisses her on the cheek. He then stands up and questions his wife, "Who is

A Seedy Alliance

our guest?" Unflinching in her performance Karen answers matter of fact like, "This is Mr. Cosmos Stone, CEO of Taney Oil." Now it's Martin's turn to perform. Offering his hand to the man he pretends as if he isn't the least bit suspicious of the two. As they shake hands Ian watches and wonders why his father doesn't kill this bastard or at the very least toss him out on his butt. The little respect Ian may have had for his father wanes. "I hope dat yah yere 'cause yah believe dat dere's oil yere in Louisiana," Martin is being facetious. Cosmos laughs. "I wish that was the case. I'm sure it would be a lot easier doing business with good white folks than trying to teach dumb black folk the nuances of business," he says what he believes they want to hear.

An astute Ian decides to challenge the stranger. "I hear that those dumb black folk are getting richer and more educated each day." Stone looks over to Ian and smiles. "...and who are you?" he asks. The mother apologizes then introduces her son. "Sorry. Where are my manners? Dis is the light of my life, my son Ian." The annoyed businessman turns to Ian. "You're right young man. They are getting richer and more educated. And that's dangerous for good white folk like you and I," he warns. "How so ...?" Ian continues to challenge the man's line of bull crap. Cosmos stares at the young man. He knows that this family is in the leadership of the racist group the Knight Ghost, so he figures the young man is jerking his chain. Cosmos laughs. "You're having fun with me, aren't you?" Stone questions. The perceptive Ian accuses Stone. "I think it's the other way around." Cosmos begins to understand that this young man hasn't bought into the racist propaganda.

A Seedy Alliance

This one thinks for himself. "Touche'!" Stone gives in to the young man's tenacity.

The businessman turns to Martin and Karen and asks, "... would you folks mind if Ian and I speak ... alone? I think that I may be able to do a lot for this young man's future and the future of the Grant family." Too quickly Karen answers, "By all means." Martin glares at Cosmos and Karen. He wonders what these two have been plotting. Ian looks to his father. "Do you mind, father?" Ian asks. Realizing that the oil man may be able to do a lot for his son Martin concedes, "Of course not. Besides I have a lot of work to catch up on." Martin then turns and leaves out of the dining room.

As the young man and the businessman walk the grounds of the Grant plantation Ian wonders why the man is here and why now? The blacks working in the field seem to perfectly frame the conspiracy against the other blacks who had once worked these same fields. "You are a sharp young man," Cosmos begins. "If you're still playing me for the country bumpkin then you're making a big mistake," Ian warns him. Stone laughs. "No. I mean what I say. Most people hear what they want to hear. You read in between the bull and understand what is for real," Cosmos explains. "Why are you here?" the young Mr. Grant wants told. "The slaves who left here after the war have control of land that my company wants," Stone tells Ian. "What does that have to do with us?" he demands of the stranger. "We can't be involved in any illegal action against these people, but I figured that if I can find some ambitious young person with strong Knight Ghosts' connections I can finance a covert action. This person could earn

A Seedy Alliance

themselves a seat on the executive board of my company," Stone explains further. "Tell me more," the ambitious young man instructs the one whom he believes could be a possible mentor.

Wary Martin watches his son and the Yankee talk. He can't help, but wonder what will be the foul outcome of this seedy alliance he sees forming ? Whatever it is he knows only the devil will smile to see it.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 30
A Charming Snake

Everyone in Black Mud gap knows that Patricia Hannon is the delight of her uncle Mark's life, but there are times when the man could easily see himself taking the girl across his lap and spanking her buns. She is home from private school and sits across from him tapping her fingers on his desk and humming. "Hmm ... hmm ... hmm," the girl goes. Mark glares at her impatiently. Patricia looks at him innocently. "What?" she asks. "Why don't you go bother your uncle Donald for a while?" he asks. "You don't know anything. He's out hunting down the man who killed Mr. Turk." The spoiled young girl looks at the clock on the wall then back at her uncle. "Why can't we go riding today?" she questions. Mark points at the stacks and stacks of papers on his desk then at the empty desk next to him. "Since my assistant quit I have to deal with all of these matters myself. And speaking of work ... why aren't you home studying for your college entrance exams?" he asks. The arrogant girl laughs. "Who is the smartest person that you know?" she questions her uncle. Without hesitating he answers, "Your father." Again the egotistical girl laughs. "Nooo! As smart as he is I am smarter.

Then it begins. A laugh comes from behind Patricia. She turns to see the very handsome young white man, Ian Grant, in the doorway. The door is still open. The light shows around him like a halo she thinks to herself. Her initial reaction is attraction so she smiles. Then she realizes that he is laughing at her so she then glares at him. "What are you laughing at?" she states in an admonishing tone to the handsome stranger. "I find it amusing when people

A Charming Snake

are so full of themselves that their heads can barely fit into a room," he mocks her. "You don't know me," she chastises him. Ian closes the door and walks further into the room. "That is the smartest thing I've heard you say since I entered," again mocking her. "I don't know you and I don't like you," she insists. "Yes you do," he contradicts her. Patricia sighs and marches out of the office in a huff. Mark and Ian laugh as she slams the door shut. Ian turns to Mark. "Was it something I said?" he jokes.

"I like the way you handle yourself," Mark tells the stranger. "That's good since I came here looking for a job," Ian replies. "What kind of work are you looking for ...?" Mark asks. "I'd like to apprentice in the law with you." This is part of Ian's plan to get close to the black power brokers. "You can make more money in the oil fields than clerking for me," Mark informs him. "Maybe at first, but in the long run a man can make a lot more of himself with a pencil than his muscles," the young man demonstrates his intelligence. "What's your name?" Mark asks. "Ian, Ian Grant." He sees no reason to lie. "We'll give it a try. \$2.00 a day for thirty days. If it doesn't work out we part friends ... deal?" Mark offers. Ian offers his hand. The two men shake. "A deal!" Ian confirms.

"Do you have a place to stay?" Mark wonders about the young man's situation. "I'm boarding over at Miss Tools," he informs his new boss. "You take today and get settled in. Report back here first thing in the morning." Mark orders. "Yes sir!" Ian says snapping to attention like he was in the army. After walking to the door Ian stops then turns to

A Charming Snake

toward Mark. "Thank you sir. I won't let you down," he plays his role to the hilt. "I'm sure that you won't," a trusting Mark replies.

In the New York offices of Taney Oil Stone sits at his desk. Across from him sits his secretary, Austin Leonard, taking dictation. They're interrupted by the door opening and Dutton entering. "Wire \$10,000 to the 1st National Bank at Black Mud Gap establishing an account for a Mr. Ian Grant. Be sure to route and reroute it through subsidiaries until no one can trace it back to this company." Cosmos instructs Austin. "Yes sir." Austin assures his boss. The secretary then gets up and leaves out. "Hello Mr. Dutton," the secretary greets Reginald as he leaves. "Hi Austin," the superior acknowledges him.

As the door closes behind Austin the VP turns to Cosmos. "Who is this Grant?" he asks. "This deals with the probative matter. I assume that you still prefer not to be involved," Stone warns. "You assume correctly," Dutton answers then quickly exits Cosmos' office.

In the dirty little bar on the white side of the tracks of Black Mud Gap Grissom, Tim and other white settlers stand around the bar having drinks. The others make fun of Grissom. Unnoticed by the others Ian sits alone in a corner observing everything and searching for his scapegoat. The bartender walks over to Grissom "Where's the two bits for your last drink, Grissom?" he demands. "Put it on my tab," the once proud man requests. "You drunken fool!" the bartender scolds him. "We don't run tabs round here. Never know from one day to the next if you trash

A Charming Snake

will stay or go," he explains for all to hear. "Would you run a tab for that darky, Hannon?" the bitter man asks.

The angry bartender once worked for Daryl and had been leant the money to start his bar by him. He comes from behind the bar brandishing a bat. The man chases Grissom from his establishment. "Why you bum. Mr. Hannon has done more for all of us here than ten the likes of you." As Grissom rushes out the bar doors the bartender tosses his bat, barely missing the man.

Down the lonely dark dirt road of the poor white side of town a drunken Grissom stumbles along. The sound of footsteps and hooves behind him makes him turn around. He stops. A man is coming toward him out of the shadows leading a horse. Ian steps into the light of the moon. Speech slurred by his drunken state Grissom demands of Ian, "Who da hell are yah? What are yah doing following me?" Smiling Ian knows that he has found the pawn he seeks. "I'm a man who knows how you feel," Ian tells Grissom. Believing the young man is being patronizing the bitter fool marches over to him then pushes him backwards. Ian laughs. "Get away from me you young pup. You ain't lived enough years to understand not'in," the ex-plantation owner points out to the stranger. Stepping toward his patsy Ian hopes to draw him in with a tale, "I'm from Louisiana. As a little boy my father told me stories of how grand our plantation had once been. He also told me stories about how well we treated the jig-a-boos. Did they show any loyalty? We lost everything," Ian lies. The drunken man turns his back to Ian and starts to walk away. "So what if you do understand. What good does that

A Charming Snake

do me?" the disillusioned man wonders aloud as he stumbles on down the road. The young master Grant grabs the man's arm. Twirling around an angry Grissom orders, "Don't be grabbing on me boy!" Ian takes a wad of bills from his pocket and offers it to the man. At first Grissom smiles then he frowns and looks at the young man suspiciously. "And who do I have to kill for money like this?" he asks. "Would that be a problem?" Ian questions, testing the limits to which the man has fallen. Looking down at the money, more than he had seen in quite some time, Grissom shakes his head, no. "Na. Not at all," he answers. Putting his hand on the man's shoulder Ian promises, "You're gonna make a lot of money Mr. Grissom ...," Ian had overheard the man's name in the bar. "... and at the same time get your payback against the blacks," he further promises.

