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KODACHROME FROM FILES OF FIRST MARS EXPEDITION

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PRETTY QUADROON ***

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Pretty Quadroon

BY CHARLES FONTENAY

*Once a man has chosen a path to follow, there's
no turning back. But what if the die could be
recast and we could retrace our steps when we
chose the wrong one ... and choose another?*

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General Beauregard Courtney sat in his staff car atop a slight rise and watched the slow, meshing movement of his troops on the plains south of Tullahoma, Tennessee. Clouds of dust drifted westward in the lazy summer air, and the dull boom of enemy artillery sounded from the north.

"You damn black coon," he said without rancor, "you know you're costing me a night's sleep?"

The Negro courier stood beside his motorcycle and his teeth flashed white in his good-natured face. The dust of the road filmed his uniform of Southern grey.

"Miss Piquette told me to bring you the message, suh," he answered.

"A wife couldn't be more demanding," grumbled Beauregard. "Why couldn't she wait until this push is over?"

"I don't know, suh," said the courier.

"Well, get back to headquarters and get some supper," commanded Beauregard. "You can fly back to Chattanooga with me."

The man saluted and climbed aboard his motorcycle. It kicked to life with a sputtering roar, and he turned it southward on what was left of the highway.

The sun was low in the west, and its reddening beams glinted from the weapons and vehicles of the men who moved through the fields below Beauregard. That would be the 184th, moving into the trenches at the edge of what had been Camp Forrest during the last war.

On the morrow this was to be the frontal attack on what was left of the Northern wind tunnel installations, while the armor moved in like a powerful pincers from Pelham to the east and Lynchburg to the west. If the Union strongpoint at Tullahoma could be enveloped, the way lay open to Shelbyville and the north. No natural barrier lay north of Tullahoma until the Duck River was reached.

This was the kind of warfare Beauregard Courtney relished, this wheeling and maneuvering of tanks across country, this artillery barrage followed by infantry assault, the planes used in tactical support. It was more a soldier's warfare than the cold, calculated, long-range bombardment by guided missiles, the lofty, aloof flight of strategic bombers. He would have been happy to live in the days when wars were fought with sword and spear.

When the Second War for Southern Independence (the Northerners called it "The Second Rebellion") had broken out, Beauregard had feared it would be a swift holocaust of hydrogen bombs, followed by a cruel scourge of guerilla fighting. But not one nuclear weapon had exploded, except the atomic artillery of the two opposing forces. A powerful deterrent spelled caution to both North and South.

Sitting afar, watching the divided country with glee, was Soviet Russia. Her armies and navies were mobilized. She waited only for the two halves of the United States to ruin and weaken each other, before her troops would crush the flimsy barriers of western Europe and move into a disorganized America.

So the Second Rebellion (Beauregard found himself using the term because it was shorter) remained a classic war of fighting on the ground and bombing of only industrial and military targets. Both sides, by tacit agreement, left the great superhighways intact, both held their H-bombers under leash, ready to reunite if need be against a greater threat.

Just now the war was going well for the South. At the start, the new Confederacy had held nothing of Tennessee except Chattanooga south of the mountains and the southwestern plains around Memphis. That had been on Beauregard's advice, for he was high in the councils of the Southern military. He had felt it too dangerous to try to hold the lines as far north as Nashville, Knoxville and Paducah until the South mobilized its strength.

He had proved right. The Northern bulge down into Tennessee had been a weak point, and the Southern sympathies of many Tennesseans had hampered their defense. The Army of West Tennessee had driven up along the Mississippi River plains to the Kentucky line and the Army of East Tennessee now stood at the gates of Knoxville. Outflanked by these two threats, the Union forces were pulling back toward Nashville before Beauregard Courtney's Army of Middle Tennessee, and he did not intend to stop his offensive short of the Ohio River.

"Head back for Winchester, Sergeant," he commanded his driver. The man started the staff car and swung it around on the highway.

He should not go to Chattanooga, Beauregard thought as the car bumped southward over the rutted road. His executive officer was perfectly capable of taking care of things for the few hours he would be gone, but it ran against his military training to be away from his command so soon before an attack.

Had the summons come from his wife, Beauregard would have sent her a stern refusal, even had she been in Chattanooga instead of New Orleans. She had been a soldier's wife long enough to know that duty's demands took precedence over

conjugal matters.

But there was a weakness in him where Piquette was concerned. Nor was that all. She knew, as well as Lucy did, the stern requirements of military existence; and she was even less likely than Lucy to ask him to come to her unless the matter was of such overwhelming import as to overshadow what he gained by staying.

Beauregard sighed. He would eat a light supper on the plane and be back in Winchester by midnight. The pre-attack artillery barrage was not scheduled to open before four o'clock in the morning.



The plane put down at the Chattanooga airport at dusk, and a swift military car took him down Riverside Drive, past the old Confederate cemetery, and downtown.

Chattanooga was a military city. Grey-uniformed military police stood at the intersections, and soldiers on rest leave from both East and Middle armies trooped in laughing gangs along darkened Market Street. Few civilians were abroad.

The siren and circled stars on Beauregard's car cleared a path for him through the sparse downtown traffic. The car roared out Broad Street, swung under the viaduct and sped up the curving drives of Lookout Mountain.

At a darkened house on the brow of the mountain, overlooking Georgia and Alabama, the car pulled up. Beauregard spoke a word to the driver, got out and went to the front door. Behind him the car's lights went out, and it crunched quietly into the shadowed driveway.

