

VI REID'S EASY HISTORY

Coachman Joe and Planter George were, in a manner of speaking, relics of a couple of encounters. They shared a mutual sire, one of the old breed of hard-riding planters who could creak saddles in a dozen Quarter cabins any smoky Sangaree evening.

The difference lay in, that George, being a Great House baby, was legal as hell. Joe was midwifed in the Quarters; next day his ma returned to the field.

George was white; Joe was mulatto.

George and Joe grew up together. George stayed a bachelor; and although he laid about in the Quarters like a parish bull, the old genes generated no progeny. As some are star-crossed, the unlucky devil was, in a manner of speaking, moon-crossed.

After George had dropped dead from whoring and liquor, it was discovered that rather than leave the property for the State

hawks to peck over, he had willed the whole stagg^{er}ing deal to his beloved slave-coachman and brother, Joe.

Joe had turned out to be a steady, most moral fellow. ^{Yet} But, as it must to all men, the time came when Joe felt the old Adam stirring in him. However, unlike his stupid half-brother, he more than merely rose to the occasion. He shot the bolt on his libido by freeing a pretty slave girl named Cobina and marrying her.

Joe, although a man of property, was a prudent man. He had to be. It was the law. The goddam law flatly stated that an ex-slave who misbehaved himself could be ironed-up again. Not like these mealy-mouthed days where they carry the ^{shackles} ~~shackles~~ behind their backs as they sneak up on you. Those were clean, honest days of straightforward slavery.

But, lets get back to the mainstream.

With all his worldly wealth, Joe walked softly. For example:

ITEM. He refused for a long time

to use the coach-&-four
his brother George had willed
to him.

ITEM. He never took to the
public road without the
blue cross-patch on his
shoulder (right) to show
that he was once a slave.

ITEM: He would step from
the sidewalk into the dust
for any white scallawag who
happened out.

But sometimes he felt bleak, by God.
Wasnt he a wealthy man? Yes? And
almost white? No?

bleaker
One ~~bleaker~~ Palm Sunday he almost
lost his head through a sudden impulse
to ~~go~~ take phaeton to the parish church
in Falmouth. Luckily, in Cobina, he had
a wife whose good sense was scandalous.

this

~~This~~ was what bugged Joe.

Poor Joe grew more morose as the days wore on. In today's talk, we would say he was hung up. ~~He wanted a family Christmas, but how in holy Jesus could he pull in the family from five parishes, and furnish the kind of cuisine the Christmas spirit kindled, without offending buckra? Especially the poor-white buckra who lurked back of every bush, ready to pounce you back in irons if you spat crooked?~~

"My father had no family in Jamaica, but there are ~~my~~ lots of my mother's people about," he moaned to Cobina. "I bought them their freedom when I came into money. Freedom! Yet, I cannot have them for Christmas, because such feastings and doings and all ~~these~~ those people visiting me, may offend the buckra."

Cobina held his head at her waist and kneaded ~~rubbed~~ the medulla oblongata.

"And even if we got them safely through the roads without arrest, how could we provide them with all the fine victuals one should have at Christmas?" he mumbled. "If the poor-white buckra find out we're buying up all the expensive foods, they may say we're getting uppity and go to the magistrates."

Cobina felt for the big hunk of man. ~~so~~
 In her deep woman's head, she concocted a plot.

"If the buckras and the magistrates get together, they'll play pranks with our freedom," the big lug groaned, his head buried at her chest.

Cobina could hardly conceal a sneer at the stupid slob. What she did was to put on ~~her~~ ~~face~~ the Madonna-look, the mystique thing, half-goddess, half-gut ache, with which women mask their feelings when ~~through cause~~ they are reminded by sudden, swift, intuitive force that men are a pain in the ass.

"Rest easy, my husband," she said, digging ~~into~~ ~~into~~ her black folk lore for the appropriate

mot. "'When ram-puss walk softly, bulldog dream him sleep deep.'"

And so I've brought you, engagingly I hope, to the nub of our story.

The nub?

A nostalgic look through a keyhole bill of history at a true grocery/~~store~~ from those lousy yesteryears.

Now, back to Cobina.

Cobina's two-fold effort which she hoped would lay the ghost in Joe once and for all, was to:

- a) bring home Joe's large clan, in secret; and
- b) spread the kind of gourmet board whose groanings would, for generations, be a legend from

the Cockpits to Cuna Cuna Pass.

No less would do for a man with a sore head the size of Joe's.

Calling three of her trustiest slaves, bold horsemen all, and holders of travel permits, she sent them to drum up Joe's relations.

"Tell them to come in their field clothes, wearing the blue cross on their shoulders," Cobina said, standing in the yard and looking up at her bold horsemen.

"Tell them to come by foot and to bring all these things in their headloads, so if a jealous poor-white buckra should stop them on the freedom road, it will be seen they're ~~not~~ merely hucksters selling fine foods for the buckra table."