The two men walk over to Ian's horse. Reaching up into his saddle Ian takes out a white hood and sheet. He hands them to the man. "Do you recognize these?" the rogue asks of Grissom. He laughs. "Yes I do," he assures Ian. "Do you know the name Albert Marshal?" he continues his questioning of the man. "Yes sir." Now Grissom believes he is beginning to understand. "He's my grandfather and he's going to be sending me some men who think the same way as we do. You are going to work with them to change things around here."

The ambitious young man has put his plan into motion. An elated Grissom mistakenly remarks, "With you running the Knight Ghosts around here it damn sure is!" Frowning Ian clears things up for the pawn. "You don't get it. You're going to be running the Knight Ghosts. I'm going back to work for the

A Charming Snake

blacks. I'll finance things and instruct you in what to do, but I can't be tied to this," he instructs the man. "I don't understand," The man admits. "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer," Ian instructs the dimwitted man. Grissom smiles even though he doesn't truly understand.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 31
A Cancer Appears

In the first decades of Black Mud Gap it has been a community that almost all were proud to live in. Occasionally a ruffian would drift into town. The outsider is quickly dealt with by Donald and life became peaceful once more. But as five strangers drift into town today one can feel a sense of foreboding rides with them. They wear the long fatigue like coats, like the ones the first bounty hunters had worn. All of them are unshaven and have too long gone without a bath. These men are gun men for sure. There's nothing Donald would like more than to send them on their way, but unfortunately they aren't wanted by the law. He does check. Besides this, on the surface they have started no trouble.

The once broken down Daniel Grissom no longer gambles in the seedy bars of the white ghettos. He is a player at the tables of Samuel's luxury casino. Everyone, including Donald, wonders where this newfound prosperity is being generated from, but again there is no evidence of any wrongdoing so all anyone can do is speculate. As usual Grissom is at the roulette wheel the first morning the five Knight Ghosts agents enter town. The doors to Samuel's casino swing open and the ominous men enter. They ask at the bar for Grissom. They're sent to the roulette wheel. When he is told that Mr. Marshal has sent these men he cashes in his chips and leaves.

The casino owner, Samuel, knows the habits of his patrons and knows that this degenerate never leaves the table until he is broke, so he wonders what is so important that this reprobate would leave the game

A Cancer Appears

game early today. He asks Wallace if he knows any of the five men because he is sure that they are gunmen. Wallace knows two of them and that they are Knight Ghosts. Now it is clear who is financing Daniel Grissom's new lifestyle.

Less than two weeks after the ominous men arrive the atmosphere in Black Mud Gap changes. The once cordial neighbors of different ethnic backgrounds now watch one another with suspicion.

The Black Mud Gap Sentinel, the local newspaper, writes of the disturbing possibility that the racist Knight Ghosts group is trying to get a foothold in their community and warns of the dire affect their poisonous philosophy and actions can bring here.

By this time Daryl has been elected the mayor of Black Mud Gap. He calls a town meeting to deal with the terrible rumors and how they are affecting their community.

White, black, yellow and red citizens of the community are all gathered in the town hall including Grissom and his new friends, the Knight Ghosts gunmen. There's grumbling and a general discontent with the presence of the Grissom party. "Order. Order. This town meeting will now come to order," Daryl commands. A hush falls over the proceedings. "We all know why I called this meeting. Our community has grown stronger because we all try to respect and care for one another regardless of race or color, but it seems that there's the possibility that a venomous faction may have come to Black Mud Gap with the intent of dividing this community. I just want you all to remember that if

A Cancer Appears

we trust one another and hold to the caring relationships that we've developed with one another the serpent will crawl off to another garden." Most of the people gathered clap and cheer Daryl's words.

Then it happens. Grissom tosses aside his mask. The evil man stands up and begins to speak, "We all know that you are talking about the rumors of the Knight Ghosts coming to Black Mud Gap. I only have one question, aren't we allowed to make up our own minds as to whether or not their message is venomous - as you say - or a life preserver for some of us who are on the short end of this financial boom here?" The room is filled with a chorus of boos and jeers from whites and other races. Daryl knocks his gavel to regain order. He addresses the agitator, "Everyone has noticed your sudden prosperity so we see where you stand to benefit from this spirit of hatred, but I think the community has answered you. In Black Mud Gap everyone is given a fair opportunity to prosper in our community, according to their works not the color of their skin. I can see how a lazy man might desire some other criteria, but our community has spoken. We won't tolerate any illegal action by you or your friends in the name of bigotry." The five gunmen follow Grissom as he storms out of the meeting. Those who remain clap and cheer as the men leave.

The meeting seemed to have had its desired healing affect. It is only days later that Black Mud Gap seems as it was before the rumors began. Blacks, whites, reds and yellow everyone greets his neighbor as a neighbor and a friend once more. The leader of this township is lulled into a sense of contentment. That is, until he sees Grissom handing money to some

A Cancer Appears

white residents of the town.

The Little Africa businessmen meet to discuss the possible ramifications of the Knight Ghosts buying members. "We should pay them not to join up with them," Samuel offers. "That's bad business." Sutton answers. "I'm not going to pay anyone to do the right thing. I pay a more than fair wage so if white workers choose to take blood money let them, but if I find out that they're members of this hate group they'll need more than the few bucks Grissom gives them to make up for their lost wages," Sutton threatens. "Then it's agreed. Fire anyone believed to be affiliated with the Knight Ghosts." Carter replies. A more level headed Daryl answers, "If we have some proof of an affiliation." The others grumble because persecution of blacks didn't require any proof, but they go along with the maybe too fair Daryl.

In a dilapidated barn on the outskirts of town Grissom, the five gunmen and a handful of the white citizens of Black Mud Gap are gathered. There is plenty of liquor provided free of charge to fuel the courage and anger of the men who have failed too often in their lives.

"Hard earned money we had paid for our slaves and the war just took them away. Then the blue coats gave good land to those same slaves. I bet those who fought for the union would have thought twice if they had known that the people they were fighting for would end up taking bread from their children's mouths," he spews lies and exaggerations, but the failed men need someone to blame. It is all too easy to convince themselves his words ring true. "Whites

A Cancer Appears

are god's people. We're meant to rule the world, not to be led by some jungle bunnies," he inflates their egos with poisonous propaganda. The liquor and inflammatory words flow on and on. Others are urged on by Grissom's song of bigotry and hate. They soon join in with their own diseased choruses. By the time that first meeting is over the handful of recruits are more than ready to put their hard earned monies and their souls into the promotion of this destructive organization.

Like a cancer this hate and bigotry grows and spreads. Before long many who seemed beyond reproach would be seduced by the promise of great things to come for the white race. Few expected that they would be asked to commit acts against their neighbors that would forever taint their very souls. Black homes and businesses are at first merely vandalized then that escalates to burning and threats against the lives of men they had once admired and women and children they had once cared for as they care for their own. Swiftly they had fallen too deep. For some they just didn't see how they could ever break free again.

For most life in Black Mud Gap continues as before. Many people of all races are gathered in the main dining room of the now grand estate of the Hannons. An aging Daryl, Azizza, Sandra, Phillip, Mark and others sit eating and drinking, laughing and dancing. All talk at once. Daryl taps with a fork on a crystal wine glass. A hush falls over the gathering. "Dear friends and family, I am grateful that you have honored me and my household by making our Sunday dinner a community tradition. First and foremost I must thank god for how he has blessed my

A Cancer Appears

life ...". Daryl takes Sandra's hand. He stares lovingly into his wife's eyes then with his other hand he takes his daughter's hand. "I would also like to say a prayer in honor of and in thanks to the many who gave their lives that this dream could become a reality." Everyone bows their heads in silent prayer. After a minute or so everyone lifts their heads. "Enjoy and know that you're always welcome in my home," Daryl adds. The guests begin to eat, drink and celebrate again. Ian walks over to Patty. They smile at one another.

Hours later most of the guests have gone home. Some linger, walking the all so beautiful grounds of the Hannon Ranch, the land that was once Sandra's plot of land. Others are inside drinking, dancing or talking. The host and hostess sit on the porch side by side. Daryl hugs and pulls his wife close to him. Sandra sighs. "Mmm." Looking out over all that they possess she questions, "How did we get here?" Her husband reflects then answers, "I don't know. I never dreamed that anything like this was possible." She kisses Daryl. "It's been quite a journey ...," Sandra begins. "... loving you then not loving you then learning to love you again ... from nearly starving on the trail to barely making it those first years ... to now, having so much. And we have Patty. Things are so good that it makes me fearful," she admits. The husband pulls her even closer, as if their closeness could ward off any harm that might come. "A little fear is a good thing. It keeps us from taking all of this for granted. It also makes us protect what we have," he warns. "... from whom, Daryl?" Sandra wonders aloud. "Anyone who wants to take from us what we've earned," he answers.

A Cancer Appears

In the shadows of the doorway to the Hannon home the skulking figure of Ian stands eavesdropping on Daryl and Sandra.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 32
Loving the Enemy

Often many see the times as seeming to pass as swiftly as Mercury. The Hannon household, family and servants, are aflutter with anticipation of Patty's return. It has been four years now. She has finished college and is returning home for good. Anna - the maid stands on the porch. The maid leaps for joy upon spotting the buggy which carries Daryl and Patty coming toward the house. "Mistress Hannon! Mistress Hannon! Dey's comin'! Dey's comin'!" the woman shouts.