There was light in the house when Piquette opened the door to him. She held out her hands in welcome, and her smile was as sweet as sunshine on dew-sparkling fields.

Piquette's skin was golden, like autumn leaves, with an undertone of rich bronze. Her dark eyes were liquid and warm, and her hair tumbled to her shoulders, a jet cascade. She was clad in a simple white dress that, in the daring new fashion, bared the full, firm swell of her breasts.

Beauregard took her in his arms, and as her lips clung to his he felt a grey old

man, as grey as his braid-hung uniform. He held her away from him. In the mirror behind her he saw his face, stern, weather-beaten, light-mustached, with startling blue eyes.

"Piquette, what on earth is this folly?" he demanded, kicking the door shut behind him. "Don't you know I'm moving on Tullahoma in the morning?"

"You know I wouldn't call you unless it was important, Gard, as much as I long for you." When she talked, her delicately molded face was as mobile as quicksilver. "I've found something that may end the war and save my people."

"Dammit, Quette, how many times have I told you they are not your people? You're a quadroon. You're three-fourths white, and a lot whiter in your heart than some white women I've seen."

"But I'm one-fourth Negro, and you wouldn't have married me, for that, even if you'd known me before you met your Lucy. Isn't that right, Gard?"

"Look, Quette, just because things are the way they are...."

She hushed him with a finger on his lips.

"The Negroes are my people, and the white people are my people," she said. "If the world were right. I'd be a woman instead of a thing in between, scorned by both. Can't you see that, Gard? You're not like most Southerners."

"I am a Southerner," he answered proudly. "That I love you above my own blood makes no difference. No, I don't hate the black man, as so many Southerners do—and Northerners too, if the truth were known. But, by God, he's not my equal, and I won't have him ruling over whites."

"This is an old argument," she said wearily, "and it isn't why I called you here. I've found a man—or, rather, a man has found me—who can end this war and give my people the place in the world they deserve."

Beauregard raised his bushy eyebrows, but he said nothing. Piquette took him by the hand and led him from the hall into the spacious living room.

A Negro man sat there on the sofa, behind the antique coffee table. He was well-dressed in a civilian suit. His woolly hair was grey and his eyes shone like black diamonds in his wizened face.

"General Courtney, this is Mr. Adjaha," said Piquette.

"From where?" demanded Beauregard warily. Surely Piquette would not have led him into a trap set by Northern spies?

Adjaha arose and inclined his head gravely. He was a short man, rather squarely built. Neither he nor Beauregard offered to shake hands.

"Originally from the Ivory Coast of Africa, sir," said Adjaha in a low, mellow voice. "I have lived in the United States ... in the Confederacy ... since several years before the unfortunate outbreak of war."

Beauregard turned to Piquette.

"I don't see the point of this," he said. "Is this man some relative of yours? What does his being here have to do with this crazy talk of ending the war?"

"If you will excuse me, General," said Adjaha, "I overheard your conversation in the hall and, indeed, Piquette already had informed me of the dissension in your heart. You would be fair to my race in the South, yet you fear that if they had equality under the law they would misuse their superiority in numbers."

Beauregard laughed scornfully.

"See here, old man, if you think I'm ripe to lead a peace and surrender movement in the South, you're wasting your time," he said. "The South is committed to this war, and so be it."

"I ask only that you listen for a brief time to words that may be more fruitful than a few hours in a quadroon's bedroom," said Adjaha patiently. "As I said, I am from the Ivory Coast. When the white man set foot in that part of Africa, he found a great but savage kingdom called Dahomey: the ancestral home of most of the slaves who were brought to the South.

"Before Dahomey there was a civilization whose roots struck back to the age when the Sahara bloomed and was fertile. Before the great civilizations of Egypt, of Sumer and of Crete was the greater civilization of the African black man.

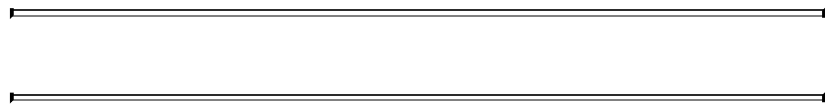
"That civilization had a science that was greater than anything that has arisen since. It was not a science of steel and steam and atoms, but a science of men's minds and men's motives. Its decadent recollections would have been called witchcraft in medieval Europe; they have been known in the West as voodoo and superstition."

"I think you're crazy," said Beauregard candidly. "Quette, have you hired a voodoo man to hex me?"

"Be tolerant, General," admonished Adjaha in his mellow voice. "Many of you in the West are not aware of it, but Africa has been struggling back to

civilization in the Twentieth Century. And, while most of its people have been content to strive toward the young ways of the West, a few of us have sought in our ancestral traditions a path to the old knowledge. Not entirely in vain. Look."

Like a conjuror, he produced from somewhere in his clothing a small carved figure. About six inches high, it was cut from some gleaming black stone in the attenuated form so common to African sculpture. It dangled from Adjaha's fingers on a string and turned slowly, then more swiftly.



As it spun, the light from the chandelier flashed from its planes and curves in a silvery, bewildering pattern. Beauregard felt his eyes drawn to it, into it, his very brain drawn into it.

Beauregard stood there, staring at the twirling image. His eyes were wide open and slightly glazed. Piquette gave a little, frightened cry.

