

Indivisible Excerpt

Abner Bellamy stood silently in front of his favorite monument in St. Louis. It might be his favorite monument in all the world. It stood in Forest Park, a huge urban park that dwarfed Central Park in New York. The monument was off the beaten path. Not quite hidden, but not in the center of anything. There was nothing about its setting that would draw attention to it. Abner noted that it was majestic nonetheless. It was a twenty-foot granite column with a bronze relief of a Southern family offering its only son to the Confederate cause. On the back of the column was an inscription in large block letters that he had long ago committed to memory:

TO THE MEMORY
OF THE
SOLDIERS AND SAILORS
OF THE SOUTHERN CONFEDERACY,
WHO FOUGHT TO UPHOLD
THE RIGHT DECLARED BY
THE PEN OF JEFFERSON
AND ACHIEVED BY THE
SWORD OF WASHINGTON,
WITH SUBLIME SELF SACRIFICE
THEY
BATTLED TO PRESERVE
THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE STATES
WHICH WAS WON FROM
GREAT BRITAIN,
AND
TO PERPETUATE THE
CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT
WHICH WAS ESTABLISHED BY THE
FATHERS.
ACTUATED BY THE PUREST
PATRIOTISM
THEY PERFORMED DEEDS
OF PROWESS SUCH AS
THRILLED THE HEART OF
MANKIND WITH ADMIRATION.
"FULL IN THE FRONT OF WAR THEY STOOD."
AND DISPLAYED COURAGE
SO SUPERB
THAT IT GAVE A NEW AND
BRIGHTER LUSTRE TO THE
ANNALS OF VALOR.
HISTORY
CONTAINS NO CHRONICLE
MORE ILLUSTRIOUS THAN
THE STORY OF THEIR
ACHIEVEMENT,
AND ALTHOUGH
WORN OUT IN
CEASELESS CONFLICT
AND
OVERWHELMED BY NUMBERS,
THEY WERE FINALLY
FORCED TO YIELD.
THEIR GLORY ON BRIGHTEST PAGES
PENNED BY POETS AND BY SAGES
SHALL GO SOUNDING DOWN THE AGES

For Abner, this was more than an inscription commemorating a past event; it was at once a prayer, a summons, a call to action. It was also an indictment, a declaration that something was amiss, something that no one was acknowledging much less addressing--something no one was taking care of. In the hundred and fifty plus years since the War Between the States, the cause has languished. No hero, no movement; not even talk. The Unionists had enshrined their interpretation of power into the legal system like a cancer, disemboweling the very heart of the constitution as the Founding Fathers had envisioned it. A union of free, sovereign, and independent States. That's what they signed on for. That's what they lost in the War Between the States.

Abner thought about his great, great, great grandfather, Abraham Bellamy. The story was never far away during his upbringing: about how Abraham left Georgia to fight the war; how he lived through many, many violent engagements; and how heart-broken he was when Lee's army was forced to surrender. Some of his relatives said it killed him. Others just looked away. Abner figured there was more to his death than the adults

were willing to tell the children. Nonetheless, they were as proud of him as a family could be. He stood for their values. He died for them.

Abner came to this monument as if to a sacred burial ground before every important event which touched upon his mission to resurrect the cause. Tonight he was meeting with a group of men he had painstakingly assembled over the previous ten years to address this singular problem. The monument was his touchstone; it reminded him of a mission he never forgot for a single second. It gave him strength. It connected him to those who had gone before him.

The event this evening was critical. He felt his heart pound in his chest for pride at what he and Providence had accomplished so far. Tonight was the first meeting of the entire group in one place. Abner thought it apt that the group was meeting in St. Louis, technically a Union State but one full of Southern sympathy. It was Abner's job to do what Robert E. Lee with his mighty and devoted army could not do: to reassert the rights of the States that made up the United States, to reassert the right to self-determination on which this government was based. To restore the federal government to its proper place. And in the process to put an end to the status quo, where the needs of the people were ignored because of imperial politics.

Abner looked around. The park was lovely as it always was, and there were a few cyclists and joggers about a hundred feet away. Chances were they didn't notice this monument, he thought. He turned and walked slowly back to his car.

