

3. Where *Utopia* Ends

The evening wore on. The fire crackled gently. Neither man spoke for a long moment. At length, Alderman Johnson tilted his goblet round and round, letting the ruby-tinted light play across his eyes. Then he set it on the table with a deliberate hand.

"I have been considering, Sir Thomas," he began slowly, "considering that conundrum."

"Eh? What conundrum is that?"

"Why, what you have said earlier: if Sandys is such a clever soul, why does he do such foolish things? And if he is such a fool, then how can he be so clever?" Johnson picked up the glass again, as though to drink, but set it down without touching his lips and an abruptly different tone he asked, "have you heard of Bacon's new essay?"

"What's that? replied Sir Thomas, confused by the change of tone as of subject. "Bacon?" he repeated. "Fine fellow of course: very helpful when we drafted the charter; excellent scientific studies, too, I hear. Even Harvey admires his work, though he detests his style. But as for his Bacon's natural philosophy, well that has never been my *forte*, I fear."

"Yes, well, I'm not speaking of his natural philosophy, but rather the more *unnatural* kind: the flight of fancy that Bacon is working on now."

"Oh, that! Yes, I heard it mentioned some time back. *Novus Somethingus*, or the like, is it not?"

Johnson nodded. "Indeed: *Novus Atlantis*. Not terribly original, perhaps. If he ever finishes it, it will be merely another *Utopia*, though not so amusing as the first. It's rather *less* than, uh...More, you might say." He grinned.

"*Utopia!*" muttered Smythe, ignoring the wit. "Another *Utopia!*" he muttered. "One is more than enough, I should think." He shook his head. "I cannot understand it, Johnson. Men dream of women, which is normal enough; and the dear Lord knows what women dream of -- but certainly not of men! Why would any sensible woman waste her sleep dreaming of the beast that slumbers and snores beside her? I hope my Sarah does not! But who dreams of heaven on Earth? What kind of man does that, I ask you? No one up to any good, for no sooner than Jack spies his Paradise, but he finds John blocking his view. So Jack pushes John down, of course, so he can gaze on his heaven *totus solus*. But since John doesn't like it, he pushes Jack back. And then it's all just a matter of who pushes more -- or less, as you say! Look what that fool Calvin did to Geneva! Hmph! Heaven on earth is a hell all to itself! No, Johnson, Heaven is best left just where the good Lord put it, so near to our reach, yet beyond our grasp!"

Johnson smiled momentarily, then hesitated, as though summoning courage. "I agree with you, Sir Thomas, but I don't think Sandys does." He looked his father-in-law in the eye.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I will tell you," replied Johnson. "But before I start, pray let me lay it out 'in one fell swoop' as they say. Otherwise I may never dare say it at all."

Smythe's curiosity was piqued. "Speak then, as to the sphinx himself," he said, and lay a finger over his lips.

"Yes, then," said Johnson, draining his wine. "Now, Sandys thinks to build his New Atlantis, his own *Utopia*, if you will, on the banks of the Chesapeake. You know that. Yet he will not stop there. Consider the facts. He has been active in the Company since its early days and was the chief opponent of the royal monopolies --"

"So says he!" exclaimed Sir Thomas, unable to stop himself. "But no one loves monopoly as much as Sir Edwin Sandys, as long as it is *his* monopoly!"

"As you say. But there is worse. He has not scrupled to defraud the original Company investors -- the term is not too harsh! -- with this new-fangled system of private ventures where he grants land to newcomers who plant in Virginia without them paying anything towards for use of the Fort or the quays that our investors have carved out of raw wilderness over a dozen years. His favored friends build on the eighty thousand pounds the Company's investors have put in -- yet he ensures *them* a current profit on their newly invested, private funds."

Johnson was speaking easily now. This was what he understood: ventures, funds, returns. "*Idem*: he maneuvered for months, nay, I believe for years! to replace you as Treasurer, currying favor with the small holders, the one-share men who count even with you in the balloting box."

"That is true!" exploded Sir Thomas in anger. "But it was not just his sweet words and games that persuaded me to give up the post. I had sworn to see the Virginia Company through until it found its way, and we are nearly there, now that Rolfe's new leaf is winning markets and--." Sir Thomas remembered his promise of silence and stopped. "A sphinx, I am. A sphinx!" he cried, and folded his hands on his lap.

Johnson continued speaking as though there had been no interruption. "Now consider our new Assembly in Virginia. He claims credit for it himself, even though it was you who proposed it and --"

"Well of course we had to put an end Argall governing Virginia like a petty tyrant and -- Sir Thomas caught himself and fumbled for his glass.

"Of course. But for Sandys, the new Assembly is about much, much more than stopping Argall's depredations. He plans to make the Assembly his own private Parliament, reporting to him as Treasurer -- putting himself in place of the Crown!"

It was Johnson's voice that was rising now. He was talking as much to himself as to Smythe. "Still more: see how desperately he works to people his new *Utopia*. Last year he even bought five score children from the City --"

"Oh, that! Just more of his foolishness, Johnson, and I've gotten too old to argue with every foolish idea and the older I grow the more of them I hear. They often sprout in France, you know, then take root and flourish here!" He shook his head and sighed. "As for those rather useless orphans from last year, it's true I let Sandys take the reins more and more since I was soon to step down. So yes, I let him have his way with the children. Once he got the City to put in five hundred pounds, he had a hundred scoundrels rounded up and off they went. But they were *orphans*, Johnson, or so he told us. And as I said, the City provided the children, not the Company. And they were not *bought*."