"It's all right, my dear," said Adjaha. "He's just under hypnosis. Your General Beauregard is the key that can unlock the past and the future for us."



There was an insistent command beating against Beauregard's brain: "Go back ... go back ... go back...."

It was a sunny summer morning in Memphis. Beauregard Courtney, Nashville attorney and adjutant general of Tennessee, stepped out of the elevator of the Peabody Hotel and walked across the wide, columned lobby to the newsstand. He did not go by the desk; Beauregard preferred to keep his room key in his pocket when he stayed in a hotel.

He bought a copy of *The Commercial Appeal* and dropped onto one of the sofas nearby to read the headlines. As he had suspected, the story in which he was involved took top play.

SOUTHERN GOVERNORS
GATHER HERE TODAY TO

DISCUSS 'REVOLT.'

It was a three-column head at the right of the page. *The Commercial* wasn't as conservative as it had been when he was a boy, but it still didn't go in for the bold black streamers, he thought approvingly.

He glanced at the other front page headlines: MERIDIAN QUIET UNDER FEDERAL REGIME ... NEHRU BLASTS RACE UNREST IN MISSISSIPPI ... PRESIDENT URGES SOUTH: 'ABIDE BY LAW'....

Beauregard sighed. He was caught up in the vortex of great events.

He arose, folding his paper, and walked toward the stairs leading down to the grill. The governors' meeting was not until eleven o'clock. After breakfast, he would talk with some of the Memphis political leaders and telephone Governor Gentry. He was in a delicate position here, representing a state that did not think exactly as he did.

As he reached the steps, a dark-haired woman, dressed in misty blue for the morning, approached from the elevators. He stepped aside to let her precede him. Then they recognized each other.

"Piquette!" he exclaimed. "I didn't know you were in Memphis."

The quadroon flashed a smile and a sparkle of black eyes at him.

"I knew you were here," she said, gesturing at his newspaper.

He hesitated, uncertain whether she was just countering his own remark or telling him that he was her reason for being here.

"Will you have breakfast with me?" he invited.

"Yes," she answered, and gave him a sidelong glance, "if it's in my room."

He laughed, rich and full-throated. She took his arm and they went back to the elevators together. His heart was lighter now that Piquette was in Memphis with him....

There were eleven Southern governors at the meeting. Governor LeBlanc of Louisiana, like Governor Gentry of Tennessee, had sent a representative in his stead. As representative of the host state, Beauregard opened the meeting, welcomed the visitors and turned over the chairmanship to Governor Dortch of Georgia.

"Gentlemen, there is no point in delaying our principal discussion," said Dortch.

"Within the past week, federal troops have moved into a Mississippi city to enforce the Supreme Court's infamous integration decree. For the first time since Reconstruction Days, hostile soldiers are on the soil of a sovereign Southern state. The question before us is, shall we bow to this invasion of states' rights and continue our hopeless fight in the courts, or shall we join hands in resisting force with force?"

Chubby Governor Marsh of Alabama rose to his feet.

"There wouldn't have been any federal troops if it hadn't been for this extremist segregation organization, the Konfederate Klan," he said heavily. "I belong to a segregationist organization myself: I suppose most of you do, because you got elected. But lynching and rioting and burning homes and schools is no way to resist integration. Mississippi's national guard should have been in Meridian."

"If I'd mobilized the guard, I'd have had a revolt on my hands," said Governor Ahlgren of Mississippi mildly. "Two-thirds of the guardsmen belong to the Klan."

"I'll go along with the majority, of course," said Marsh, "but I think this proposed Pact of Resistance can lead only to full-fledged military occupation of the South."

Almost without willing it, Beauregard arose. Governor Gentry had counselled caution, listening instead of talking, but a fire burned deep in Beauregard. Somehow the laughing face of Piquette as he had last seen her misted his eyes. A powerful urging was on him to beat his breast and cry: "The white man must rule...!"



Beauregard opened his eyes and looked around him dazedly. He was sitting in the parlor of Piquette's house on Lookout Mountain. Piquette leaned against his shoulder, patting his hand, and Adjaha stood before him with hands clasped behind his back. Adjaha looked like a worried dwarf.

"You remember that you relived your participation in the governors' conference in Memphis?" asked Adjaha.

"Yes," said Beauregard, rubbing his forehead. "You black scoundrel! You hypnotized me with that pagan doll!"

"Yes, sir," admitted Adjaha. "It took me a long time to trace the key to this war, and when I found you were that key I knew I could reach you only through Piquette. It was your impassioned speech before the governors that turned the South to war instead of peace."

"Nonsense!" said Beauregard, sitting up straighter. "I just expressed what the majority was thinking. They'd have agreed on the Pact of Resistance even if I had objected."

"The man of destiny sometimes doesn't realize his own influence," said Adjaha drily. "Many factors were concentrated in you that day besides your own native persuasiveness. No, General, your stand swung the governors to the Pact of Resistance. Announcement of that pact spurred the Konfederate Klansmen to massacre the federal troops at Meridian. That brought the federal proclamation placing Mississippi under martial law and the subsequent mobilization and revolt of the South."

"Perhaps so," conceded Beauregard wearily. "Perhaps I did wrong in not following Governor Gentry's instructions and keeping my mouth shut. But I spoke my convictions, and it's too late now."

"That is not necessarily true, General," said Adjaha. "Time is a dimension, and it is as easy to move east as it is to move west. A better simile: one can move upward as well as downward, but the presence of gravitation makes special skills necessary."