It was in St. Louis that Abner first conceived his plan. Missouri was a divided State during the Civil War. It was officially Union but also allowed slaves. It was claimed by the Confederacy but never formally seceded. There were battles here between the opposing factions. The St. Louis Police Department had its Board split, with control residing not in City Hall but at the Missouri State Capital a hundred miles away. This arrangement was still in force right up to the present.

Just like this country, Abner thought. Nothing settled; everything up for grabs. So why not re-establish the United States the way it was originally? The way it was supposed to be. He got worked up when he thought this way, and, in the midst of these thoughts, he picked up his cell phone and speed dialed a familiar number. He wanted to calm himself down.

"Hi, darlin'," he said in his native but rarely used Southern drawl. Abner had studied at Yale, and his most comfortable accent was at least Northeastern American, the kind that was closest to highbrow British. But he was talking to his girlfriend, a native of Georgia.

"Hi, Sweetie," Judith drawled back. "Been missing you."

"You'd better be missin' me," Abner said. Just talking to Judith aroused him, and arousal quelled his excitement. "You know what tonight means to me, honey," he said softly. "You've been really important to me in all this." Abner paused. "I couldn't have done it without you. I'll be by soon. I'll make this all worthwhile."

"You'd better," Judith teased. She didn't mind his being away. She and Abner had been together for a number of years, but their relationship was anything but conventional. They shared a deep and enduring devotion to a cause they had both nurtured for years. In addition, Judith was genuinely fond of Abner, but he was a demanding man, devouring all her attention when they were together. His visits were usually short, and she prized her time alone. She found in Abner Bellamy a man who fit her desires for herself perfectly. There when she needed him. Otherwise, they lived apart, even in different cities. When he was with her, he was attentive, intelligent, and just plain fun. When he was away, she got to rest, work, and do whatever else she wanted. The issue of marriage never came up. Not once in the years the couple had been dating.

That was okay for Abner too. As smitten as he had always been with Judith, a beautiful and sexy a woman as she was, he preferred that their connection be a real one and not one dictated by marriage or any other institution. He adored her. He loved being with her whatever they were doing. But he had been down the

marriage route, and he was sure it wasn't for him. Even though he was still technically married, he couldn't be happier with Judith and her independent ways.

"See you soon," he whispered into the phone. He clicked off.

Abner got into his car and started driving across town. He passed the architecture that had become so familiar to him and that he appreciated probably more than the local inhabitants of this classic Midwestern city. The stately homes along Forest Park, the older buildings east on Lindell. In the distance he saw the famous Gateway Arch looming against the skyline. Funky monument, but Abner liked it. He liked almost everything American. Except the federal government.

He was headed to the location of tonight's meeting of the twenty-two men he had selected, groomed, and prepared for the special mission he had conceived. He was a couple hours early, but Abner valued nothing so much as being prepared. He headed downtown to Preservation Hall, an old building on the Near South Side that offered all the privacy and anonymity he required. It was a great find.

As he drove, he thought of the first days of his plan. He was living in St. Louis at the time. Bill Clinton had just been elected president, and Abner was enraged. He saw the man from Hope as a traitor to the Confederate cause, a pseudo-Yankee turncoat who was smooth-talking and smart but who otherwise had a high tolerance for even more federal government. It was during that fit of outrage that he found himself wandering around the city, driving aimlessly, then walking, then driving again. He found himself at the foot of the monument he had revisited today, and it was at that moment that he thought: Why not?

Why not resurrect the Confederate ideal? Why not resume the war? Just because the Confederacy lost did not mean its cause was not just. Plus, he knew the election of Bill Clinton spelled trouble for the country. He also knew that it would not be enough to work hard in the mid-term elections to deprive the Democratic president of a majority in Congress. Even if that effort succeeded, as it did a couple years afterwards, the problems of the federal government were just too deep.

But he also recognized in those days that something was fundamentally wrong with American politics. It was too big, too expensive, too imperial. He ran across a prescient quote by Robert E. Lee that said it all: The consolidation of the States into one vast empire, sure to be aggressive abroad and despotic at home, will be the certain precursor of ruin which has overwhelmed all that preceded it.

