

## SEXUAL STEALING

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# SEXUAL STEALING

BY

WENDY WALKER



TEMPORARY CULTURE

Sexual Stealing  
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by Daniel Levin Becker  
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## often pastoral    often breathing

Read *Sexual Stealing* as you would a novel. Not the one from which its words have been excised, but a narrative of its own trajectory and ambience. A comedy of manners, a domestic drama, an escape caper, a revenge fantasy, a barely allegorical allegory. Above all, a ghost story: one whose ghosts are historical but also textual, because in a sense what's the difference.

Or watch it as you would a movie. Let its elliptical evocations flicker past at the pace it chooses for you, in the place it superimposes on you. The pastoral plantation setting and the quiet undercurrent of cruelty and menace coexisting, alternating, from the first minute to the last, still jockeying as the credits roll.

Or listen to it as you would a song cycle, a musical, an opera on a broken radio. *Hamilton* (Oneohtrix Point Never remix). The voices disembodied but distinct, swaths of primary-source gallantry and atrocity mixed in wholesale alongside a libretto in a language of which you understand one word in every dozen. Learn to chant the absence.

Or enter it as you would a childhood home, not necessarily yours but probably yours. A mansion fallen into majestic disrepair. Tiptoe over the floorboards that creak anyway, leave fingerprints in the fine layer of dust coating the peeling wallpaper, the brittle heirlooms and fussy antique fixtures, the chapter titles doubling as captions under the daguerreotypes on the wall.

Or visit it as you would a monument, now dilapidated, to some deathless struggle that seemed pretty much dead at the time of erection. Marvel at how much of its carefully hewn form has been hacked and redacted away: by time, by subjectivity, by whitewashing and forgetfulness. Drop a flower, trace the names that remain.

Or join it as you would an insurgency. Take up the struggle, the revolt. Erase the master text, and with it the very notion of mastery, until it is almost literally decimated. And remember that the systematic erasure that created this monument, this home, this opera, this movie, this novel, is still a system — that systems can be as arbitrary, as brutal, as people, as masters, as history. Remember that erosion is erasure is evolution.

— Daniel Levin Becker



# SEXUAL STEALING



## PART ONE



George Robertson, "A View in the island of Jamaica, of the Spring-head of Roaring River on the estate of William Beckford Esqr.," engraving. London, 1778.

# I

## AN IMAGINARY PLANTATION ON A VERY REAL ISLAND

banks of the plantations  
whose forms gleamed  
sometimes tremendous  
flocks herds and distance

the margin floated  
pastoral portrait  
delineated corrected  
benevolence scenes

literature of deficiency  
intrigues honor  
a death amiable or necessary  
sold to felicity  
treasures attached  
delight intrusted  
obliterated circumstances  
shade character  
waves    remembered  
disengaged wishes



*Chaine des Noirs venant de l'interieur.*  
Anonymous, "Mandingo Slave Traders and Coffle," Senegal, 1780s. From *L'Afrique, ou histoire, mœurs, usages et coutumes des africains: le Sénégal* by René Claude Geoffroy de Villeneuve, 1814.

2

PASTIMES OF  
THE PLANTER ARISTOCRAT

little basket of scenes  
abstract sauntering enthusiast  
of bosom  
of repast  
of rocks adjoining room  
books exercised taste  
building beauty  
a fabric remembered  
building taste  
conspicuous in manners  
made windows  
and palm-trees  
enriched modern grove  
towards caught landscape  
precipices scarce  
among feast pursuits





*A Surinam Planter in his Morning Dress.*

"A Surinam Planter in His Morning Dress," an engraving by William Blake from a drawing by John Gabriel Stedman for his *Narrative, of a Five Years Expedition against the revolted Negroes of Surinam*, 1796.

At night Mr. Cope came. Slept here, had Little Mimer; but suspect he has the clap . . .

In the evening, *Cum* Little Mimer, a Creole, *Sup. Lect. In meo domo* parlour . . .

Lent Mr. Parkinson the Oeconomy of Love, a poem (said to be wrote by Armstrong, a Scotsman). Mr. Parkinson praises Tom Jones, said to be wrote by Fielding, Joseph Andrews, by Fielding's sister . . .

— Thomas Thistlewood, *Diary*, May 1759

The climate of figure  
adjusted to chateau  
was excellent story  
was tasteful  
yet  
sacrificed prospect  
that wept  
a plantation



palm-trees  
a river  
fine setting-sun  
distant gray children  
ever simplicity  
tumultuous heart experienced  
nothing moral  
blessing  
favourite hour   dark hour  
often pastoral   often breathing



William Berryman, "La Duchesse," Jamaica c. 1806

## 3

## HIS FAVORITE SLAVE

uncommon benevolence advanced her object  
 congenial penetration dangerous to self-command  
 he instructed passions  
 with obliged indifference  
 occasioned her eyes  
 awakened her  
 “eye contagious”  
 her sciences  
 her might  
 early inclination against ever escape thinking  
 gratifications necessary  
 indolence beautiful  
 dissipation interest  
 was it

This morning Old Tom Williams called, and made his observations as usual; he once killed a Negro girl of his own that had got looseness, stopping her A – with a corn-stick. And one of the girls cleaning the hall when he thought it did not much want it he shit in it and told her there was something for her to clean. Frequently at home wears nothing but a shirt, and fans himself with the forelap before his daughter, &c. &c.

