



There Are Things That Can't Be Undone

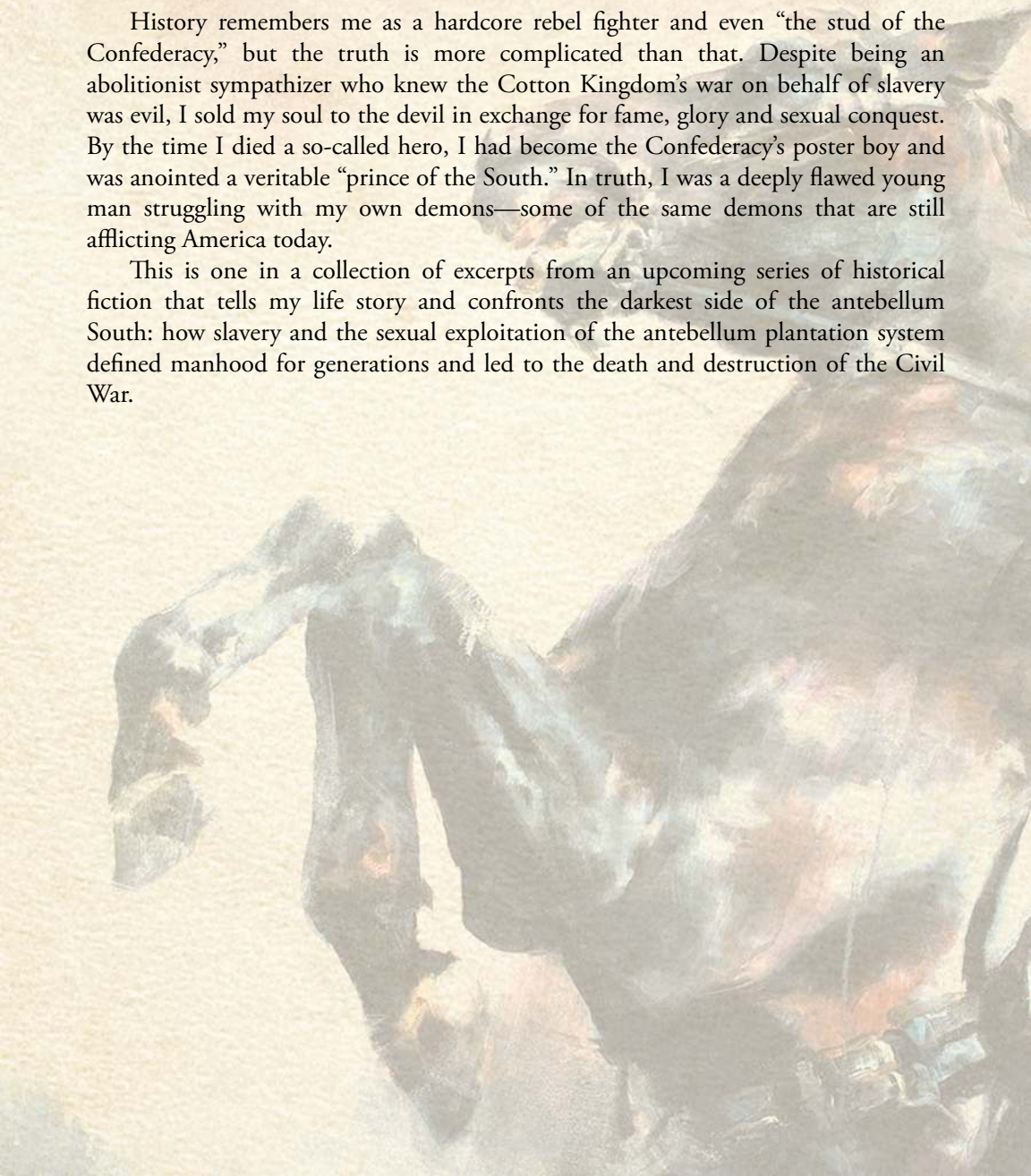


You might say I sold my soul to the devil.

I was dubbed the “gallant Pelham” by General Robert E. Lee of the Confederate States of America, and subsequently got myself killed fighting for that terrible cause, maybe the worst cause that ever was. We can all thank God it became known as the “lost cause.”

History remembers me as a hardcore rebel fighter and even “the stud of the Confederacy,” but the truth is more complicated than that. Despite being an abolitionist sympathizer who knew the Cotton Kingdom’s war on behalf of slavery was evil, I sold my soul to the devil in exchange for fame, glory and sexual conquest. By the time I died a so-called hero, I had become the Confederacy’s poster boy and was anointed a veritable “prince of the South.” In truth, I was a deeply flawed young man struggling with my own demons—some of the same demons that are still afflicting America today.