A smart, prudent woman.

"Tell them they should buy whatever they must. I will pay them back

when they get here."

~~She had it~~ She had it plotted ~~easy~~ ^{tell} as all-fall-down.

"So ~~give~~ ^{told them} us our grocery-lists, ma'am," the bold horsemen said.

So she ~~gave~~ ^{learning} the list; for in those days, slave-folk were too busy building a country to bother about ^{the} books.

"Say to our people in St Ann," she said, "to bring the following for Marse Joe's table. Bring ~~prime~~ prime fillet from the Pedro Cockpits at one-and-tenpence a pound --- and ~~bring~~ ^{don't do} me in the eye. Bring butter at sevenpence a pound. Homemade butter, not that rancid stuff the Jews sell, brought in from County Cork or ^{from} the wild North American Colonies in sailing ships. Bring lots of tongue at three-&-nine each, and veal at sevenpence a pound."

She turned to face the second bold

horseman upon his palomino gelding.

"Say to our relatives in St Elizabeth they should wring the necks of the following ^{items:} ~~to~~ wild ducks at six shillings ⁷ a pair; capons at ten shillings a pair; hens at five shillings a pair. ~~to~~ Eggs for no more than sevenpence a dozen."

Then to the one who would be galloping east, she sent to say to the relatives in St Thomas:

"Tell them Marse Jose will appreciate much black crabs and mullet from the Plantain Garden river. ~~to~~ ^{and} stop by those of our people in St Catherine and tell them ^{to} bring beans and cucumbers, lettuce and artichokes, potatoes, ^{and} carrots, onions and any vegetables they lay hands on."

The horses turned on their hind hooves, forefeet pawing high. Fine savannah beasts, of proud shoulders and narrow flanks, good for long, steady gallops.

"Tell them to come, all walking-foot, with the blue-patch on their shoulders so if a poor-white buckra sees them on the road, he'll think they're nobodies, just higglers."

So Joe's folk came from five parishes, walking with their blue shoulder patches, into WOLF.

end

or

INTRODUCING THOSE TWO DOUGHTY SCOUTS, ANTONIO & MORALES

by Vic Reid

The two lay in a hollow of a boulder on the brow of the Red Hills. Below them lay the Liguanea, the great savannah to the sea. There, glinting in the sun, sat Passage Fort, Port Royal and the harbour. On their right, the rocky Soldier's Road took off from Passage Fort to Saint Jago town.

The men were bare, save for pantaloons. Their naturally black skins were burnt deep in the pore. The boulder was hot.

"Such a nice, hot place," Antonio said. "We should have brought some women."

"Roll over to your back, amigo, it will be easier," Morales observed.

Antonio grinned.

"Did I ever tell you about that Ibo girl I met in the ~~port~~ port of Antonio over on the north coast?"

"Si. And the one in Savannah la Mar. And the one in Rio Bueno. And the highborn Spanish woman up on Mount Diabolo whose spread you ramrodded for a year," Morales said, using the Spanish equivalent for a rancho boss, "and all the rest. Roll over on your back, Senor Cojones."

They chuckled and shifted positions on the rock, muscles glistening and rippling in the sunlight. They both carried weapons; Morales, a Spanish musket ornate in brass; Antonio an English firearm he had taken off a Red-coat whom he ambushed a few weeks after the English landings.

"Antonio, what do you think of it?" Morales whispered.

They were half a mile up in the sky and far away from ~~any English camp~~

30 pages

Pic
Two
men
looking
on
Liguanea
Plain

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the nearest English camp and little fear of enemy ears; but they were outlaws in hostile territory. As far as they knew, their Spanish masters had all fled to Cuba, except the Commandant, Arnaldo de Ysasi; and he was somewhere up in the north mountains sending messages.

"It is still too early to say. We will have to scout closer to the English camp to overhear what they talk about," Antonio said.

Morales rolled on his side. A sly twinkle was in his eyes.

"Overhear them, amigo? You think they will speak in Spanish [REDACTED] or Yoruba? What makes you think you'll be able to understand their barbaric tongue all at once? Have you been taking lessons in English?"

Antonio shrugged. "A man can sometimes tell what people are talking about by [REDACTED] seeing their faces. Perhaps this is what the Spaniard de Ysasi thought when he sent us on this scout. He knows we speak no English."

"Ah, not only that. The Spaniard, the Holy Virgin bless him, is a lazy fellow. He's also clumsy in the forest. He depends on us. We've worked for them, fought for them, and now we must read the future for them."

"It seems to me, more each day, that we, the African-Jamaicans, will have to take over from the Spanish-Jamaicans."

"That is if the newcoming English-Jamaicans go away. Leave the island."