Anna runs into the house. Sandra is running down the stairs. The two women laugh excitedly. They then rush out the door then down the outside stairs. The buggy pulls up in front of the main house and stops. Sandra runs up to the buggy and smiles up at her daughter, tears of joy in her eyes. The father comes around the buggy and lowers Patty down into her mother's waiting arms. The mother and daughter hug and kiss. "I've missed all of you so much!" Patty declares. "Welcome home baby," The mother acknowledges that the waiting is over. "Mom, I'm not a baby!" the daughter whines. Much like someone inspecting a package Sandra holds her child an arm's length away and looks her up and down. "I can see that," she admits. "But you will always be my baby," she assures her daughter. A satisfied Daryl puts an arm around the waist of his two ladies. The three of them walk toward the house. "You know that we're having a welcome home party for you?" Sandra tells more than asks Patty. The father warns his daughter, "It's more of an ambush than a party. Your mother has invited every good looking young man between here and New York to your party." The spoiled young

Loving the Enemy

lady sighs in resignation. "Not a debutante's ball, mother?" she accuses. "Not officially," the mother dances around the truth. "What am I going to do with you?" the daughter asks. "You'll have fun!" the mother promises. The family and Anna enter the house.

Meanwhile in the law office of Mark Carter the attorney puts away legal documents. He stares across the room at his clerk, Ian Grant, who sits writing. "My niece is home," he lets the young man know. Ian feigns indifference, but the joy in his heart shows through. "I know. I saw your brother picking her up at the station," he replies. "Are you going to her welcome home party?" Mark asks, knowing that Ian is dying to see Patty. "I wasn't invited," he answered. "We don't stand on ceremony around here, but if that's what you need to feel welcomed consider yourself invited." The uncle plays matchmaker. The young clerk smiles and answers, "I wouldn't miss it for the world."

The mother and daughter sit at the dining room table while the staff prepares for tonight's party. "Did you ask Ian?" Patty asks. "I didn't, but I'm sure your uncle did. Would you like me to check with your uncle?" the mother teases. "No I would not!" Patty exclaims. "I don't care if he comes. I was just curious who is going to be here," the daughter insists. Sandra laughs and answers, "Anything you say." The father enters the room to his wife's laughter. "What did I miss?" he wonders aloud. "Nothing ...," Patricia is quick to answer. "Young love in bloom," the mother continues her taunting. "Mother!" Patty is annoyed by her mother's use of

Loving the Enemy

the word love when referring to the pesky young Mr. Grant.

While many plan for the joyous occasion of Patty's party others are plotting. Grissom stands alone in the red barn at the edge of town. The barn doors open and Ian enters. "Why did you want to meet with me? This is dangerous," the gruff older man insists. "I've given you a lot of money over the years, but I don't see where I'm getting any real results," the wicked young man accuses. "I've recruited half of the white men in this town. What more do you want?" the local leader of the Knight Ghosts questions. "Action! Let the blacks know that you are here. Make them fear you," Ian demands. The evil man smiles. "How far do you want me to go?" Grissom wants to hear the words from Ian's lips. "I can't tell you that, but if you don't strike fear in their hearts by tomorrow morning I won't be supporting you financially anymore." Again an evil smirk Grissom wears. "What I have in mind will shake up this town for good," he promises.

The Hannon ranch is lit up by bright lights and decorative torches. There are balloons and streamers everywhere. The most handsome young men and the loveliest of young women in the area are in attendance. The dress is formal and elegant. Music plays, couples dance, people eat and mingle. Inside Patty stands at the foot of the stairs in the main hallway. Melvin Sumner, George Sumner's son, walks over to her. "Would you like to dance?" Melvin asks. "Not right now, but later. I promise," the young woman answers. "I'm going to hold you to that," the infatuated young man declares. He exits. The impish mother, Sandra, spies her daughter from the top of

Loving the Enemy

the stairs. The mother decides she has to taunt the usually confident young woman. This is too good an opportunity to pass up. "Waiting for someone?" she teases. A startled Patricia turns to face her mother. "Of course not!" she lies. "I just felt ..." she stops in mid-sentence when the door opens and Ian enters with her uncle Mark. Mercifully her mother ends her teasing. Sandra walks down the stairs to her brother's side then takes his arm leading him away. Turning around to face Ian and Patty one last time Sandra tells them, "Enjoy the party." She laughs then walks on with her brother Mark. "Thank you," Ian calls after her.

Ian turns then walks over to Patty. "You're even lovelier than I remembered," he compliments her. Playing coy Patty answers, "That's funny because I don't remember you at all." Ian laughs. "And despite that fact here you are out here waiting for me," he accuses her. "God, you are the most egotistical man I have ever met," she counters. "Then we are a perfect match because you are easily the most vain woman I have ever met," he answers. The two of them laugh. Dropping her ever protective guard Patricia asks Ian, "Do you want to dance?" he shakes his head no. "I've got a better idea," he says. "Let's go." Pretending to be reluctant she says, "I can't. It's my party." The young man gently pulls her by the waist toward the door. "It would be rude," she admits as she allows him to tug her closer and closer to the door. Ian stops. Pulls her into his arms and kisses her. After the kiss Patty grabs his arm and pulls him out of the door. "They'll never miss me," the young woman makes light of their abandoning her guests. Laughing Ian and Patty exit the house hand in hand.

Loving the Enemy

After hearing the door shut Mark and Sandra come back into the hallway looking for Ian and Patty. They figure out that the two of them have left together. Mark turns to his sister. Too late concerned he asks her, "Has the world changed enough for them to stand a chance?" The mother answers, "More than likely no, but they're going to have to find that out for themselves."

In the red barn at the edge of town an unlikely face shows up. The once loyal worker Tim is drawn to the dark side by the promise of riches to come after the blacks are run out. Grissom passes out bottles of rum to the others in hopes that the alcohol will grease the wheels later when he attempts to incite the others to violence.

The local leader of the Mud Gap Knight Ghost turns to one of his followers, Jack Camp, and says, "Jack tell the others what you told me." Jack laughs a cynical laugh. "You won't believe this. I was put on report for being insubordinate because I called my coon supervisor Joe instead of Mr. Washington." Everyone laughs. "We should take a whip to his ass like in the ole days and see what he wants to be called then," Jack suggests. "I applied for the rigger job, but they hired a spook. Dey said dat he had more experience than me," another member yells out. "I should be running that casino not that jig-a-boo Samuel," the dealer Moe adds to the chorus of false grievances. Others begin telling their perceived tales of woe.

All of their claims add up to one fact, that is that each of them believe that they have an entitlement to something that others have earned by their sweat

Loving the Enemy

and blood simply because they were born white.

The liquor is still flowing freely. Tim joins Grissom in stirring the men up with half truths and racial slander because he has no idea what the end result will bring. " ... blacks were given the land that white folks earned by our fathers' blood, but what are you willing to do about it?" Grissom challenges the men.

The carefully choreographed dance between Grissom and Tim begins, "What can we do?" Tim asks, as the two had planned. "What do you think would happen if they were scared off?" Grissom asks. Without waiting for an answer he continues, "I'll tell you what would happen ... white folks would be able to make claims on this land," he promises. Again Tim chimes in, "How do we scare them off?" The wily Grissom answers, "A pick a nig." No one knows this slang term Grissom has created. They all look confused. "After we finish this food and liquor we pick out a nigger and hang him," Grissom explains. "I ain't killing nobody," Tim says sincerely. "Who said anything about killing anyone. We just let him kick about for a time then cut him down. That will scare the shit out of him and others," Grissom lies. "I bet that will put the fear of god and white folks in 'em," the wicked man assures the others. Too late Tim begins having second thoughts. "I don't know." Tim now hesitates to commit. The leader pulls out a handful of money. "Do you want to be rich or do you want to work for niggas your whole life long?" It came down to economics, not bigotry - not ideologies just money.

"Pick a nig ... pick a nig ... pick a nig ... pick

Loving the Enemy

nig ... pic nic!" the chant goes out. Tim looks around and sees that everyone else has been drawn in. He joins in, "Pick a nig!"

Along the long winding road of the Hannon Ranch Ian and Patricia ride in a horse drawn buggy. She is cuddled up close to him. Ian pulls up on the horse's reins. They stop atop a hill overlooking the whole of the country side. The young man climbs down. Turning around Ian reaches up and takes Patty by her waist then lifts her down. They join hands and walk along the hillside. The enamored young man speaks, "This is beautiful country." The smitten young woman wonders aloud of the young man's future plans, "Are you planning on settling down here and raising a family?" Until now he hadn't thought much of such things and he admits this to Patty. "Well you ain't getting any younger Mr. Grant," she teases him. "No I'm not Miss Hannon," he answers thoughtfully.

The beauty of the moment is scarred by the white hooded horsemen who ride by on the road below where Patricia and Ian stand. Before the night is over their flamed torches will mark a path of chaos, destruction and death. Patricia points to the men as she turns to Ian. "Who can they be?" she asks. "I have no idea." the scoundrel lies. "I have a bad feeling about them," the young woman predicts. This villain pulls her close and kisses her even though he plots against her family. After they part he like the other fool, Tim, begins to have second thoughts. Looking into Patricia's beautiful brown eyes he says, "Let's just forget about them. Let's forget about everything except us, right here, right now." The young woman laughs. "What about tomorrow?" she asks. "We'll start all over again, forgetting about

Loving the Enemy

the rest of the world." He wants most to forget his plotting. Ian kisses the young woman he is falling in love with passionately. The two of them do forget the rest of the world, for right here, for right now.

