CHAPTER 1

In 1860, two brothers found themselves in an argument that seemed to have no end and no common ground. Growing up in a small town in North Carolina, Henry and his younger brother, Will, had been inseparable best friends, but now there was a bitterness between them, and it grew worse as they argued throughout the long, hot summer.

"How can you dare go back to New York in the fall?" Will demanded. "With the way things are, you should be ashamed."

"*Ashamed*?" Henry cried angrily. "I'm a cadet at West Point, learning to serve my country. I'd hardly call that shameful."

Will just shook his head. "What you call your country is not what I'd call *my* country. You know as well as I do that the government and Northerners want to force their rules and

laws on us down here and destroy the way we live. If you want to serve anything, you should serve your home. Doesn't where you come from mean anything to you?"

"You just don't understand it, do you?" Henry fired back, his voice getting louder. "We all live in one country. The states are not separate countries! That's the way it is, and that's the way it's going to stay."

"Maybe not. Everyone in town says that if Abe Lincoln gets elected President, the South will form its own country and its own government," Will countered. "We'll leave the United States altogether."

"Not without one hell of a fight you won't," Henry shouted. "And I don't need to tell you which side I'll be on."

Will folded his arms and glared at his brother. "Well then, I reckon I'll see you on the battlefield—on the opposite side."

Henry just turned and walked away. As angry as he was, he was mostly sad. He and Will had had their share of fights over the years, but nothing that couldn't be worked out in some way. Making matters worse, their father sided with Will. Just that morning, he had looked at Henry and sternly ordered him to remain in North Carolina and stand by his family, his home, and the South.

"No sir," Henry had said quietly. "I have to do

what I feel is right. I won't fight against my own country if that's what it comes to."

"Then you're not the son I thought you were," his father said, his voice trembling. With that, he had left the room, slamming the door behind him.

Now, Will called out to Henry, demanding a response to another argument. But Henry just kept walking. He didn't feel like fighting anymore with the brother he loved. And he didn't want Will to see the tears in his eyes.

How had it gotten to this point of brothers fighting brothers? Barely eighty years earlier, Americans had struggled together in the Revolutionary War, fighting for their freedom from British rule. United in vision and direction, Americans had named themselves "the United States." Now, just a few generations later, Americans were bitterly divided within the country, within states, and even within families. Many people in the South did not think of themselves as being part of a united country.

The troubles and disagreements that led to the Civil War were many. It is difficult to say that one specific thing caused the war. Northern states were richer, more populated, and more advanced in industry. This made Southerners both a little envious and a little worried. Furthermore, many people in the South felt that each individual state

should be allowed to make its own laws and not be bound to what the federal government decided. Because Washington, D.C., the nation's capital, was in the North, Southerners began to suspect that Northerners, or "Yankees," were becoming too powerful. Many worried that it was only a matter of time until the North would take over the South.

But the longest-fought issue and the one that most strongly divided people was the issue of slavery.

"I think we must get rid of slavery, or we must get rid of freedom," declared the famous writer Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Many Americans—even some in the South—agreed with Emerson. But those who disagreed, disagreed bitterly.

"It is our constitutional right to own slaves!" Southern slaveholders argued. And they were right. When the Constitution had been written in 1787, most Southern states had refused to agree to it unless slavery was protected. At the time, it didn't seem like such a big deal. After all, even Thomas Jefferson owned hundreds of slaves. And Americans had been bringing slaves over from Africa since 1620—why change now? Finally, the founding fathers decided to let the issue of slavery slide. They pointed out that there weren't that many slaves in the South anyway. Aside from seasonal work on a handful of rice, indigo, and tobacco farms, there really wasn't a great need for slaves.

Then, barely seven years after the Constitution was approved and signed, that all changed.

A young inventor from Massachusetts named Eli Whitney visited the South and noticed that while cotton seemed easy to grow, few farmers planted it. There was always a tremendously bigger demand for cotton than the South could supply. The problem, Whitney discovered, was in the cotton itself. Dozens of little seeds filled each cotton ball, and removing them was a slow and difficult process.

Eli Whitney instantly saw dollar signs. If he could invent a machine that removed the seeds, both he and Southern farmers would become incredibly rich. In two weeks, Whitney had drawn up a design. Within the year, the cotton engine, or cotton "gin," had become a reality.

To say that the cotton gin made Southern farmers rich is an understatement. Suddenly, cotton production skyrocketed. Instead of taking days to clean the cotton, it took only hours. Farmers greatly increased their acreage and became known as "planters." And their simple farmhouses were transformed into magnificent plantations with tall white columns and unending luxuries.

However, the prosperity of the planters created suffering for the slaves. Cotton was a plant that required a lot of attention as it grew and a lot of work to harvest. As a result, the slave trade from Africa tripled and then quadrupled. Throughout

the South, the slave population grew from 700,000 in 1790 to 4,000,000 in 1860. One out of every three people living in the South was a slave. And as the demand for cotton continued to increase, slaves were forced to work harder and harder.

At the same time, the slave population in the North had steadily grown smaller. With the invention of new machinery in the factories, less manual labor was needed, and so slaves were often allowed to buy their freedom. Some Northern slave owners simply freed their slaves and then hired them for low-paying positions. In any event, the absence of slavery in the North drew attention to how cruel and out-of-control the institution of slavery had become in the South.