"Last year, perhaps. But Sandys' vision is too great now for mere orphans and his needs are too great for niceties. The Lord Mayor signed an order not a fortnight ago directing the Aldermen to assemble one hundred

children more to ship this winter – and there was no mention of orphans.” He paused to take a sip.

“Go on.”

“I have Lord Mayor Cockaine’s order here.” Johnson took a paper from a leather folio at his feet and handed it to Smythe. “He has ordered the arrest of any young vagrants, at least twelve or older, boys and girls both. The roundup has already begun. Sandys is so pleased he plans to take the scheme to the ports next year, buying up children in Bristol, Southampton, Plymouth. There are even rumors from Somerset that men have gone about buying maids for a shilling apiece to add to the shipment. And Sir Thomas” -- here Johnson paused -- “that is not all. The constables are telling the poor on parish relief to give up a child for Virginia, or else to be cut off. It’s that paragraph towards the end,” he added, pointing to the document. “There where it ends *“they shall receive no further relief from the parish in which they inhabit.”*”

Smythe squinted; then scowled; and an awkward silence followed. When he spoke, his voice was soft and sober. “So, London’s poor must choose between starving or offering up an Isaac for Sir Edwin Sandys’ altar? We did not do such a thing last year, Robert. There were no such threats to the families last year. They were either orphans and wandering vagrants, or were willingly sent by their families, or so Sandys told me...but I left a great many things to him last year, more perhaps than I should....”

But his voice rose indignantly again. “And even so, it never made any sense to send children! The Company needs *skilled* men who can ply a dozen trades a thousand leagues from all the civil parts of the world – not ignorant starving children, no matter badly the City wishes to be rid of ‘em!!”

"Even so," replied Johnson, "he's not done with the idea. I've heard that as soon as Dean Donne returned from Europe and enjoys the King's favor, he's taken to badgering him to preach in favor of sending the children."

"More foolishness and more!" exclaimed Sir Thomas. "What does the good preacher know of what Virginia needs or how much it costs to furnish, ship and feed a new settler? He ought to keep to his preaching and his poems, instead!"

"Indeed," replied the Alderman. "But it's not only children. Sandys is so desperate to find a thousand souls to ship this year that he's negotiating for a shipload or two of Frenchmen! Not Papists, to be sure, but foreigners still; hundreds of them, who he'll settle among our own people. And still more! he wants Brewster to begin peopling the northern reaches with true Dissenters – Separatists! – near traitors to the Crown who've been skulking about in Holland for ten years or more! And you know that they do not look overkindly at any king...."

"The northern reaches, you say? How *far* north, Johnson? With all the questions hanging over Popham's charter for a northern company, by what right can the Virginia Company build a northern plantation at all?"

"By what right?" It was Johnson's turn to be indignant. "Lawyerly details will not deter Sandys. Once men have planted in Northern Virginia, who will expel them?"

Johnson stood up abruptly, and began pacing nervously before the fire. "Now we come to the nub. It is not to trade for furs with the savages or to mine ore that Sandys will plant Separatists and Puritans in Northern Virginia. Don't you see? He will not send them to build Bacon's *Novus Atlantis* – but to build Brewster's *New Jerusalem*! They will draw others whose only purpose is to

reform the Reform. They will not rest until they have rebuilt a new Church of England that is as pure as their prayers, as barren as their hearts, and London as cheerless as Geneva! *That* is why he sends men to buy maidens to ship to Virginia to breed him new subjects! He intends nothing less than rebuilding Christendom in his own image!

"And who will rule this new realm? Sir Edwin Sandys, who despises the old England that gave him life, and yearns for a new and better England that will do his bidding! And when all this is done a generation or even two hence, he or his disciples will arise in the Commons and say, 'See what we have done? Go now and do likewise!' And the commoners will listen and follow and have done with crown and scepter! *That* is what Sir Edwin Sandys thinks and dreams and schemes, whether he admits it even to himself or not. Yet *that* is what he uses the Company for: not to earn a return but for a headlong rush to build his new world on the flesh and blood of other men's very lives!" Johnson stopped, shocked by the enormity of his own accusation.

"It is beyond treason," whispered Smythe, "it...it is revolution; it means war, even --"

He stopped abruptly when the door behind them opened and a servant entered without a word. He eyed the fire and quickly chose two or three short pieces of pine, hardly larger than kindling, to stoke a pretty flame, then placed goodly oak atop. The flames embraced the pine and cheerily lapped at the oak.

"Thank you, Edmond," said Smythe, trying to speak in his usual voice. "Uh, we won't need you any further this evening; you may retire."

While the servant left as quietly as he had entered, his mere appearance – unassuming as it was – had somehow left a conspiratorial scent lingering in the air.

“Treason and revolution, it is, Sir Thomas,” whispered Johnson, when the door had closed. “Revolution above the slightest reproach: treason in plain view; revolution by order of the King, under a charter bearing the Privy Council’s seal; treason sown today to be known tomorrow; treason to be wrought by his children and grandchildren – against ours. Revolution, and even war, will come before your grandchildren grow old.”