Clip clop - clip clop. The sound of the Knight Ghosts as they gallop through the night fills any knowing heart with dread and terror. The cowards wear hoods to hide their identities and their shame.

Abe Milton, a widower and black oil rigger with only one son, Calvin Milton, works late. He is alone except for his son, Calvin. Abe is driving large spikes into the rigging for added support. "I'm going to be an oil man just like you, daddy," Calvin says proudly. The father wants more for his son than the hard work of an oil man. "No you're not. You're going to college. My son is going to be a lawyer like Mr. Mark Carter." Abe lays out his son's future. "Aw daddy. I want to be just like you," the boy answers. The father smiles, but is no less determined to see his son better himself.

Just as Abe is about to lay down the law to Calvin he spots the red flames of the torch bearing riders in the distance. He turns to Calvin. "You go climb inside of that barrel over there and no matter what happens don't you open your mouth or come out of that barrel unless I tell you to ..." the father orders. "But daddy ..." Calvin starts to speak. "Don't you but me boy! You do what I tell you! Now!" he screams at his son. The boy runs to the barrel and climbs inside.

From where he lies, scrunched up inside the barrel,

Loving the Enemy

Calvin can see most of the area around the oil rig. His father stands at the ready, holding a long metal pipe.

Bearing their menacing torches Grissom and his men ride up to Abe and surround him while still on their horses. Looking up at the leader of the men Abe glares. "It's been a long time since I've seen those hoods and sheets. You fellas are a long way from home ain't yah?" he asks. Muffled by the sheet Grissom speaks, "No, we ain't, but you are African." Abe strikes one then another of the men, knocking them from their horses. Caught off guard, Abe is knocked to the ground by Grissom, who has hit him aside the back of his head with the blunt end of his torch.

Minutes later Abe regains consciousness. The Knight Ghosts have Abe hoisted in the air upon a horse with a noose around his neck and the other end of the rope tied around the rigging. Once the wicked leader sees that Abe's eyes are open he slaps the rump of the horse. The horse takes off. The helpless man is left kicking and choking in mid air. It is then that Tim jumps from his horse and grabs the man around his legs. He shouts up at Grissom, "Help me! Help me, damn it! You said that you weren't gonna kill nobody!" The leader of the Knight Ghosts takes his gun from his holster and rides over to where Tim is struggling to hold Abe up. He takes the butt of his gun and hits Tim aside the back of his head. Tim falls to the ground releasing his hold on Abe. Helplessly Abe kicks in mid-air until he is still. Tim wallows on the ground trying hard to get to his feet to help the dying man, but is unable to make it to his feet. "I lied," Grissom laughingly replies. The vicious Knight Ghost leader laughs then he takes

Loving the Enemy

off his hood. The light from his torch shows his face clearly to the young boy who sees all from his hiding place in the barrel. Three men get down from their horses and lift Tim up then tosses him across his horse. The others still wear their hoods, including Tim. The evil men ride off leaving Abe still dangling from the rigging by the rope. Unbeknownst to the fiends a witness to their act is still alive.

The riders have been forgotten by Ian and Patty. The couple sit on the hill staring up at the full moon. Without warning the skies burst open and the rain begins to fall. They jump up and run down the hill for cover to a barn.

As they look around the barn they see that bins of crops fill the barn. Nervous, they can't seem to stop laughing. The clothes that they wear are soaked through. "I should have figured you for bad luck," Patty teases. The young woman shivers from the cold and wetness of the clothes that she wears. Ian takes off his coat and wraps it around Patty. "I would have to say that you are the one who brought the bad luck. I've gone on many a ride with many a woman before and this is the only time that I ended up wet and shivering in a barn," he points out. Ian and Patty laugh. She opens the jacket. "I guess we had better share this," she says. Ian looks around and spots a horse blanket. "I have a better idea," he assures her. He walks across the barn, picks up the blanket then brings it to Patricia. The young lady tunes up her face. "That thing stinks," she points out. "But it's dry. You don't want to catch pneumonia do you?" the logical young man asks. Without waiting for an answer Ian turns his back on

Loving the Enemy

Patty. He begins taking off his clothes. "What are you doing?" she demands. "Getting out of these wet clothes," he tells her as he strips down to his bare butt. Once naked he stands there for a moment. Patty drinks him in with her eyes. Ian wraps the blanket around his body. Hesitantly Patricia takes off her dress then her wet underwear. Ian turns around and sees this beautiful woman standing there naked. "Close your eyes until I get under the blanket," she instructs him. Ian closes his eyes. Patricia hangs their wet things over a railing to dry then she walks over to Ian and climbs under the blanket with him. Each can feel the warmth of naked flesh pressed close to naked flesh. They pull the blanket closer which in turn pulls them closer. Together they ease their way down to the barn floor. "Isn't this better?" the young man asks. Nervously Patty answers, "I'm not wet anymore."

Forced close by circumstance they peer even closer into each other's eyes than ever before. They kiss. Ian eases Patricia onto her back. "I've never been with a man before," Patricia admits. "I've never been in love before," Ian answers.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 33
Finding A Killer

Morning has come. The good and the bad of last night has passed, at least for the moment. The rain has stopped. The two lovers lay together under the coarse blanket. To Patty the horse blanket feels like a satin sheet for she is so completely happy. Her head is upon Ian's chest. He holds her tightly, as if he's afraid she will disappear like a phantom. Turning slightly over toward Ian, Patty kisses his chest again and again. Easing her onto her back once more he makes love to her again.

It is still early morning when Ian and Patricia exit the barn in their now dry clothes. They walk hand in hand. She turns to him and says, "I had no idea anything could be so wonderful." The young man smiles at her then answers, "I'm glad that I was your first." Ian takes Patricia's face in his hands and he kisses her tenderly. A sigh more like a quiet moan escapes her lips. Then suddenly she pulls away. "Oh my ...! I'm in so much trouble. I've got to get home. My parents are more than likely worried to death about me. I've never spent the night away from home except when at school." Ian nods in agreement. "Of course you're right. Let's go." He takes her hand and they walk around to the side of the barn and up the hill where they had left the horse and buggy.

Along the road home they pass by the oil fields. There they spot Abe hanging from the oil rig. A distraught Patty turns her head then she cries. Pulling on the reins of the horse Ian stops the buggy. They get down. First Ian then he helps Patty down. Cautiously they approach the rigging. The two

Finding A Killer

look around to make sure the culprits who are guilty of the foul deed are gone. Ian grabs a hold of Abe's legs with one arm and reaches up and cuts the rope with a knife that he always carries that is in his other hand.

Meanwhile Patricia walks around the area. She is sure that she can hear the sound of sniffing. Following the sound she searches until she stands over the barrel with Calvin inside. Bending down she reaches inside of the barrel then pulls him out. Frightened Calvin kicks, cries and screams, "Nooo ... noo don't kill me ... don't kill me!" Holding his head against her breasts Patricia tries to calm and comfort him. "Shh ... shh ... little one. No one is going to hurt you. You're safe now. You're safe," she assures him. As Calvin lifts his head he sees Ian coming toward him. Again he becomes hysterical. "Don't let the white man kill me!" he screams. "Ian is a friend of mine. He won't hurt you. I promise," she speaks in a soft and soothing tone. The boy sets his head on Patty's shoulder then falls off to sleep. The concerned young woman carries the orphan to the buggy. "We had better get him into town to the doctor and my uncle Daryl," she instructs Ian. Looking at the boy Ian is wary, wondering how much and whom he may have seen. "I guess we have no choice," Ian responds.

It is close to noon and Patricia hasn't been home yet. She and Ian stand guard over Calvin who sits on the doctor's examining table waiting to be seen. Dr. Stanley Henderson, a black man, examines Calvin. He looks into his eyes then sticks a tongue depressor in the boy's mouth. "Say ahh" the doctor instructs. The boy sticks out his tongue saying, "Ahh ...!" then

Finding A Killer

Henderson stands up and walks over to Patty and Ian. "Except for a mild case of shock, which is to be expected after the emotional trauma of seeing his father killed, the boy seems fine. He just needs some rest and to have someone to look after him. Do you know where we can find his mother?" the doctor explains and asks. "I think his mother is dead," Patricia informs the doctor. "Poor little fella. He can't seem to catch a break in this life, can he?" Henderson empathizes.

The lawman, Donald, enters the doctor's office. He crosses the room and walks over to the doctor, Ian and Patricia. "I was told that I was needed here. There was some mention of a murder," he states. Patricia points to Calvin. "He's your only witness. Don't know how much he saw," she tells her uncle. "How did the two of you happen to be the ones who brought him in?" the concerned uncle wants to know. "We were out riding and happened upon the boy's father hanging by a rope tied to one of the oil derricks." Ian says. "Did you see anyone else around?" he continues to cross examine the young man. "Afraid not ... Whatever happened seemed to be long over by the time we found him," Ian answers the lawman's questions. Then Patty recalls the Knight Ghosts. "Last night we saw some men, from a distance. They were carrying fiery torches and all dressed in white with hoods on their heads." This doesn't please Donald at all. "Shit! Knight Ghosts! What else can you tell me?" he asks the two young adults. They shrug their shoulders and answer, "Nothing." The lawman then turns to the doctor. "Can I talk to the boy, doc?" he asks. "It has to be short and if I see him getting upset I'm going to have to stop you," Henderson makes clear his position

Finding A Killer

"That's fine," Donald assures him as he turns to Calvin.