Beauregard shook his head.

"A good theory, but good only as a theory," he said. "If it were more than that, the law of cause and effect would be abrogated."

"No, it works both ways. The present can influence the past as much as it influences the future, or as much as the past influenced it. Thus, through the past, the present can influence itself."

"In my native land, the Ivory Coast of Africa, we believe in fan-shaped destiny, General. At every instant where a choice is made, a man may take one of many paths. And those who had the old knowledge of my people could retrace their steps when the wrong path was taken, and choose another path."

"But I can't," said Beauregard. "If I could, I don't know anything that could have changed what I said and did that day in Memphis."

"Tell me, General, how long had Piquette been your mistress before the

Memphis Conference?" asked Adjaha.

"About three years," answered Beauregard, too puzzled at this change of tack to be offended.

"Even if you were a psychologist instead of a general, it would be difficult for you to probe the motivation of your own heart," said the Negro. "Piquette was your reason for voting for war, instead of peace!"

Beauregard sprang to his feet angrily.

"Look, damn you, don't feed me your voodoo doubletalk!" he thundered. "If it were Piquette alone I had to consider, don't you think I'd have advocated equality for the black race?"

It was Piquette's voice that sobered him, like a dash of cold water.

"And yet you try to tell me I'm not a Negro, Gard," she said quietly.

The anger drained from him. He slumped back to the sofa.

"Ah, yes, the perversity of a man whose mind and heart are at odds!" exclaimed Adjaha softly. "You love Piquette, yet your pride tells you that you should not love a woman with Negro blood in her veins. For that you must be aggressive, you must prove the moral code taught you as a child was not wrong.

"You went to the Memphis Conference with Piquette's kisses still sweet on your lips, and because of that your conscience demanded that you stand forth as a champion of the white man's superiority."

"So be it, then, you black Freudian," retorted Beauregard cynically, an angry gleam in his blue eyes. "The die was cast two years ago."

"The die shall be recast," said Adjaha firmly. "Piquette must not have gone to Memphis. She must not have been your mistress before you went to Memphis."

With this, he walked swiftly from the room. Beauregard looked at Piquette, his eyes half amused, half doubtful. She smiled at him.

"What he does is out of our hands," she said. "It's still early, Gard."

He took her in his arms.



Governor Beauregard Courtney of Tennessee sat in the tall chair behind the

governor's desk and twiddled a paperweight given him, if his recollection was accurate, by the Nashville Rotary Club. His wife, Lucy, a handsome woman whose dark brown hair was just beginning to grey, stood by the door with an armload of packages.

"Beauregard, the people moving into that vacant house down on Franklin Road are Negroes," she said indignantly. "I want you to do something about it. The very idea! That close to the mansion!"

"They aren't Negroes," he said patiently. "They're my secretary and her mother. My secretary is a quadroon and her mother's a mulatto. It's convenient to have them live so close, in case I need to do some weekend work at home."

"A quadroon!" Lucy's eyes widened. "Which of your secretaries is a quadroon?"

"Piquette. And don't tell me I shouldn't have employed her. The Negro vote is important in this state, and if I'd hired a full-blooded Negro a lot of the white vote would turn against me."

"Well, I never! You've become more and more of an integrationist ever since you got into politics, Beauregard."

"Maybe I've gained some wisdom and understanding," he replied. "That is not to say I'm an 'integrationist.' I'm still doing my best to get it done slowly and cautiously. But the only way the South could have resisted it was by open revolt, which would have been suicide. And I must say the Southern fears have not been realized, so far."

Lucy sniffed.

"I have to speak at a woman's club meeting tonight," she said, opening the door. "Are you going home now?"

"No, Sergeant Parker will drive you home and come back for me. I'm going to eat downtown and clean up some work in the office tonight."

She left, and Beauregard leaned back in his chair thoughtfully, having just told his wife a lie.

They had no children to be affected by it, but Lucy would never become reconciled to integration. She blamed him for his part in turning the Memphis Governors Conference away from the proposed Pact of Resistance five years ago.

Beauregard had had his doubts about speaking out against resisting the federal

government with the threat of force. Now he thought he had done right: war would have been terrible, and the South could not have won such a war. And it was his statesmanship at that conference, and Governor Gentry's lavish praise of it, that had set him up to succeed Gentry as governor.

Beauregard sighed peacefully. He had done right and the world was better for it.

The door opened, and Piquette's golden, black-eyed face peeked around it.

"It's four-thirty, Governor," she said. "Will you want me for anything else?"

"Not just now," he said, smiling.

She smiled back.

"Room 832," she said in a voice that was hardly more than a whisper. Then she was gone.

Beauregard's blood quickened, but he was disturbed. This that he was going to do was not right. But what other course would a normal man take, when his wife was so estranged that she had become nothing more than a front for the married happiness the people demanded of their governor, a figure-head who lived in another wing of the mansion?

He had met Piquette eight years before, briefly, when he was a staid, climbing Nashville lawyer. Not knowing she was of mixed blood then, he had been drawn to her strongly. He had thought her drawn also to him, but for some reason their paths parted and he had not seen her again until after his election to the governorship.

She had been among a group of applicants for state jobs, and Beauregard had happened to be visiting the personnel office the day she came in. He employed her in the governor's office at once. She was a good secretary.