This is one in a collection of excerpts from an upcoming series of historical fiction that tells my life story and confronts the darkest side of the antebellum South: how slavery and the sexual exploitation of the antebellum plantation system defined manhood for generations and led to the death and destruction of the Civil War.



“It was the worst thing that ever happened to me; I let my brothers force me into raping Aryanna. If ever there was something that couldn’t be undone.”

It was hard to say if it was the result of exceptionally good weather or God’s smiling on the Pelham farm, but the pile of corn waiting to be shucked had never been bigger. Although a lot of things seemed to be getting smaller as John got older, that green pile of pulpy corn ears was clearly an exception. And as Benton County grew, so had the number of so-called neighbors who came to help shuck corn. It was obvious that some of them did as little work as possible in exchange for a share of the libations, but somehow every year all the corn got shucked.

From his vantage point atop a bale of hay, John had never seen that many pretty girls—young ladies, as both Mama and Mammy preferred calling them. According to Mammy, more young ladies were coming to the cornhusking every year for the express purpose of acquainting themselves with the handsome Pelham boys, but he knew she mostly meant Philip and Andrew rather than himself. John had every confidence that he would grow up to be far handsomer than his brothers, but for now he was a scrawny little thing who was unlikely to be of much interest to the young ladies.

John recognized Henrietta Robinson and Elizabeth Carlyle right off. There were no two young ladies in the county that his brothers wanted to fuck more than Henrietta and Elizabeth; the two of them went so far as to claim their doodles got hard at the mere sight of them in church, a fact that would have no doubt discouraged the pastor to no end. Philip preferred Henrietta based on her dainty perkiness, while Andrew favored Elizabeth for her over-size bosoms. The two brothers had even begun a competition of sorts in which they tried to outdo each other describing imaginary encounters with their respective love interests in the most graphic terms.

To think that either of those girls would ever take a fancy to Philip or Andrew was positively revolting. John couldn’t imagine Henrietta or Elizabeth leaning over a bale of hay, squealing like an animal while Philip and Andrew took turns fucking her, although he did rather enjoy the thought of

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those big melons flopping back and forth. But the fact was, given how white girls were strictly off limits for such activities, neither of his brothers would even try to get Henrietta or Elizabeth alone, let alone violate them in the stable. That was probably why his brothers had turned their attentions to Aryanna in the first place.

Looking about, John saw Aryanna on the other side of the barn and their eyes met, just as they always did at the cornhusking. And, as in years past, she was the first to turn away, not so much rebuking him, he was pretty sure, as reminding him that he shouldn't transgress. Given what his brothers had done to her, were probably doing to her all the time, John wouldn't have blamed her if she never looked at another white boy again, least of all one with the last name of Pelham.

And speak of the devil, there they were, Philip and Andrew, standing near the punch barrels, looking as grown-up as possible, ever so handsome and respectable. How awful for Aryanna to have to sit there among her attackers, pretending everything was as it should be. No doubt about it, white girls like Henrietta and Elizabeth got the Pelham boys' charming smiles, while Aryanna got their dicks rammed inside her.

Could proper young ladies like Henrietta and Elizabeth even begin to imagine the truth about his brothers? Did they even know that such aspects of human behavior existed?

John was so lost in thought that it took him a moment to realize Philip was standing in front of him, blocking his view of Aryanna. Philip was smiling in that charming way of his and holding up a tin cup as if offering John its contents. Still, John was intimidated, instinctively worried that, no different than usual, his brother was probably up to no good.

After a start of surprise, John forced a smile. "What do you want?" he blurted out in spite of himself.

"I don't want anything, little brother," Philip said innocently, looking taken aback. "I just came to offer you some refreshment."

John held up his own cup of fruit punch. "I've already got some," he said, puzzled as to why Philip would come halfway around the barn just to offer him a drink.

"Not the kind they serve the children," Philip said, pushing the cup closer. "I mean the *real* cider, the kind with whiskey in it."

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John perked up; he was so curious that he wanted to grab the cup right out of Philip's hand and take a swig, but his cautious nature prevented it. "You could get in trouble," he said, glancing around to see if anyone was watching.

"No one's gonna find out," Philip said with a quick shrug. "Besides, you're old enough to have a little whiskey." He moved the cup right up to John's lips. "You're not afraid, are you?"