The others stare attentively as Donald begins his cross examination of the boy. "How are you doing Calvin?" The boy looks at Donald as if he's crazy. "Terrible," Calvin answers. "Yeah. I guess that was kind of a stupid question, wasn't it? Calvin, I want you to think carefully ... did you see any of the men who hurt your father?" Calvin becomes agitated as he answers Donald, "He killed him. Put a rope around his neck and hit the man who tried to help my father." The boy cries and asks the grownups, "Why did he do that? My father never did anything to him," Donald realizes that Calvin knows the man he is speaking about. "Did anything to whom Calvin?" the lawman asks. The terrified boy answers the lawman, "Mr. Grissom ! They worked together at the oil well before he got fired."

Not believing how careless the man had been Ian tries to cast doubt on the boy's story. "I thought the Knight Ghosts all wore hoods?" Donald turns to the white clerk and says, "They usually do." Then he turns his attention back to the scared young boy. "Did the men you saw wear hoods?" he asked. "Yes sir." Calvin replies. Ian is quick to jump in. "Then how do you know that the man who did those terrible things was Mr. Grissom?" Donald glares at the man, but Calvin answers the clever man. "I was in an oil barrel. I could see them, but they couldn't see me. After he knocked the other man down, the one who was holding my father, Mr. Grissom took off his hood. I was even more scared then cause he stood there laughing while my father was choking and kicking." An anguish filled Calvin cries uncontrollably. The

Finding A Killer

doctor jumps in between the lawman and the boy. "That's enough. He needs his rest and I think you have what you need." The doctor insists. The lawman answers the Henderson, "Yes I do."

Then the concerned uncle turns to his niece and her new beau. His expression is stern and foreboding. "You have your parents worried sick about you. Is this gonna become a habit, staying out all night?" he asks. Frowning like a child caught in mischief she apologetically answers, "No sir." The hint of a smile creases Donald's lips. "I'm glad to hear that." He turns and glares at the young man then he leaves out.

Turning to Patty Ian makes his excuses. "I know that I promised to take you home, but I really have something else that I have to do right now. I am not abandoning you. After I finish I will come by and talk with your parents about last night," Warning her new lover Patricia says, "I have to warn you, they are going to want an inch of your hide," Smiling Ian assures her, "I'm willing to face the music." It is Patty's turn to smile. "Then I'll see you later." She kisses him then heads out of the doctor's office ahead of Ian.

An hour later Ian finds himself standing alone in the red barn of the Knight Ghosts. He pulls out a gun as the door to the barn opens. Grissom enters and closes the door. The fool is scared when he sees Ian's gun. After Ian puts away the gun the Knight Ghosts leader sighs in relief. "You had me worried there for a moment," the fool answers. "It would probably be the smartest thing I have ever done concerning you if I did shoot you," the young man

Finding A Killer

states frustrated. "What are you talking about? I did a great job last night. I bet you dem blacks 'round yere are afraid of us now," he assures Ian.

"You did half of a great job. Blacks know that the Knight Ghosts are here and they are afraid," the young man repeats Grissom's accomplishments. "How is that only half of a great job." the older man questions. "Everyone also knows that you killed Abe," Ian answers. The older man begins pacing the barn. "No way ...! Did Tim turn me in?" he wonders. Ian is caught off guard by Grissom's question. "Why would you think that Tim had turned you in?" a curious Ian asks. "I told him no one was going to get killed then when he tried to save dat nigga I knocked him out," Grissom tries to explain. "Why did he join if he doesn't hate the blacks?" Ian asks. "For him it's totally about the money," the older man answers. "Well, it wasn't him. A little black boy, the man's son, was hiding in an empty barrel and saw your face when you took off your hood ... you idiot!" Ian slaps the older man aside his head. A frightened Grissom covers up his head with his hands and arms. "How was I to know?" he whines. Then the lackey asks, "What are we gonna do now?"

The horse that Ian rode to the barn on is hidden inside. He walks over to the horse and takes a leather roll from the saddle bag. Bringing the roll back over to where Grissom stands Ian unwinds the roll. Inside the roll is two stacks of bills. He hands all of the money to the man. "You take this money and you head down to Kelly, Louisiana to my parent's plantation. No one will find you there," Ian heads for the door. Pulling the reins of his horse he nears the door to the barn. Ian stops then

Finding A Killer

turns to face his former pawn one last time. "I don't expect to see you in these parts ever again," he tells the man. Frowning Grissom assures Ian that he has had his fill of the uppity rich black folk around here. After climbing onto his horse Ian leaves out of the barn.

Two weeks later in a frontier town west of Black Mud Gap Grissom stands at the bar having a drink. The gruff man had decided that he had also had his fill of following the young pup's orders. With the money he has he intends on going to California and buying him a small spread. It wouldn't be like the old days, but at least he would be his own man again.

The plans the evil man had made quickly change when Donald Carter enters the bar wearing his marshal's badge. The town's sheriff, a white man, walks into the bar behind Donald. It takes the marshal calling out Grissom's name to get his attention, "Grissom!" The wicked man turns to face Donald. "You're under arrest for the murder of one Abe Milton," he informs the villain. "I ain't going back wid you nigga!" the fool yells back. "... sitting in the saddle or over it. That's your choice," Donald assures him. Some of the patrons run for the door. Others take cover. A few watch to see how this drama will play out. Hands shaking as he holds them beside his holster he stares at the black man. The Marshal stares at him with an icy glare. The former plantation owner goes for his gun. The man was never a gunman, so it was all too predictable that he would end up on the bar room floor with two slugs from Donald's '45 in his gut. Grissom's last words were some unintelligible obscenity then he dies.

Too many miles is it back to Black Mud Gap to worry

Finding A Killer

with the corpse of a fool, so Donald turns to the sheriff, takes some bills from his pocket and hands them to the other law man. "I'm sorry sheriff, but I won't be getting any answers from him, so if you don't mind I will leave him to your care. I think this should cover the cost of burying him," he offers. The sheriff peels off a five and hands the rest back to his fellow lawman. "All we do with trash like this is throw 'em in a box then tote 'em up to boothill."

Meanwhile back in Black Mud Gap along the road to Daryl's oil fields Ian and Daryl ride in a horse drawn buggy. The young man turns to his sweetheart's father. He says, "I'm glad that we cleared up that misunderstanding Mr. Hannon." Laughing at the boy Daryl answers, "... don't take me for a fool young man. I know why you and my daughter were out all night. I was young once myself. The only reason that I haven't tarred and feathered you is because I also have eyes and I can see that the two of you have true feelings for one another." Ian lowers his head. "Thank you sir ...," Ian is grateful for not being tarred. "You're a likable young man. My brother-in-law has nothing, but the highest regards for you. My wife and my daughter are both in love with you and it wouldn't upset me at all if everything did work out for you two." Ian interrupts Daryl, "I hear a -but- in there sir." Daryl nods his head. "... but everyone isn't going to feel that way," the father warns. "I've never truly given a damn what people thought before and I surely ain't about to start worrying now," Ian tells Daryl. "If the two of you are serious then you're in for hard times. If you aren't serious then this is something you need to end now," The father makes plain what the two lover's

Finding A Killer

options are. The two men stop talking. They see a rider coming. It's Donald. He rides up to the buggy and stops. His brother-in-law greets him. "Hey ... when did you get back?" The tired lawman answers, "This morning." an antsy Ian asks, "Did you catch up with Grissom?" Donald turns to Ian who he has never quite trusted and answers, "Yeah, I caught up with him." Wanting more details Ian continues his cross examination of Donald. "So when is the trial?" A disgusted Donald admits, "There won't be a trial. He drew on me and I had to shoot him," Donald pauses. "I wanted him to tell me who was with him and who is putting all of that money into the Knight Ghosts and why, but most of all I wanted to see him tried and hung for what he did." Ian is relieved. "Justice is a fickle lady. One has to take what she freely gives to you," the young man answers philosophically.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 34
The Price of Your Soul

Tortured by his conscience Tim Smith sits in the quiet of his little cabin, under the light of a small kerosene lamp. He reflects back on how he had gotten involved in all of this. "I'm not a bad man," he tells himself. "I just wanted a taste of the good life; lovely ladies at my beck and call, a big house like Daryl Hannon has, maybe go on a luxury liner to Paris or London and maybe buy me a fancy gold watch like Mark Carter is always flashing around. I never wanted anyone to get hurt. I tried to save him." All of this and a thousand other excuses and recriminations run through his head.

There comes a knock at Tim's door. "Could it be Donald Carter? Everyone knows Donald has gone looking for Grissom. Maybe he found him and the man had lied and said that it was him that killed Abe." Finally he hears Ian's voice call out, "Smith, Tim Smith ... are you at home? It's me Ian Grant." Relieved, Tim opens the door and beckons the young man inside.

"Hi young man, can I offer you a drink or anything?" he plays the host. "No thank you," Ian answers. "Did your boss send you out here for something?" Is the only reason Tim can come up with for the stranger to make his first visit to Tim's home. "No. Actually I wanted to talk to you about Mr. Grissom and the Knight Ghosts." Leaping to his feet Tim begins to whine and plead. "Oh god. Oh god. I didn't do anything. I tried to help Abe. No matter what that bastard says I tried to help. It was Grissom who hit me aside the head and stopped me from saving Abe," he rants on.