Nothing untoward had passed between them in that year she had worked as his secretary. In nothing either of them said or did could any members of his staff have detected an incorrect attitude. But there were invitations of the eyes, caresses of the voice ... and a week ago their hands had touched, and clung, and he had found she was willing....

Beauregard heaved himself to his feet with a sigh. Briefly, he felt sorry for Lucy. He would eat supper downtown tonight, but it would be in Room 832.



Beauregard awoke slowly, with a hand shaking his shoulder. Reluctantly he abandoned a dream in which the South had remained at peace and he was governor of his state.

Piquette's flower-like face hovered over him in the dimness. She rested on one elbow in the big bed beside him and shook his shoulder.

"Gard!" she said urgently. "Wake up! It's after midnight."

"Oh, damn!" he groaned, rolling out of the warm covers. "And the Northerners will attack today if my intelligence service hasn't gone completely haywire."

"Get dressed," she said, dropping her bare feet to the floor and smoothing her nightgown over her knees. "I'll fix you some coffee."

He pulled on his uniform, the Confederate grey with the stars glittering on the shoulders, while she plugged in the hotplate and started the coffee. Outside, the eastern sky was streaked with dim light, against which the sleeping houses of Winchester thrust up stark silhouettes.

She sat across the little table from him, a flowered robe drawn around her, while he sipped his coffee and thrust the last wisps of dreams from his head.

"Quette," he said, "I want you to pack and get out of here. Before daylight, if you can get ready. Head south, for Birmingham. I'll send a staff car around for you as soon as I get to headquarters."

"I don't want to leave you, Gard," she objected.

"You've got to, Quette. We can't hold these Federals. We're in a bulge here, and the only reason they haven't cracked us out yet is Chattanooga holding our right flank."

He kissed her goodbye, a long kiss, and strode down the street to the Franklin County courthouse, where he had set up headquarters for the Army of Middle Tennessee when the Union troops had forced them out of Nashville. The place was a beehive of activity.

The eastern sky glowed red over the Cumberlands and the artillery was thundering in the north when General Beauregard Courtney rode out toward the front. He had his driver park the staff car on a slight rise overlooking his troop formations.

The war was going badly for the South, and Beauregard unhappily took much of the responsibility on himself. Perhaps he had been wrong in making that

impassioned speech at the Governors Conference in Memphis which, he was sure, had swung the weight of opinion in favor of the Pact of Resistance. Certainly he had been wrong in recommending a farflung northern battle line, at the start of the war, which stretched from Paducah, Kentucky, north of Nashville to Knoxville, with its eastern anchor on the Cumberlands.

It had been his idea that a defensive line so far north would give the South more time to mobilize behind it, would hold the rich industries of Tennessee for the South, and would give the South a jumping off place for a strike across the Ohio River. But the North had mobilized faster, and Northern armies had crunched down through the Southern defenses like paper.

Now all West Tennessee and a segment of Mississippi was in Federal hands. The Southern defense in East Tennessee had been forced back to the mountains around Chattanooga. And his own troops had fallen back from stand after stand after the Battle of Nashville. Even now, Federal armour was reported to have crossed the Tennessee River and be heading south-eastward toward Columbia and Lewisburg.

He hoped Piquette had left Winchester by now. Perhaps he should not have kept his quadroom mistress with him through the constant danger of defeat, but with Lucy way down in New Orleans....

As the morning wore on, the guns thundered below him and the tanks rumbled across the Tullahoma plain, spouting fire. Several times his sergeant urged him to withdraw, out of danger, and return to headquarters, but he stayed. He wanted to direct this battle personally, giving his orders over the car radio.

A great pall of smoke hung over the battlefield. Then the attack came, wave after wave of blue-clad infantry, pouring down from the north. Tanks and planes supported them, and atomic artillery shells burst in the Southern trenches. The grey lines began to crumble.

"Colonel, throw in the 112th and the armored reserve, and let's try to get an orderly withdrawal to the Alabama line," Beauregard ordered into his microphone. He turned to his driver. "Sergeant, I think you're right. We'd better get out of here."

The staff car swung around and headed back toward Winchester over the bumpy highway. As it left the rise, Beauregard swore fervently and reached for the microphone. From the west came a great cloud of dust and a mass of rumbling tanks. The Federals had broken through the left flank at Lynchburg.

Jet planes streaked overhead from the north, flying low. The flash of exploding bombs and rockets was visible in Winchester, ahead of them.

Speaking swiftly into the microphone, Beauregard glanced out of the car's back window.

"Sergeant!" he yelled. "Strafers!"

The driver twisted the wheel so quickly Beauregard was thrown against the door. The speeding car leaped a ditch and bounced into the fields.

Out the window, Beauregard saw the jet swooping down at them like a hawk. It was a speck in the sky, and almost instantly it was on them in a terrifying rush.

He saw the flare of the rockets leaving the plane's wings, he felt the shock of a thunderous explosion, and the blackness engulfed him.



Beauregard opened his eyes painfully. His head ached, and his left arm hurt horribly.

He was lying on a rumpled bed in his torn uniform. Piquette and a wizened, very black Negro man were standing beside the bed, looking down at him anxiously. He recognized that he was in the house in Winchester, in the room where he had spent last night ... or was it last night?

"Quette!" he croaked, trying to sit up. He couldn't make it, and he gasped at the pain in his arm. "I thought I told you to leave Winchester."