John frowned. "Of course not. What makes you think I'm afraid?"

Philip looked at him as if it were obvious. "I'm not going to stand here all afternoon. Take it or leave it."

After glancing around the barn again, John finally took the cup in his hand. "I appreciate it," he said, managing a closed-lip smile.

Philip looked on, waiting for John to take his first sip.

John cautiously put the cup to his mouth. He fully intended to take a drink but the smell of the whiskey stopped him.

"Go on," Philip said, sounding more encouraging than impatient. "At least taste it."

John tipped the cup back. He meant to take only a small sip, but nervous as he was, he took nearly a mouthful. For the love of God that stuff burned! He wanted to spit it out, but he could hardly do that with Philip staring right at him. Unable to abide the foul liquid in his mouth, he swallowed it all in one gulp, making his throat burn so badly that his eyes watered and he almost gagged. There he was trying to show his brother what a man he was, and instead he ended up crying like a baby.

"Whoa, there, little brother," Philip said, verging on an affectionate smile. "Easy does it."

"Is it always that strong?" John managed to ask after a moment.

Philip patted John on the shoulder. "It takes some getting used to," he said. "You just take it slow."

John nodded as Philip turned and walked away, disappearing among the throngs of people almost as quickly as he had appeared.

The mere fact that Philip wasn't staring him in the face made it a lot easier to get the rest of the whiskey down. It didn't seem anything like what it was cracked up to be, but maybe he was fortunate enough not to be one of those people who were overly susceptible to its allure.

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Having finished off the whiskey in the manliest fashion he could muster, John decided it was about time that he did his share of corn shucking. He found himself a spot along the corn pile and got to work. For all the talk about the hazards of getting inebriated, John had never done a better job of shucking corn.

Just when John had forgotten everything in the world but corn shucking, he felt a tug on his sleeve. It was Andrew, holding up a tin cup just like Philip had. "Want some more?" he asked, sounding just as charming and civil as Philip had earlier on.

John shook his head. "I'm working now. I can't drink and shuck at the same time."

"Other folks are willing to help out," Andrew said. "You've been working mighty hard."

If it was unusual for Philip to act hospitable, for Andrew it was downright miraculous. John wasn't sure what to make of it; maybe a little alcohol had brought out their kindness and consideration. He took the cup of whiskey and wandered back to his bale of hay, once again fixing his eyes on Aryanna.

As the afternoon wore on, John's brothers took turns bringing him more whiskey. If John had failed to understand what was so special about a sexual orgasm until he experienced one for himself, neither had he understood what was so good about getting drunk until now. It felt like part of him was the same person while part of him wasn't. And the world was becoming a different place, a place where there was no reason that white boys couldn't fraternize with black girls. Nothing was stopping him from declaring his love for Aryanna right then and there, in front of everyone in that barn. He wasn't sure why, but nothing was preventing anything, and everything wonderful was possible. It was just like the night he had shown Aryanna the comet through his telescope and they had shared the whole universe together.

His brothers were talking to him now, both of them together, standing in front of him, telling him they'd get him out of the barn and up to bed before anyone else, namely Mama or Doctor Pelham, found out he was drunk.

"I'm not drunk!" John objected, annoyed at his brothers for failing to appreciate his superior state of mind. "Not only am I *not* drunk," John said with a confident cock of his head. "I've never been thinking more clearly." He

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wanted to share his revelations but didn't know where to begin. "I'm going to marry Aryanna," he said.

"You can't marry a nigger!" Philip burst out, failing to understand anything.

"Why not?" John asked, his wonderful new world crashing down around him.

Philip and Andrew were incredulous. Andrew in particular showed the usual disdain that John hadn't seen all day. "Niggers are just for fucking," he said.

"And working in the fields," Philip added.

His brothers were spoiling everything. "What if white girls were for fucking?" John suggested, thinking of Elizabeth's amazing bosoms. "I'd sure like to fuck me one." John could hardly believe his own words, but he was mighty glad he'd gotten up the nerve to say them.

Philip and Andrew were wide-eyed. "Maybe our little brother is growing up," Philip said with a sly chuckle.

John had been so busy trying to impress his brothers that he hadn't realized they were leading him out of the barn. But instead of taking him toward the house like they'd promised, they were going in the opposite direction. John gazed out across the desolate fields as he staggered along, his brothers holding him up, one on each side. The sun was going down, the last light of God's glorious day spread across the horizon.