"They say that Cuba is bigger than this island, and that the Old Country, our Africa, is infinite. But there

can be few places, large or small, with people of three countries fighting for it, as is the case in this Jamaica."

They lay on their backs watching a few balls of cloud chasing each other across the blue sky. The air up here was cool and clean. It stung their nostrils like rough wine.

"I wonder why the Spaniard de Ysasi thinks there is a chance that the English might stay? They have always gone away before, those other times they invaded the island," Antonio said.

"They've never come on so many ships before and they've never stayed so long. They seem to have a mind to settle down here."

"Settle? How can they settle when they have no women?" Antonio scoffed. "The Spaniards have sent all their women to Cuba and those of ours who have not gone with them are up in the mountains with our people. These English soldiers arent monks that they will settle without women. They will go away, compadre!"

Restless, they turned again, staring out to sea. Antonio squinted long and hard. Presently, he said:

"Amigo, take a look at the Palisadoes, behind the bushes to the east."

Morales took a look. The long, narrow neck of land which made and protected the harbour, had a high bush. Back of the bush, a ship crept along the land, slowly, in the light wind.

"Could it be a Spanish ship? One of ours?"

Morales shrugged. It made no difference. A single

Spanish ship [redacted] was useless against the armada of English ^{man-o'-wars} ~~manowars~~ anchored in the harbour. Even less so to the thousands of English soldiers ashore. He pointed to a bluff.

"If we climbed that butte, we could see further along the Palisadoes. There may be other ships out there."

They thought about it. One had to be careful. The English had taken to sending patrols into the near hills. The English were equipped with powerful glasses that could pick up a man great distances away.

"I will go," Antonio said.

"But careful," Morales said; "with God."

Antonio broke some bushes and festooned his pantaloons. A larger branch, he held over his head for his main cover. He began a slow crawl. Working his way to the crest of the bluff, he [redacted] saw another ship in the wake of the first but these were all. He returned to Morales without incident.

"There is only one other, both ships of the English."

"So the King of Spain isn't coming," Morales joked.

"Then I fear de Ysasi and I must proceed with our own plans for liberating the island."

"Si, Capitan, proceed," Antonio said. They spoke in Jamaican-Spanish which was a mixture of Spanish and African words.

The shadows [redacted] lengthened. Morales made a pillow of leaves for his head.

"We will rest here until nightfall. Then we will go nearer to the Englishmen and see what we can learn

from their faces."

They moved at nightfall. A moon hung out. Watch
 fires were being lit along the road from
 Saint Jago
 to Passage Fort. They moved with care and reached the
 plains. Keeping inside the trees, they made for the
 docks at Passage Fort. Saint Jago, or as the English were
 calling it, Spanish Town, was too closely guarded.

They found cover in a clump near the
 waterside. The ships were being warped to the docks when Morales
 and Antonio took up position. They were close enough to
 hear the soldiers talking but were helpless at the strange tongue.

"They speak with marbles in their mouths," Mo-
 rales whispered.

"A funny people, these English," Antonio agreed.

"Their faces show as much expression as the hind-end
 of a bull."

"They do not gesture with their hands when they
 speak. They're not like us, or the Spaniards."

"Cold, amigo. Too cold for this warm land. I believe
 they will not remain. *They will go away, back to England.*"

The ships had tied up. The gangplank was lowered.
 emerged,
 Figures descended the gangplanks.

And a roar erupted from the soldiers ashore.
 Antonio
 The two scouts stared. Their eyes popped. jumped. He
 howled with anger.

"No, it cannot be!" whispered Morales.

"Those mother-hating, heretic English have pulled
 off the dirtiest weasel-deal of modern seventeenth cen-
 tury times!" cried Antonio in fine fettle.

Pic
 Irish
 Classics
 December
 King.

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"They do not war fairly, amigo!" bawled Morales.

"They fight as if they wanted to win, the bastards!"

But regardless of how Morales and his compadre protested, the English soldiers obviously approved. To a roar of lust from the soldiers, a thousand Irish lassies sweet-assed down the gangplank, bawling obscenities like harpies in Tara's hall. The smutty, saucy lassies whom that sly, psalm-singing old puritan, Oliver Cromwell, had sent out to salt his new colony. To turn his soldiers into settlers.

Bedraggled from the long, hard voyage but full of the proverbial Irish spirit, they swung gaily ashore, bottoms articulating lively thoughts for the future of Jamaica.

Antonio glared at Morales.

"Putas," he rasped. "The English have brought in their putas to breed up a nation."

"Our scout is over," agreed Morales. "Truly, we can say to the Spaniard de Ysasi that the days of his people in Jamaica are over. The English have come to stay."

"Very well," Antonio said, a funny gleam in his eye. "I will not be left out of this nation-building. I will myself endeavour to do whatever is possible with these foreign putas. I will assist in building a new Jamaica."