"I didn't want to leave you, Gard," she answered softly. "And it's lucky I didn't. Some men on an ammunition truck found your car. Your driver was killed and your arm blown half off. They brought you here."

"Dammit," he complained, "why didn't they take me to the base hospital?"

"Because the base hospital took a direct hit from a bomb."

That startled Beauregard into the realization that there was no sound of firing, no crash of bombs, outside. There were men's shouts and the normal sounds of a town occupied by the military. Had the Union forces been repulsed by some miracle?

"Well, for Pete's sake, call the medics and get me to a field hospital," he ordered. "And you head south for Birmingham, like I told you to."

"Gard," she said soberly, "I thought it ought to be your decision, and not mine. If we call the medics, they'll be Federal troops. Winchester was captured hours ago, and it's just chance that they haven't entered this house and found you before now."

Beauregard lay silent, stunned. The strange man beside the bed spoke for the first time.

"It is not his decision," he said. "There is work that I must do which may be delayed forever if he is captured."

"This is Adjaha, a friend of mine," said Piquette. "He came to Winchester to see you. He thinks he knows a way to end the war."

"Poppycock!" snorted Beauregard weakly.

"General Courtney," said Adjaha intensely, "you spent last night with Piquette. Where did you spend the night? Here or in Chattanooga?"

Beauregard opened his mouth to say, "Here, of course." Then he stopped. Suddenly a vision, almost a memory, rose up before him and he could not be sure. There was a chandelier, and a black voodoo charm....

"You do remember some of it!" exclaimed Adjaha delightedly.

"It seems that I dreamed the South was winning, and I was going to drive on Tullahoma, and I went to Chattanooga to see Piquette," said Beauregard slowly. "But it's mixed up in my mind with another dream, in which there was no war at all, and I was elected governor...."

"Those were not dreams," said Adjaha. "They happened and yet they did not happen."

"I remember you in a dream," said Beauregard faintly, "and words about 'fan-shaped destiny'...."

"You have to understand this or I can do nothing," said Adjaha hurriedly. "The South was doing well, although it could not have won in the end. You were preparing to advance on Tullahoma, and you did go to Chattanooga last night to see Piquette. This happened.

"But it didn't happen, because I utilized the ancient knowledge of my people, involving dimensions beyond time, to change the factors that led to it. Decisions of different people were influenced differently at a dozen points in the past so that Piquette did not become your mistress before you went to Memphis, and

your own emotional attitude was changed just enough to steer you on a different course.

"Then the other things you call a dream happened instead. There was peace instead of war."

"Then how is it that we actually have war and defeat?" demanded Beauregard, his voice a little stronger.

"Piquette," said Adjaha gravely. "You found her again, and she became your mistress after you were governor."

"But I remember that now!" exclaimed Beauregard. "That's three years in the future ... and there was no war."

"It is difficult to understand, but the future can change the present," said Adjaha. "General Courtney, even more than I realized at first you are the 'man of destiny,' the key to war or peace in the South, and Piquette is the key to your own emotions.

"Try to comprehend this: *you cannot love Piquette in a South that is at peace!* The whole social fabric in which you were nurtured demands of you that a woman of Negro blood cannot be your paramour unless she is socially recognized as an inferior and, in a very real sense, not your co-equal lover but the servant of your pleasure. When Piquette became your mistress, even five years after the decisive moment of the Memphis Conference, the entire framework of time and events was distorted and thrown back into a sequence in which the South was at war. This time, unfortunately for you, a slightly different time-path was taken and the South does not fare so well."

"Then you've failed, and things are worse than they were if you hadn't interfered," said Beauregard.

"No, I must try again," said Adjaha. "Piquette's mother must never have brought her to Nashville as a child, so there will be no chance of your ever meeting her at all."

There was a thunderous knocking at the front door. Federal troops who were investing the town at last had reached this house. Adjaha gave Beauregard one sympathetic look from his dark eyes, and slipped quietly from the room, toward the rear of the house.

The knocking sounded again. Beauregard lay in a semi-daze, his blood-encrusted left arm an agony to him. Through the haze over his mind intruded a

premonition that bit more deeply than the physical pain: Never to know Piquette?

He clutched her hand to his breast.

"Quette," he whimpered.

"Be still, darling. I won't leave you," she soothed him as a mother soothes her child. Her cool hand caressed his cheek.



United States Senator Beauregard Courtney of Tennessee crossed Canal Street cautiously and plunged into the French Quarter of New Orleans with a swift, military stride.

He had always urged Lucy that they take a trip to New Orleans, but she always had demurred; she said the city reminded her of war and trouble, somehow. Now he had been invited to be the principal speaker at the annual banquet of the Louisiana Bar Association tonight. He had welcomed the opportunity to make the trip, without Lucy.

It had been ten years since his voice at the Memphis conference had swung the South away from war and onto the path of peace. His statesmanship on that occasion had brought him great honour. He had served a four-year term as governor of his state and, on leaving that office, had been advanced to the U. S. Senate. His light-coloured hair and mustache were beginning to grey slightly.

Lucy had been a good wife to him, even though there had been that near-estrangement when he was so busy as governor. Perhaps she still did not agree with him entirely on his acceptance of the fact of racial integration without bitter resistance, but she was more tolerant now of his sincerity than she had been once. He was sorry she was not here: she would have enjoyed the Old World atmosphere through which he walked.