Thomas Thistlewood, *Diary*, Thursday, March 19, 1752

wild silence  
impressed scenes faded  
were woods of circumstances  
her little glen  
wound screened    eye shattered  
by emerging vine-covered



Gabriel Bien-Aimé, b. 1951, Croix des Bouquets,  
Haiti, Untitled, c.1990.

dusk of accents  
from trembled excursions

sonnet to go  
steps *all ah!* sweet  
light'ning portrait  
*all ah!*  
conceal away!

lines to being  
          compelled  
painful  
she to presume  
away thoughts  
          exercise  
          indisposition fever  
          a recovery advanced  
          air provisions  
                  no torturing

As Sally steals everything left in the cookroom, and eats it if eatable, Phibbah had her tied with her hands behind her naked for the mosquitoes to bite her tonight. She bawled out lustily, but before 9 o'clock in the evening broke loose and ran away. I got up, and all hands went to seek her. I caught her near the Rockholes, in ditto provision ground. Her hands were tied up so tight that the string hurt her very much. Brought her home and secured her for this night in the bilboes.

About 9 in the evening, *Cum Sally (mea) Sup. Terr.* in Rockhole provision ground.

— Thomas Thistlewood, *Diary*, Tuesday, August 7, 1770.





## 4

# TACKING BETWEEN MASTER AND MISTRESS

botanizing gratitude gave Monsieur pleasure  
confinement conceptions of every shade  
the sensible romantic  
with daughter degree  
could himself forbear secretly  
regret    useless  
to surprised instrument  
to temper  
her silence    her person  
timidity of whether

she entered faltering  
to Madame her wherefore  
only apprehensions  
faint wainscot tremour  
now added doubt  
Monsieur of palm-trees  
of delicacy    much detained  
          sails of unpleasing alas!  
                  ever recollected

long loss    her resemblance  
really became absence  
informed    unreasonable  
          music  
                  disappearance

Set all the blackies to scrape and clean all round the house, the lawn, &c. Treated them with beef and punch, and never was there a happier set of people than they appear to be. All day they have been singing odd songs, only interrupted by peals of laughter; and indeed I must say, they have reason to be content, for they have many comforts and enjoyments. I only wish the poor Irish were half as well off. Had a visit and a good long conversation with Mr. Ward today.

— *Lady Nugent's Journal of Her Residence in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805*, January 23, 1802.



## 5

### A LADY FROM EUROPE

same Monsieur    readily  
expressed contempt  
concealed resentment  
restrained resentment  
understood his heiress  
woman determined not to display intelligence  
listened for latter  
permitted ostentation  
a negotiating of class  
importance    not opinions  
nor what Madame could    describing banquet  
honour  
with minuteness  
fancy heightened to happiness

The carriages were sent to Port Henderson for some Navy men. We had twenty at breakfast and at dinner, in addition to our party. — Much talk about peace; some pleased, some the reverse. I am of the contented party; and went to dress in great spirits for the grand ball, given me to-night by the Council, &c.: put on my smartest dress, with a gold tiara, and white feathers, and made myself look as magnificent as I could. At 8, was received at the entrance of the House of Records by the Members of Council, some of the Assembly, and some military. Was conducted to a sort of throne, covered with pink silk and draperies festooned with flowers. The decorations of the room were beautiful, and the supper was superb: one dish I shall never forget; it was a roasted peacock, placed before me, with all the feathers of the tail stuck in, and spread so naturally, that I expected every minute to see him strut out of the dish. Danced myself almost to death, to please both civil and military, Army and Navy, and stayed till 1 o'clock.

— *Lady Nugent's Journal of Her Residence in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805*, November 25, 1801.

*I sigh for the politics  
or I exist  
where conscious  
I know improvements  
I bring enquiry  
should I number servants people  
accommodated  
improved  
since living at chateau*

*sir apropos  
some possession improvements  
I hear mentioned  
difficulty  
of deferred hope*

In the morning a carpenter, from Spanish Town, applied to General N. to respite a slave, sentenced to be hanged to-morrow. The law of the land is, it seems, that three magistrates may condemn a slave to death. This case was, that two slaves, one, an old offender, the other, a boy of sixteen, robbed a man of his watch, &c. The old man shewed the boy how to get in at the window, and gave him all his instructions, while he remained on the outside, and received the things stolen. The old man has been condemned to hard labour, and the boy to be hanged. General N. made every exertion, but in vain, to save the life of the boy, and send him out of the country; but it appears that it could not be done, without exercising his prerogative very far, and giving great offense and alarm to the white population. — This law of the three magistrates appears to me abominable, but I am too little versed in such matters to do more than feel for the poor sufferer.

— *Lady Nugent's Journal of Her Residence in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805*, January 10, 1802.

cut the should side  
hollow enthusiasm



# 6

## LESSONS FOR MARRIAGE

favour manner    disposed   proper  
think dispute presumptuous  
never appear dismal  
hide intensity   before entering family  
more prohibitions  
mistook for consideration

family approaching  
prepared to induce affliction  
restrain affliction occasion first

distant complacency  
their memory hastily afraid  
resembled old children  
affecting emotions  
                    of sanctioned admiration  
                    of conscious arrival  
                            sufficiently departure

little cattle with vista