The Price of Your Soul

Placing his arm comfortably on Tim's shoulder Ian tells him, "I know. You don't have to be afraid of me. I'm here to help you." The confused man begins to calm down. He looks at Ian and wonders what is he up to. "Could he be trying to get a confession out of him. No. There seemed something more ominous about this young man. "Something, up until now he had overlooked," was his thought. "Help me how?" Tim asks.

"I'm taking a big chance with you, but I need a new man. I think that man is you," his words are cloaked in enigmas. "What are you saying?" the man demands of Ian. "I am the money man behind the Knight Ghosts," he confesses. Tim can think of no reason why anyone would lie and say that, so he believes Ian. "Abe didn't have to die in order to scare black people," the reluctant Knight Ghost instructs the man he sees as the real leader of the Knight Ghosts. "What if he did have to die? How far are you willing to go to become rich, Mr. Smith?" Ian wants to know.

All of his previous regrets seemed to have evaporated in that singular question. The greedy little man could only think about the things that he wanted to have. "How rich are we talking?" Tim asks. Ian laughs then answers, "How does a thousand a week to start sound? A position as an account supervisor for the Black Mud Gap wells for the oil company that I represent." Shaking his head Tim realizes what he always suspected was true. "I never believed it was about the color of a man's skin," he accuses the Knight Ghosts. "It's all about the color of green money and black gold," Ian assures him. "For that kind of money I would definitely shoot my daddy and give serious thought to shooting my momma," is Tim's

The Price of Your Soul

sarcastic reply.

"I have one problem that I need for you to deal with for me," the slimy serpent instructs his new leader of the Black Mud Gap Knight Ghosts.

It has been a solitary existence for the eldest of the Carter sons. Several times he has been involved in very serious relationships, but each time he was asked to make the hard choice between marriage and giving up his responsibility to protect this community. He picked the law, so he sits in a large comfortable chair, in front of a blazing fire, all alone.

Just a few miles away from the dedicated law man in the red barn at the edge of the town once again the members of the Knight Ghosts meet. Many of the group dropped out after the night of terror. The ones that remain are pumped up for more violence. With Grissom dead the most of the men believe that they are a ship adrift.

Tim enters the barn and is quick to take control. The new leader comes into the barn carrying two cases of bottled rye whiskey. He commands two of the other men to go out to the wagon and bring in another four cases of rye. The men laugh and accept this to mean that Tim is taking charge. Some of the men who had watched him try to save the black man are surprised that he hasn't quit and even more surprised that he would take on a position of leadership.

After the men begin their drinking Tim begins to speak. "Sometimes violence is a necessary tool to

The Price of Your Soul

take back from someone what should have rightfully been ours in the first place. I thought that we should have been a little more cautious in our use of deadly force. Grissom's death says that I was right," Tim points out. Some of the men grumble. They think that the man is a coward. "But when blacks kill one of ours there can be only one response to that ... the nigga must die!" Tim declares. The men are fired up by his declaration. Each of the evil men cheer his answer, but what if they had known that he was only following orders. That his declaration had nothing to do with vengeance for one of their own and everything to do with the end strategy to acquire the oil fields for Stone and Grant. What would have become of the evil man then ...?

In the wee hours of the morning the lawman, Donald Carter sleeps heavily. It is four a.m. when outside of Donald's house men in white sheets and white hoods creep about his place. Quietly they slip inside. The men make their way through the house and into his bedroom. A creaking floor board, which Donald has been intending to fix, alerts him to their presence, but all too late. Donald reaches for his gun near the bed. Tim grabs the gun first. Another Knight Ghost hits Donald aside his head with an iron pipe. The marshal is stunned. It is then that the others jump on him and begin to drag him from his bed. "Who are you? What are you doing?" he asks of the men. One man kicks him then answers, "Shut up spook. You ain't in charge of notin' here tonight." Others begin to hit and kick the lawman also.

Heading out doors Tim leads the men who are carrying

The Price of Your Soul

Donald out to his porch. Not to repeat Grissom's mistake Tim orders, "Don't anyone take off your hood until we get back to the meeting place. You never know when someone may be spying on us," he explains. The greedy man then walks over to his horse then takes a rope from the saddle. Turning to Donald, who is in the grasp of two Knight Ghosts followers, he accuses, "You killed our friend and member Daniel Grissom for his acts of patriotism for the white race. For this we have tried you in a court of your betters and found you guilty. The sentence of our court is that you be hanged by the neck until you are dead." Donald struggles in the arms of the men. "Fuck you! You racist, sick bastards don't represent white people or any court of law. You're just a bunch of losers hoping to steal the respect you've never been able to earn," Donald makes plain his assessment of the men.

One of the men hits Donald hard with an iron pipe. The lawman is knocked out cold. They bound his hands and feet. A gag is stuffed in his mouth then Tim takes a bucket of water and tosses it in his face. "It's not going to be that easy for you," the lost man predicts. One man throws the rope with a noose over a beam of the porch. Two other men hoist Donald into the air. While one more man slides a chair under his feet. Menacingly Tim walks toward the law man. He stops within inches of Donald. "If you had been a white man I would have said that you have been a great law man, but you were a spook using your badge to lord it over us white folks," the man lies to excuse his actions. Tim kicks the chair. The chair tumbles backwards. The black lawman drops a foot then dangles kicking in the air. The ruthless men watch and cheer as he breathes his last breath,

The Price of Your Soul

all except Tim. He feels one last twinge of remorse.

Alone in his home a few hours later Tim wretches again and again. "Is it worth what I have to do to get the things that I want?" he asks himself. The misguided fool knows what his answer would be, but is too ashamed to admit it even to himself.

The cold bright light of day stands witness to the cruelty that transpired the night before. Donald hangs from the roof beam of his own home. If one would ask for proof that there is no justice in this world here it is, that a man who has dedicated his life to protecting people could have his life end this way bears witness to the truth of it.

There have been too many funerals in Black Mud gap of late. Friends and family, white and black are gathered for Donald's funeral. Sandra, Patricia and the other women weep for their loss. The men all look somber. Samuel turns to the men who comprise the Black Wall Street business association. "We all need to get together after the funeral," he instructs them. "Why?" Daryl wants to know. "Don't you see what's going on?" Samuel demands of the naive man. "A few angry men are trying to scare us off," Daryl answers. "I think that there's a lot more than that going on," Samuel insists. "I agree with Samuel," Sumner adds. "OK. After the funeral we'll meet." Daryl ends their conversation.

As the black men ride back to Samuel's casino to meet they see one more disturbing occurrence along the streets of Black Mud Gap. There are already signs out promoting Tim Smith for the new marshal. What's disturbing to most is what the signs read, "No

The Price of Your Soul

Black Law -No White Law- Just Justice - Tim Smith for Marshal. In the minds of the black businessmen things are beginning to add up.

Six black men sit around the round table in the conference room of Samuel's casino/hotel; Daryl, Samuel, Phillip, Mark, George and Wallace sit staring at one another. "Tim Smith is running for marshal." Samuel warns. "He's a good man," a still naive Daryl answers. "Damn it man! Take your blinders off!" Samuel instructs Daryl. "What are you saying?" Daryl wonders aloud. "First the Knight Ghosts kill a black man at the oil wells then a black marshal is killed in his own home, now out of the blue one of your ranch hands wants to give up his good paying job for the lesser paying more dangerous job of marshal," Samuel maps out the recent events. "Do you think Smith is hooked up with the Knight Ghosts?" George questions. "I think it's worst than that. Where did he get the money for his campaign?" Samuel asks the others. "The oil companies," Daryl finally begins to put it together. "They've been trying to get me to sell my land since the first barrel of oil was drilled," he explains. "Then they are probably bankrolling the Knight Ghosts also," Phillip deduces. "How do we protect ourselves?" George wants to know. "Let me bring in more guns," Wallace offers. All of the men look around the table. They nod in agreement. "I'll take a few days to get things in order here then I'll go down to Arkansas and get some of my old hands," he informs the others.

Outside the conference room the white bartender, Joe, has been eavesdropping and sees an opportunity to make a lot of money for himself.

The Price of Your Soul

The new leader of the Knight Ghosts and candidate for Marshal - Tim Smith walks down the streets of Black Mud Gap. He is kissing babies and telling the citizens why he is the best candidate for the job. As he walks by an alley Joe steps from the shadows, startling the man. "What the hell are you doing Joe?" Tim demands. "You liked to scared the life out of me," he informs the bartender. "You should be scared. A damn Knight Ghost running for marshal in a town run by rich blacks," Joe accuses. A frightened Tim denies the charges. "That's crazy talk Joe. You can get a man killed spreading lies like that," he cautions the man. Joe isn't fooled by Tim's act. "Cut the bull. They know. And I want to know how much will you pay to know what they know and what they plan to do about it," the bartender propositions Tim. The innocent act is over. "How does a hundred dollars sound?" Tim asks. "Not as good as five hundred," Joe counters. "Okay, but this had better be good," Tim warns.

The bartender lays it all out to the Knight Ghosts leader, "They know that you have the Knight Ghosts and the oil companies backing you. That Wallace guy is leaving in a few days to bring in gunmen to deal with the Knight Ghosts." Reaching into his pocket Tim takes out ten one hundred dollar bills then hands them to Joe. "Thanks. Keep your ears open," he instructs the bartender, hoping to put him at his ease. Joe turns to leave. Stepping toward the scoundrel Tim then stabs him in the back with his hunting knife. A surprised Joe collapses to the ground dead. "Can't ever trust a blackmailer to be satisfied with what he gets." Tim excuses his actions as he picks up his money and walks calmly away.