Beauregard moved up fabled Bourbon Street, past Galatoire's and the Absinthe House. He stared with interest at the intricate ironwork of the balconies that overhung the narrow sidewalk, at the bright flowers that peered over the stone walls of gardens, at the blank wooden doors flush with the sidewalk.

How far, he wondered, was he from Rampart Street, where the Creoles had kept their beautiful quadroon mistresses in one-story white houses in days long gone?

He knew nothing of the *Vieux Carre*, and had no map.

As he penetrated more deeply into the French Quarter, he began to pass the barred gates that stopped the dim corridors leading back to ancient courtyards. These fascinated him, and he tried several of the gates, only to find them locked.

He never knew later, studying the map, whether the street he had just crossed was Toulouse, St. Peter or Orleans, when he came upon one of those gates that stood ajar.

Beauregard did not hesitate. He pushed it open and paced eagerly down the shadowed corridor until he emerged into the sunlit courtyard.

There was a stone statue, grey and cracked with age, in the midst of a circular pool in the center of the courtyard. Flower-lined walks surrounded it. The doors that opened into the courtyard were shadowed by balconies, on which there were other doors, and to which steep flights of stairs climbed.

On a bench beside the pool sat a woman in a simple print dress. Her skin was tawny gold and her hair was black and tumbled about her shoulders. Her eyes were black and deep, too, when she raised them in surprise to the intruder. She was beautiful, with a poignant, wistful beauty.

"I'm sorry," said Beauregard. "The gate was open, and I was curious."

"Mrs. Mills forgot to lock the gate," she said, smiling at him. "All of us who live here have our keys and are supposed to lock the gate when we go out. But Mrs. Mills forgets."

"I'll leave," he said, not moving.

"No, stay," she said. "You're a visitor to town, aren't you? There's no reason why you can't see a French Quarter courtyard, if you wish."

Beauregard moved closer to her.

"I'm Beauregard Courtney," he said. For some reason, he omitted the "Senator."

"Gard," she said in a low voice, her big eyes fixed on his face. "Gard Courtney."

Somewhere in the deep recesses of his mind, faint memory stirred. Was it the memory of a dream?

"Have I dreamed that we met before?" he asked slowly. "Piquette?"

"You know!" she exclaimed, her face lighting gloriously. "I didn't dream alone!"

"No," he said. "No. You didn't dream alone. Your name is Piquette, isn't it? I

don't know why I said that. It seemed right."

"It is right."

"And you live here?"

"Up there," she said, and pointed to one of the doors that looked out on the balcony.

Beauregard looked up at the balcony and the door, and he knew, as though he had prevision, that before he left the courtyard he would go through that door with Piquette.

He took her hands in his.

"I'll never let you leave me," he murmured.



General Beauregard Courtney sat under the open-sided tent that was his field headquarters and stretched long legs under the flimsy table. He gazed morosely out toward Tullahoma in the north, where the trenches stretched endlessly from east to west and only an occasional artillery shell broke the quiet of the battlefield.

Stalemate.

"I thought trench warfare went out with World War I," he growled to his executive officer.

"No, sir. Apparently not, sir," replied Colonel Smithson correctly, not interrupting his preparation of tomorrow's orders.

Stalemate. The Northern armies and the Southern armies had collided with great carnage on that battlefield. Fighting had swayed back and forth for weeks, and at last had settled down to a stubborn holding action by both sides.

That had been months ago. Now trenches and fortifications and tank traps extended across southern Tennessee from the Cumberland to the Mississippi. Occasional offensives came to naught. Only the planes of both sides swept daily over the lines, bombarding the rear areas, reducing the cities of Tennessee to rubble.

Beauregard toyed with a pencil and listened idly to the news over the little radio at his elbow. It was a Nashville station, and Nashville was held by the North, but

he had learned how to discount the news from the battlefield.

"... And our planes destroyed thirteen Rebel tanks and an ammunition depot in a mission near Lexington," the announcer was saying. "A gunboat duel in the Mississippi River near Dyersburg was broken off after severe casualties were inflicted on the Rebel crew. Our armored troops have advanced farther into the Texas Panhandle.

"Wait. There's a flash coming in...."

There was a momentary pause. Beauregard bent his ear to the radio. Colonel Smithson looked up, listening.

"My God!" cried the announcer in a shaky voice. "This flash ... a hydrogen bomb has exploded in New York City!"

Beauregard surged to his feet, upsetting the table. The radio crashed to the ground. The other men in the tent were standing, aghast.

"It isn't ours!" cried Beauregard, his face grey. "It's a Russian bomb! It must be...!"

The voice on the fallen radio was shouting, excited, almost hysterical.

"... The heart of the city wiped out.... Number of dead not estimated yet, but known to be high.... Great fires raging.... Radioactive fallout spreading over New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania....

"Here's a bulletin: the President accuses the Rebel government of violating the pact not to use large nuclear weapons. Retaliatory action has already been initiated....

"Here's another flash: Detroit and Chicago have been H-bombed! My God, has the world gone mad? There's a report, unconfirmed, that the Detroit bombers came from the *north*...."

"They can't believe we did it!" muttered Beauregard. All the men in the tent, irrespective of rank, were clustered around the radio. No one thought to pick it up from the ground.

A staff car drove in from the south and rocked to a stop in front of the headquarters tent. Beauregard hardly noticed it until Piquette got out, followed by a slight, grey-haired Negro man in civilian clothes.

