

Who could she tell? Lovey and Nag would keep her confidence, but she feared Terrance's revenge. Better that their ignorance be sincere. No, the only person she could discuss the plan with was its architect.

She approached him the night of Terrance's address and he acted as if she had agreed long before. Caesar was like no colored man she had ever met. He had been born on a small farm in Virginia owned by a petite old widow. Mrs. Garner enjoyed baking, the daily complications of her flower bed, and concerned herself with little else. Caesar and his father took care of the planting and the stables, his mother the domestic affairs. They grew a modest crop of vegetables to sell in town. His family lived in their own two-room cottage at the rear of the property. They painted it white with robin's egg trim, just like a white person's house his mother had seen once.

Mrs. Garner desired nothing more than to spend her final years in comfort. She didn't agree with the popular arguments for slavery but saw it as a necessary evil given the obvious intellectual deficiencies of the African tribe. To free them from bondage all at once would be disastrous—how would they manage their affairs without a careful and patient eye to guide them? Mrs. Garner helped in her own way, teaching her slaves their letters so they could receive the word of God with their own eyes. She was liberal with passes, allowing Caesar and his family to range across the county as they pleased. It rankled her neighbors. In her degrees, she prepared them for the liberation that awaited them, for she had pledged to set them free upon her death.

When Mrs. Garner passed, Caesar and his family mourned and tended to the farm, awaiting official word of their manumission. She left no will. Her only relative was a niece in Boston, who arranged for a local lawyer to liquidate Mrs. Garner's property. It was a terrible day when he arrived with constables and informed Caesar and his parents that they were to be sold. Worse—sold south, with its fearsome legends of cruelty and abomination. Caesar and his family joined the march of coffles, his father going one way, his mother another, and Caesar to his own destiny. Theirs was a pathetic goodbye, cut short by the whip of the trader. So bored was the trader with the display, one he had witnessed countless times before, that he only halfheartedly beat the distraught family. Caesar, in turn, took this weak licking as a sign that he could weather the blows to come. An auction in Savannah led him to the Randall plantation and his gruesome awakening.