It was then that the idea began to take shape in his mind: maybe he could pick up this long-defunct cause. He began looking around. He was amazed at what he found: a huge amount of discontent with the federal government, groups in a dozen states that labeled themselves 'secessionist', sympathetic listeners behind almost every door on which he knocked. He was astonished that so many people felt the way he did.

He found something else. People were tired of the status quo. The federal government was all but run by big companies that paid millions in lobbying fees to buy whatever policies they wanted from the legislature. Elections that were mostly fractious, fact-avoiding quarrels that had more in common with a junior high brawl than any reasoned discussion of the issues. People were so polarized politically that major elections hung on the whims of a tiny sliver of the populations, the so-called 'independents' who were just uncommitted hard-to-get players. It was a sickening charade of civic process.

Abner believed, on the other hand, that local government could not afford the hyped-up extravagances of the federal system. The closer government got to the actual people it represented, the more effective it was. Each state was in a better position to decide for itself what it wanted and needed.

He was circumspect in those early days. Circumspection came naturally to him, fastidious as he was. But as he continued to investigate the cause of the Confederacy, he began to realize that the flame had not died, that many people both in the Old South and even in the newer, Western States had ideas about forming their own countries. One conversation stood out especially in his mind. He was talking to Senator Donald Colby from

Idaho. They were sipping whiskey in the veranda of this man's country estate, which covered several hundred acres of beautiful grass and woodlands. Senator Colby was nobody's fool; not the type to shoot off his mouth. Abner and Colby had been talking about American history. Abner thought he saw an opening.

"Senator Colby," he said somewhat gingerly. "You were born in the South—Mississippi, wasn't it? What do you think of the Confederate ideal?"

Colby didn't even flinch. He looked at Abner straight in the eye and replied: "It was the authentic ideal of America," he said. "It was what the States had signed up for." He took a sip from his glass, thought for a minute, and then went on. "Prior to the Civil War," he said, "nearly every State assumed that it was sovereign. The name, The United States, was plural: The United States are. Even when they saw some early court decisions go the other way. That John Marshall—he was responsible for the America we see now. The Union version. But it was never meant to be that. It was meant to be more a confederacy than a federation. More a group of equal partners rather than a bossy central government and subservient states. The role of the government was to provide a forum and to facilitate compromise and reconciliation among the sovereign States. It has specific purposes: a common currency, a common defense." He took another sip of whiskey. "Now the States are just regional administrative bodies. More like provinces than States. Now, the 'United States' is singular: The United States is." He gazed over the lush landscape. "Damn shame, if you ask me." He looked over at Abner.

Abner was speechless. He might have expected this kind of talk from some drawling Southern politicians at the end of a night of drinking, but not from a sitting US Senator. And Donald Colby was not an ordinary Senator. He was born in Mississippi, but he was educated at Yale, as Abner was, and was a Rhodes Scholar. He served in several important government agencies in high-profile jobs before getting himself elected to the Senate from Mississippi. When he moved out to Idaho, most people thought he was taking early retirement. But the sedentary life never appealed to Colby, and it took him just a couple years to jump into the fray of Idahoan politics. He emerged once again a Senator, now from Idaho. He was in his third term. Tall, lean, silver-haired, and ramrod straight in his mid-seventies, Senator Donald Colby was a force to be reckoned with on the Senate floor. But he was also a man who didn't really give a hoot about ideology and was always available to work either side of the aisle for something he believed in. An unusual political specimen, especially in those days.

Abner did not respond to Colby that day. He gently shifted the conversation toward more general things: how well the South was doing, the beauty of the landscape where the pair was sitting. But Colby's thoughts stoked the fire within his belly to do something, something powerful, effective, and historic. To dismantle the current structure, to reassert the power of the States. To bring America back to what it was supposed to be. To reestablish a Confederacy of Southern States. This was a role he relished taking on. He wasn't quite clear yet, but he felt the first powerful stirrings of destiny.