Beauregard strode out of the tent. The car radio was on loud, and the same announcer was babbling over it.

"Quette, what are you doing out here?" he demanded.

"Gard, this is Adjaha, a friend of mine," she said hurriedly. "I couldn't wait for you to come back to town tonight. I had to get him out to see you before it was too late."

"Dammit, it is too late," he growled. "It's too late for anything. Haven't you been listening to that damn radio?"

"This is extremely important, General," said Adjaha in a mellow voice. "If I may impose on you, I'd like to talk with you for a short while."

Beauregard frowned and glanced at Piquette. She nodded slightly, and her face was anxious.

"I suppose I have plenty of time to talk," he said heavily. "We can do nothing but sit here with useless armies while the country tears itself apart. Sergeant, turn that damn car radio off and go bring some chairs out here. You can listen to the radio in the tent."

They sat, the three of them, and Adjaha talked. Beauregard listened skeptically, almost incredulously, but something within him—not quite a memory, but an insistent familiarity—caused him to listen. He did not believe, but he suspended disbelief.

"So you see, General," concluded Adjaha, "there is some drive within you and Piquette—call it fate, if you wish—that draws you together. When it was arranged that she did not become your mistress before the Memphis Conference, she did after you became governor. When it was arranged that her parents did not move to Nashville with her, you were drawn to New Orleans to meet her. Apparently you must meet if there is any possibility that you meet, and when you meet you love each other.

"And, though you can't remember it, General—for it didn't happen, even though it did—I explained to you once, on this very day, that you cannot love Piquette in an unrebllious and peaceful South."

"If we were fated to meet, I'm happy," said Beauregard, taking Piquette's hand. "If these fantastic things you say were true, I still would never consent to not having met Piquette."

"But you must see that it's right, Gard!" exclaimed Piquette, surprisingly.

"Quette! How can you say that? Would you be happy if we were never to know each other?"

She looked at him, and there were tears in her eyes.

"Yes, Gard," she said in a low voice, "because ... well, Adjaha can see a little of the future, too. And on every alternate path he sees.... Gard, if the South is at war, you'll be killed before the war ends!"

"We can't take any chances this time, General," said Adjaha. "Should events be thrown back into a path that leads to war again, this time you might be killed before I could reach you. Piquette's parents must never have met. *She must never have been born!*"

Suddenly, Beauregard believed. This quiet little black man could do what he said.

"I won't permit it!" he roared, starting to his feet. "Damn the South! Damn the world! Piquette is mine!"

But Adjaha, moving like lightning, was in the staff car. Its motor roared, it swung in a cloud of dust and accelerated toward the south.

"Sergeant! Colonel! Get that stolen staff car!" Beauregard bellowed. He whipped out his service pistol and fired two futile shots after the diminishing vehicle.

The general's staff boiled out of the tent. They milled around a minute, shouting questions, before piling into two command cars and giving chase to the disappearing staff car.

Beauregard glowered after them. Then he took Piquette's hand and they walked together into the empty tent.

"... Here's a late flash," said the radio on the ground. "Birmingham has been H-bombed. Our planes are in the air against the Rebels...."

Beauregard imagined the ground trembled. Instinctively he looked toward the south for the radioactive mushroom cloud. Then he swung back to Piquette.

"Quette, he can't do it," said Beauregard. "He's a voodoo fraud."

She looked at him with great, dark eyes. Her lips trembled.

"Gard," she whispered like a frightened child. "Gard, aren't there other worlds than this one...?"

She crept into his arms.



Colonel Beauregard Courtney sat on the terrace of his home in the suburbs of Nashville and enjoyed the warmth of the sun on his grey head. The steady hum of automobiles on the superhighway half a mile away was a droning background to the songs of birds in the trees of his big back yard.

The "Colonel" was an honorary title bestowed on him by the governor, for Beauregard never had worn a uniform. He had been Governor Gentry's representative at the fateful Memphis Conference forty years ago, he had been governor of his state, he had been United States senator from Tennessee, he had been chief justice of the state supreme court. Now he preferred to think of himself as Beauregard Courtney, attorney, retired.

Where was Lucy? Probably sitting in front of the television screen, nodding, not seeing a bit of the program. She should be out here in this glorious sunshine.

Beauregard's gardener, a wizened little Negro man, came around the corner of the house.

"Adjaha, you black scoundrel, why don't you die?" demanded Beauregard affectionately. "You must be twenty years older than I am."

"Fully that, Colonel," agreed Adjaha with a smile that wrinkled his entire face. "But I'm waiting for you to die first. I'm here to keep watch over you, you know."

He picked up the hoe and went around the house.

Curious thing about Adjaha. Beauregard never had understood why an able, well-educated man like Adjaha, in a free and successfully integrated society, would be content to spend his whole life as gardener for Beauregard Courtney.

Beauregard leaned back comfortably in his lawn chair and thrummed his thin fingers on its wooden arm. Absently he whistled a tune, and presently became aware that he was whistling it.

It was a haunting little melody, from long ago. He didn't know the words, only one phrase; and he didn't know whether that was the title or some words from the song itself, that song of old New Orleans: "... *my pretty quadroon*...."

"Piquette," he thought, and wondered why that name came to mind.

Piquette. A pretty name. Perhaps a name for a pretty quadroon. But why had that particular name come to mind?

He never had known a woman named Piquette.

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