"I'm telling you," John cried out, garbling his words, "I've gotta fuck me a girl!"

"We can take care of that," Philip said. "We've got a surprise for you."

John was almost sure they were taking him to the stable; where else could they be going? His mind raced, growing wary of his brothers' intentions. Still, a part of him took great pride, even joy, in their acknowledging his manhood.

It was nearly dark inside the stable, the horses barely visible among the gray shadows. But when Andrew lit the lantern hanging behind the door, at least one big brown eye was staring straight into the light, kind of like the moon reflecting the sun in the night sky.

More and more eyes shone as the three brothers made their way between the stalls, their ghostly quality serving to increase John's apprehension. He considered trying to break away and run but resolved that he didn't have much of a chance.

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They led John to the farthest stall, the same one where he'd seen them have their way with Aryanna. John froze. They were going to force him on Aryanna; that's what they'd been up to all along!

Philip shoved him forward into the stall. "What's the matter, John? You've been carrying on about how badly you want to fuck."

"Get your clothes off!" Andrew demanded. "So she can see what you really are."

What he *really* was? It took John a moment to understand. Philip grabbed him, holding him tight from behind, while Andrew began unbuttoning his shirt. John kicked as much as he could, but it only made it easier for Andrew to lift his legs up in the air and pull his trousers down.

"No!" John shouted. "Please don't."

Andrew threw John's clothes into the next stall, causing the horse to give a start and whinny.

John was down on the ground, the straw scratching his skin. He tried to turn his head to see Philip's face. "Why are you doing this?" he pleaded, hoping his older brother might show some compassion.

Philip finally let John go, and he scrambled to his feet. He took a few steps back until his naked buttocks bumped against the wall. His brothers looked him up and down as though admiring their destruction of his dignity.

John couldn't get over his brothers' anger, their undeniable hatred that seemed a terrible revelation in itself. He remembered Andrew's smoldering resentment over his telescope; indeed, his hatred had turned hotter and more dangerous than Mammy's stove.

Philip turned to Andrew. "You watch him while I go find his mare." He ran from the stall, leaving Andrew to make sure John didn't escape.

After an incalculable period of time, voices could be heard approaching the stall, Philip's and a girl's. The girl was almost certainly Aryanna, protesting her seizure from the festivities and ignoring Philip's repeated demands to keep quiet.

The stall gate opened and John's eyes met Aryanna's. She showed a split second of recognition, relief that it was her childhood friend standing before her, surely protection and salvation. But then her expression turned to one of mortal terror, as though a great conspiracy and betrayal had made itself apparent; the boy she had known had become something altogether different, something evil.

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John desperately wanted her to know that it wasn't his choice, but it seemed beyond his capacity for words. He remembered the afternoon he had told her they couldn't be friends any longer and what she had said about being his slave. There was no denying it had come true in the worst way.

His brothers started tearing off Aryanna's clothes, and she started screaming, cursing them to hell and using words rarely uttered even by his foul-mouthed brothers themselves.

"Leave her alone!" John cried out, grabbing at his brothers' arms, flailing with his fists. But they were bigger and stronger, and his nakedness only seemed to add to his helplessness.

John didn't know that Aryanna would struggle so, that she was capable of putting up such a fight. The girl who had passively submitted to his brothers now fought as if for her life. Just as he was no longer a little boy, she wasn't his innocent friend or a willing sex slave; she was a human being with a will of her own who had decided to endure no more.

But her fighting, no matter how madly she swung her arms and used her fingernails like claws, seemed only to hasten the shredding of her flimsy calico dress until it fell away entirely and she was as naked as he was.

"Lie down!" Philip shouted at Aryanna, motioning at a bale of hay in the stall.

The two brothers tied her arms to the slats between the stalls. Aryanna struggled and kicked with her legs, but it was to no avail. Philip held one of Aryanna's legs while Andrew tied it firm. They did the same with her other leg until she was spread apart like a wish-bone, or maybe a broken doll, more contorted than John had ever seen a human body bend.

Andrew grabbed one of John's socks, which had fallen short of the railing between the stalls, and shoved it into Aryanna's mouth so that she looked like a spitted pig with an apple in her mouth, but with tears rolling down her cheeks. The heavy breath coming through her nose seemed the only expression of her suffering, trapped soul.

"The sooner you try and fuck her, the sooner we'll let you go," Philip said.

"I won't!" John protested.

"Are you a man or not?" Philip demanded. "You said you wanted to fuck, damn it!"