The Price of Your Soul

There is nothing left of the once good man Tim Smith had been. He has sold his soul for a chance at success and now there is simply no going back.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 35
The Beginning of the End

The tension between the races in Black Mud gap is thick enough to cut with a knife. Things have changed. After dark the streets are all but empty. Business in the casino has been slow since Donald's funeral. Samuel is closing up early again tonight. Seeing the gunman Wallace out he walks him to the front door then shuts the door behind him.

Out on the street Wallace walks the barren streets alone. Few things unnerve this seasoned killer, but there is a feeling in the pit of his gut tonight that he just can't shake. His head swivels around surveying the streets. There seems no reason for him to be apprehensive, but he's lived this long because he trusts his instincts. As the gunman passes by an alleyway four Knight Ghosts jump from the shadows. The four hooligans grab him before he can pull his gun. The men beat on Wallace. Unyielding he fights back. Managing to free himself from their grasp for a moment he pulls his gun and shoots one of the men. Another of the men knocks his gun from Wallace's hand. Finally stepping from the shadows Tim stabs Wallace in the back. The gunman falls to the ground. The Knight Ghosts leave the body of the man Wallace has killed behind. Instead they carry off the gunman's body so no one will know what has become of him.

Together on the same hill where they had sat that first night Patty and Ian sit again. Just as they had that first night they stare up at the beautiful clear Oklahoma night sky. Turning to Ian a disenchanted Patty offers a solution to their situation, "Let's go. Let's just pack up and leave

The Beginning of the End

here." A half smile creases Ian's lips. "Do you really want to go away with me?" he asks. Patricia laughs. The young woman has never heard the cocky young man sound so vulnerable or so unsure of himself before. "Yes I do. This isn't the place where I grew up. This isn't the place that I want to raise a family. Yes. Let's go," she confirms her commitment to him. Ian takes her in his arms and kisses her passionately. "I have some matters that I have to wrap up then we will get married and we'll leave," he promises. The two of them hold tightly to one another and stare out into the night.

After taking Patty home Ian makes his way back to the small room that he still rents at the boarding house. Closing the door behind himself he then turns and flicks on the light. "Shut that off!" Tim demands. Quickly Ian turns the light back off. Tim has been sitting in the dark waiting for him most of the day. Speaking softly so as not to be overheard Ian demands of the man, "What are you doing here?" Tim counters, "Where have you been?" Angered, Ian raises his voice by mistake. "That's none ... !" he catches himself and lowers his voice again. "That's none of your damn business! Now, why are you here?" Tim moves closer to Ian and whispers. "The blacks are a lot smarter than you gave them credit for being. They figured out that I'm with the Knight Ghosts." This annoys Ian but he's still confident. "So what. They can't prove anything." Tim continues his revelations, "They also know that the oil company is involved." "How?" Ian is surprised. "I'm going to have to fix this," Ian tells Tim. "They plan on bringing in hired guns to deal with the Knight Ghosts." Ian notes that Tim possesses a bevy of useful information. "I slowed them down. I killed

The Beginning of the End

Wallace last night." Ian nods his approval. "That's what I like, a man who takes the initiative." A frightened Tim tells Ian's his greatest fears. "It won't be long before they come after me." The rogue tells his flunky not to worry, "That won't happen. I'm going to end this thing soon, one way or another."

The next morning at the table in the main dining room of Grant Hall Karen sits alone awaiting her husband. The mother has received a telegram from her son. Martin enters and sits down. The matriarch glares across the table at her husband. He looks up and spies her disapproving stare. "What now?" he asks. "I want you to join Ian in Black Mud Gap," she tells him. "I can't go there," Martin tells her. "I don't know or care why you're so afraid of those niggas, but our son needs you, so you are going to Black Mud Gap and that's the end of it!" Karen orders. She then gets up from the table and leaves out. "It's time to pay the piper," Martin tells himself.

A few days later Ian meets his father at the train station. "Why are you being so secretive?" Ian asks. "There's a man here that I don't want to bump into," his father answers. "Who is that?" the son continues his inquiry. "... one of the first black settlers. A man named Samuel," Martin answers "Samuel Thomas?" Ian hopes not. "I don't know his last name," the father answers his son. "If it's Samuel Thomas we need to keep you out of sight. There isn't much that goes on in this town that he doesn't know about," Ian warns.

The two men make sure that no one sees them

The Beginning of the End

together. The father is setup in a boarding house in the poor white section of Black Mud Gap.

Things are about to reach a boiling point. Tension has gotten so bad between whites and blacks that a couple of days before Martin's arrival Mark had said good morning to an attractive young white woman and she had turned up her nose and walked on. That wasn't the end of the incident. Although it was nothing she had told Tim Smith that Mark Carter had gotten fresh with her. Everything was falling in place for Ian's evil plans.

The day that Martin comes to town another of the key players deals himself a hand in this end game. At the Black Mud Gap Sentinel Newspaper the white editor, William Barkley, meets with Cosmos Stone. "What brings a very important man like you to our small town Mr. Stone?" The ruthless businessman begins his play, "You are modest Mr. Barkley. You have the makings of a great metropolis here. My company and I would like you to work with us to help make that happen." The white newspaper man is more than a little flattered that this powerful man believes he can help in the growth of Black Mud Gap

"What do you need from me?" Barkley asks the wicked man. Cosmos hands William copy for a story. "Give this copy to your apprentice to run off then take a vacation in New York City until things blow over. Of couse my company will pay your expenses." Barkley looks at the copy and he frowns. "Why are you doing this?" he asks Stone. "... to help your city grow," Cosmos lies. Barkley shakes his head. "And if I say no?" Cosmos makes the consequences plain, "Do you truly want me as an enemy?"

The Beginning of the End

The next day as Mark walks the streets of Black Mud Gap he is met by the queerest of looks from his neighbors. Still puzzled over the encounters he enters his office and sits down. Even Ian stares just as strangely as the others at Mark as he sits across the office from him. "Something really weird is going on. People keep giving me the damndest looks and no one would speak to me," Mark notes. Ian walks across the room carrying the Black Mud Gap Sentinel under his arm. He places the paper down upon Mark's desk. "I take it you haven't seen this yet," Ian remarks. The lawyer looks down at the headline. The lawyer can't believe that Barkley would publish such garbage. "What? Has Barkley gone crazy?" he asks. In an attempt to shift blame Ian points to the byline. "It's not Barkley's story." Jumping to his feet Mark declares, "It's his newspaper. He's the editor and owner. I have to get over there and find out what's going on." Mark places the newspaper in the trash then rushes out of the office. The headline on the trashed newspaper reads - BLACK ATTORNEY MAKES LEWD REMARKS TO YOUNG WHITE WOMAN.

In the conference room of the casino/hotel the members of the Black Wall Street group meet. "Have you seen the Sentinel this morning?" Mark asks the others. "That's why we're all here. What did Barkley have to say?" Daryl asks. An exasperated Mark answers, "He's out of town." George interrupts, "Did anyone see Wallace before he left town?" Samuel shakes his head then answers, "Nope. No one has seen him since he left the casino a few days ago. He was supposed to talk with me before he left." No longer is naive. "Something big is going down and someone wanted us unprotected," he speculates. "So what do

The Beginning of the End

we do now?" George asks. "It's time to call in General Stanford. We haven't put money into his career for all of this time for nothing," Daryl answers George. A pessimistic Samuel says, "Let's hope he gets here in time." As the men leave the meeting Daryl instructs them, "Stay armed on on your guard tonight."

The one time overseer and his son meet in the rundown room where the son hides him. "I'm glad that you're here. It's all about to come to a head and I'm smack dab in the middle of it all," he confesses. "I'm here for you. Whatever you may need," the father commits himself.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 36
A Night of Terror

Before making their last plans Ian and his father slip into town to see what the state of things are in Black Mud Gap this evening. The two men pass by Samuel's casino/hotel then turn the corner moving out of sight. As Martin and Ian disappear from sight Samuel, Mark, Daryl, Phillip and George exit the casino/hotel.

"How long before he gets here?" Samuel asks Daryl. "He brought troops once before, when the second group of bounty hunters came. It took four days then. With the train it should only take a day at the most." Daryl guesses. "Let's hope things stay quiet until then," is George's reply.

June 1, 1911 will live in infamy in Black Mud Gap. The hell red barn is a gathering place for demons this night. At 12 midnight, as if the time had been preordained, the Knight Ghosts pack the barn. There are even some whites who aren't members tonight. They've lied to themselves, convincing themselves that they believe the newspaper accounts of Mark's alleged act. As usual the liquor flows freely.

In front of this gathering of fools Tim stands. "How long do we let them make the rules? Are our women just playthings for rich spooks to amuse themselves," he hopes to incite them. Charley, a non-Knight Ghost, speaks out, "I can't find one white woman who says that story is true." Tim is annoyed at the man. He looks around and sees that Knight Ghosts and the others are waiting for his answer. "What decent woman would admit to such a thing? We all know Mr. Barkley's reputation as a

A Night of Terror

newspaperman. He would never run this story if it wasn't true," Tim counters. "That's right!" the crowd chimes in. Charley backs down. "I know that some of you depend on the blacks for your livelihood, but does that mean that we let them treat us like slaves?" making the blacks the villains. "Are we going to take it anymore?!" he screams. "Nooo ...!" the crowd screams in answer.