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Andrew grabbed one of the pitchforks leaning against the railing by the stall gate and held it up to Aryanna so that one of the prongs was poking into her flower. "There are things that could do a lot more damage than that dick of yours," he said. "Now put it inside her!"

Aryanna struggled to scream, but with the sock in her mouth it just sounded as though the pig was suffering a horrible death. She shook her head, the only part of her that could move, her eyes pleading with him.

"Don't be afraid to hurt her," Andrew burst out, spreading her apart with his fingers, handling it as if he were milking a cow.

John grabbed her hips and pushed as hard as he could, trying to ignore her hysterics, how she was throwing her head around, and all but choking herself on that sock.

When it ended with what seemed a flood of uncontrollable pain, he couldn't quite believe what he had done. He couldn't imagine ever facing her again; surely he had destroyed everything that had existed between them. He hadn't only failed to protect her; he had finally become her attacker. There had been a time when he still hoped things would change so that he and Aryanna could be together, but now such dreams seemed an absurd, ridiculous fantasy. She probably wanted to spit on him.

Andrew casually poked his fingers inside her. "Was she ever more ready for the taking?" he asked, looking at Philip.

"Please let her go," John pleaded, his voice reduced to a tearful whine.

The two brothers grinned at each other as if, once again, they were of one mind.

Unable to control himself, John lunged, fists flailing, despite the odds against him. Together Andrew and Philip held him off and threw him backward onto the ground, his naked buttocks landing in a mound of horseshit.

"Maybe we should let him go," Philip said, a hint of compassion in his voice.

Andrew turned to Aryanna. "You want him to watch, don't you?"

Aryanna had given up trying to scream through the sock but shook her head so violently it looked as if her neck would break.

"Well that's too bad," Andrew said, "'cause little brother wants to watch. Don't you, John?"

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John shook his head and melted into tears, feeling like a helpless infant. "No I don't," he managed to say, hardly more audible than if he had a sock jammed into his own mouth.

Andrew unbuttoned his trousers and pulled them down over his ready, stiff dick, never more a ruthless spike.

Philip stood guard while Andrew fucked Aryanna so hard that her head banged up against the slats behind her, that spike vanishing inside her again and again, looking as painful as a pitchfork.

John put his head down and cried, his feeling of wretchedness so deep that he could scarcely imagine recovering from it.

Several days passed during which John neither saw nor heard anything of Aryanna. A part of him remained in disbelief, holding out slim hope that what happened in the stable had been an awful hallucination brought about by his drunkenness.

If John had been devastated when he first witnessed his brothers having their way with Aryanna, it was dwarfed by the havoc that now embroiled his mind. His brothers were nothing less than rapists, and maybe his own crime was no less terrible. He wanted to beg Aryanna for forgiveness, but doing so would be absurd; words were meaningless.

As much as he feared Mammy knew what had happened in the stable, several days of distraught loneliness finally drew him to his favorite chair at the kitchen table, rocking back and forth while Mammy cooked the family's supper. At first Mammy didn't seem to pay him the least bit of attention, but then she turned from the stove without warning and fixed one of her stares on him. "I guess you heard that Aryanna's run off," she said.

John struggled to hide his shock. Despite everything that had happened, it had never crossed his mind that she might run away. He'd heard of Negroes fleeing their masters, but no one had ever run away from the Pelham farm, at least not that he knew of. "No," he said, hoping his most innocent, little-boy expression would protect him from suspicion. "Do you know why?"

"I think you *know* why," Mammy replied, looking him in the eye unmercifully.

John nodded, unable to hide his acknowledgment, trying to decipher the meaning of her accusation and exactly what she knew. "Do you know where

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she went?" he asked. But as quickly as the words passed from his lips, he realized that Mammy wouldn't tell him, even if she knew. He and Mammy were mighty close, but he was still one of the master's sons, and he'd long since learned that her first loyalty was to her own people; she could hardly tell him where a runaway slave had gone, even if it was Aryanna. "Do you think she'll be okay?" he added quietly, holding back tears.

Mammy shrugged and turned back around to her pot of what looked to be sweet potatoes. "Who can say?" she mumbled.

John could practically feel Mammy about to change her mind and blame him outright for what had happened. Before Mammy had a chance to turn back around, he got up from his chair and slipped out the back door.

Outside, the whole farm seemed to have disappeared, all of it grim and gray and empty, as if Aryanna had taken its very life away with her. And, as always, following the harvest, the thick verdant cornfields of summer lay in desolation, looking like a fire had raced through them and left nothing but the final remains of hell itself.

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