Elsewhere that night a distracted Ian sits on a blanket with Patty upon their favorite hillside. There are a couple of glasses of wine that sit on the blanket in between them. Patty notices that Ian hasn't been drinking and seems a thousand miles away. "I want to get away from here," she tells him again. "Where would we go? Where will it be different?" he hopes for an answer. "My grandfather talked about going to California. Maybe it could be different there?" He smiles at her naivety and kisses her eyelids. "If that's what you want. You and I will go," Ian surrenders to his feelings for Patricia. "No matter what happens, I want you to know that I do truly love you," he assures her. "I know you do," Patty answers. The elated young lady can't hide her exuberance. "We'll talk to my parents tomorrow and by the end of the week we can be married and leave," she makes plans for their future. Ian smiles and answers her, "I'll talk to them tomorrow." Patricia hugs him and says, "We're going to be so happy." A hopeful Ian answers, "For the first time I truly believe that we can be."

Like a knife slicing into their dreams the two spot fires burning at her father's oil wells. "My god ...! What now?" she wonders aloud.

In the center of town it's like some Halloween

A Night of Terror

nightmare. The streets of Black Mud Gap are filled with whites dressed in hoods and sheets. There are some whites dressed in normal dress alongside the fanatics. Both groups are throwing rocks, breaking out the windows of black businesses and tossing flamed torches inside.

Fed up Blacks come out of their homes and businesses to meet the rabble-rousers face to face. There is fighting between the two groups. Chaos reigns in the streets. Buildings are ablaze. Screams of anger and frustration fill the night.

In the midst of all of this madness is a familiar face, Martin Grant. He leads a group of Knight Ghosts down the main street. "Come with me!" Martin declares. The master of Grant Hall leads five men into the casino / hotel that belongs to the man whom had put the v shaped scar upon his cheek oh so many years ago.

The oil wells burn as a hooded Tim stands watching with other Knight Ghosts. The brave Patty has convinced Ian to come down to the oil wells. They ride up on their horses. Seeing the vandals Patricia takes her rifle from her saddle and fires on the men. She kills one man. Ian fires his gun over the heads of the Knight Ghosts. Tim spots Ian. Turning to his remaining men Tim signals to them to leave. They all turn their horses and ride off.

The courageous young lady jumps from her horse. Running over to one of the burning derricks she grabs a large cloth from the ground and foolishly begins to swat at the fire. Turning to Ian she screams, "Help me! Help me!" Slowly Ian climbs down

A Night of Terror

from his horse and makes his way toward her. He sees the derrick breaking apart and beginning to fall and he screams, "Patty ...!" Patricia turns and looks up just as the burning beam crashes down upon her. Rushing to her side Ian kneels down beside her and tries to lift the beam.

The tears in his eyes can't cloud the fact that life is slipping away from the woman he loves. The devastated young lover puts her head into his lap. Face smudged from the smoke Patricia looks up at him. "We could have been happy," she tells him. Her head slumps over. Love is just another casualty to the games of greed and bigotry. His heart seems to burst from the pain. Ian answers her, "If I hadn't played this foolish game, yes, we could have been happy."

Inside Samuel's casino the Knight Ghosts start fires all around the first floor. "Okay. That's enough," Martin tells the other men. He stands at the front door as they file out. A determined Samuel rushes down the stairs. The two men spot one another. That v shaped scar had haunted many of Samuel's nightmares over the years since. "You ...!" Samuel accuses. A determined Martin steps further into the burning casino. Menacingly Samuel walks slowly down the stairs. "I've seen your face every day of my life for the last thirty some years, but after tonight I'm going to sleep easy," Samuel assures Martin. "One of us will," The one time overseer counters. The two men fire their weapons at one another. Both are hit and fall to the floor. The chandelier falls then the burning ceiling comes crashing down. The hotel burns around the dead bodies of these two evil men.

LITTLE AFRICA
CHAPTER 37
Living with It

It is a pitiable scene at the Hannon Ranch the next day as Daryl, Sandra and some of their hands work to clear away the wreckage from the previous night's chaos. "I'm so tired of all of this. Let's just sell and go to Europe. I hear that they treat blacks better there," Sandra has made up her mind. "If that's what you want then that is what we will do," her husband agrees.

In the distance Sandra sees Ian in the horse drawn buggy coming toward the house. Daryl has turned to see what Sandra is looking at. As the buggy draws closer they see a bundle wrapped up in a blanket in the back of the buggy. The young man stops the buggy. "Where is Patty?" a concerned Sandra asks of Ian. With genuine tears in his eyes Ian climbs down from the buggy then makes his way to the back of it. As he nears the bundle Sandra becomes hysterical, crying and screaming, "No ... god no ... it can't beee ...!" Daryl remains composed. He wraps his arms around his wife comforting her. Ian lifts the wrapped bundle gingerly from the buggy. As he walks toward Daryl he explains. "She was trying to put out a fire. Then a beam fell on top of her," the boy stumbles. His grief has stolen his strength away. "Ohh nooo ... ! Not my baby! Not my baby!" Sandra pleads. Daryl takes the bundle which contains Patty from Ian. The hands help Sandra into the house. "... a cursed land," Daryl repeats as he follows his wife and his hands inside. With nothing more to say or do Ian climbs back into the buggy and rides away.

A whistle blows announcing a train's arrival. Azizza and black workers are busy clearing away some of the

Living with It

debris from the previous night's fiasco. They have found Samuel and the unknown white man's body. Whites and blacks stand in the street watching in horror.

Days later some blacks have had enough. They are moving out by the wagon load. Some rowdy whites cheer the exodus.

An angry Azizza turns to the crowd and rages at them, "I am not going anywhere! Not this time! Not his time!" the elderly black woman assures all who are in ear shot. Some whites feel guilty for what they did or did not do, so they walk away.

General Stanford and a company of soldiers march up and down the middle of Main Street. They came on the train days earlier. Two of the black business men, Phillip and George come out of their offices and walk toward the general.

A week later the soldiers are still in Black Mud Gap. A silent uneasiness has settled over the occupants. Relations between the races will never be the same again. At the Hannon Ranch Daryl, Cosmos and Mark sit at the dining room table with papers sitting in front of them. Mark stands over Daryl. "I had heard about all of the trouble lately around here so I came to town to see if there might be something I could do to help. I never dreamed that things were this bad," Cosmos explains his most convenient arrival. The brother-in-law turns to Daryl. "You don't have to do this," he says. Daryl ignores Mark and confronts Cosmos. "I know that you had something to do with all of this. If it wasn't for the fact that my wife has already lost enough I

Living with It

would kill you and laugh on my way to the gallows. But she has, so we are leaving and I am not going to kill you." Daryl signs the papers then hands them to Stone. The ruthless man hands Daryl a check. The amount is great, but not nearly enough to cover the man's all so personal losses. No amount ever could. "Now get out of here before I change my mind," he warns the man. Cosmos jumps up and rushes from the house. "You should have let me kill him," Mark offers. "Your sister doesn't need to see her brother hang either. Besides, this is a cursed land. No one that owns it is ever going to know lasting happiness," Daryl assures his brother-in-law.

Later the same day there's a celebration going on in Ian's boarding house room. Three villains; Cosmos, Ian and Tim are alone in the room. "How do you like winning, young Mr. Grant?" Stone asks. "It isn't nearly worth what I lost," he assures Stone. The man laughs and says, "I forgot to tell you. It seldom is son. It seldom is."

Ian wears an evil grin. "But now there's nothing left for me except winning the game," he warns. Ian then shoots Tim and Cosmos. The two men fall to the floor one dead, one badly wounded. The young man walks over to where Cosmos lay dying and clutching the deed to Daryl's oil fields. "What are you doing?" he asks his protegee. The sullen young man takes the papers from Cosmos' hand. "I helped draw up these papers. If you had read them carefully you would know that the bearer of this deed is the owner of the Hannon oil fields." He walks toward the door then stops and turns suddenly then says, "I almost forgot, thanks for the lessons." Ian turns and starts once more for the door. Cosmos takes Tim's

Living with It

gun from the dead man's holster and shoots Ian in the back. The son of the overseer and the Knight Ghosts princess falls to the floor. The oil man, Cosmos, head slumps to the floor. All three men are dead.

The black janitor of the boarding house, Arnie, came up when he heard the first gunfire. He had gotten there just in time to hear Ian explain to Cosmos that the bearer of the deed would own the Hannon Oil fields. After the last of the gunfire he waits then enters the room. Stepping over Ian's body then reaching down and taking the papers from the dead man's grasps Arnie smiles then leaves.

The Knight Ghost matron, Karen, sits on the steps of Grant hall reading a letter that Ian had sent her on the last day of his life. "I think that my father died the night of the raids. Almost everything else seems to have worked out as I had planned, but if this letter gets to you before I do then something went wrong and I won't be coming home either. Love Ian." Karen tosses the letter onto the ground and weeps sorrowfully. The black woman whom Karen calls Girl rushes from out of the house. She sits down next to her mistress and eases Karen's head down upon her shoulder. Karen wraps her arms around Girl's neck and continues to weep.

Oklahoma is a distant memory as Daryl holds Sandra in his arms and they look out over the Atlantic Ocean from the deck of this luxury ocean liner. The orphan boy, Calvin, stands beside them. "Black Wall Street was a beautiful dream. Wasn't it?" Sandra asks. "My mother once told me that the wonderful thing about dreams is that as long as you're willing

Living with It

to take a chance on losing them another dream will always come along." Daryl answers his wife wondering what lies ahead for him and his remaining loved ones.

THE END