Sharpening this focus were the horrifying stories told by runaway slaves who escaped from the plantations to states north of the Mason-Dixon Line (the line that separated slave states from free states). Not all slave owners were unkind, but some starved, beat, and even raped their slaves.

“You don’t do your task, Master will wave that whip, put you over a barrel, and beat you so blood run down,” a slave from South Carolina grimly explained.

“Master told me I was his property,” a fifteen-year-old slave girl related. “Said I must be subject to his will in all things. *All* things. He was a vile, disgusting monster.”

The life of a slave involved backbreaking work from sunup to sundown. It was an existence of fear and ongoing heartache. Because slaves were bought and sold like livestock, families were often separated. It was not unusual for a child to be snatched from the arms of his or her mother if the buyer didn't want a "full set" of slaves. Most slaves were housed in cabins that were little more than flimsy stables with dirt floors. Meals consisted of coarse corn meal and pork fat.

"Was no fruit or anything else, even though there be fields of fruit trees and vegetables surrounding Master's house," an elderly escaped slave from Virginia reported. "We dare not steal the fruit. We seen what happens. Master done hang a young boy by the neck from the very tree where he took an apple."

In their misery, many slaves expressed the desire to be dead rather than to continue being a slave. Sadly, this wish often came true soon enough. In 1850, the life expectancy of a black man in some parts of the South was only twenty-nine years.

As Southern slaveholders tried to defend their right to buy and sell human beings, the voices of the abolitionists (those who wanted to abolish, or do away with, slavery) grew louder. Those who supported slavery claimed that they were actually doing the slaves a favor by taking them away from the "wicked and savage" land of Africa.

"They are fed, given homes, and taught the Bible," was the standard response. "They're better off here than where they are from. They should be thankful to their masters!"

This line of thinking made Abraham Lincoln exceptionally angry. "Whenever I hear anyone arguing for slavery, I feel a strong impulse to see it tried on him personally," Lincoln once commented.

In the North, many agreed with Lincoln. Abolitionists believed that black people deserved to be treated with the same fairness that any American citizen expected. But then, in 1857, the Supreme Court ruled that neither slaves nor descendants of slaves could be United States citizens. Furthermore, it was ruled that the federal government could not prohibit slavery in U.S. territories, such as Kansas and Nebraska. Instead, settlers in those territories could decide for themselves whether or not to allow slavery.

The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, a former slave owner from Maryland, argued that these new laws simply followed the Constitution.

"It must be followed now as it was written then," he proclaimed. "Until the point at which it is amended, the Constitution and its laws cannot be changed."

This was true, but it made abolitionists furious.

"Slavery, throughout its entire existence in the United States is none other than the most

barbarous, unprovoked, and unjustifiable war of one portion of its citizens upon another portion. It is in utter disregard and violation of those eternal and self-evident truths set forth in our Declaration of Independence."

These were the angry words of John Brown, a wild-eyed and radical abolitionist from Connecticut. Brown was tired of talk and laws and red tape. He wanted change, and he was willing to kill for it. Along with several of his older sons (he had a lot of children), Brown rushed to Kansas, where there had already been so much fighting between pro-slavery and anti-slavery groups that Kansas had been nicknamed "Bloody Kansas." Without warning, Brown and his sons burst into the homes of five unarmed pro-slavery men and slaughtered them with knives and swords.

Then, in 1859, Brown and a group of his followers, called "raiders," took over a United States weapons arsenal in the town of Harper's Ferry in Virginia, a slave state. Brown's plan was to give the guns and ammunition to slaves, who would, in turn, murder their masters. Brown believed that once enough slaves were armed, slave owners throughout the South would be so terrorized that they would be happy to free their slaves.

It didn't turn out quite that way.

Brown and his men managed to raid the arsenal, but the slaves were reluctant to fight against

their masters. Not one slave would take a gun. As Brown and his raiders tried to figure out what to do next, angry townspeople surrounded the arsenal and began throwing bricks at Brown and his men. Brown attempted to run free, but was trapped by the crowd. Convicted of treason and murder, Brown was ultimately led to the gallows to be hanged.

Just before his execution he handed a guard a piece of paper on which he had written this message: “The crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood!”

It was his prediction of war, and now he was not alone in the belief that only war could ease the growing tension in the United States. Most Northerners and abolitionists had not approved of Brown’s violent approach. Abolitionists were generally peaceful and thoughtful individuals who just wanted to see all people treated fairly. Even so, they understood John Brown’s anger, and some even pointed to him as a hero who had made the ultimate sacrifice.

On the other hand, Southerners pointed to Brown and said, “Look! This is what everyone up North wants to do! They plan to murder us, go against the Constitution, and force us to give up our slaves.” Bloody skirmishes flared more often in border states (the five slave states that bordered free states but remained loyal to the United States: Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, and West

Virginia). Families took sides against one another. And a Southern congressman, Preston Brooks, became so furious with an anti-slavery Northern senator, Charles Sumner, that he beat him senseless with his cane right in the middle of the Senate floor.

"I wore my cane out completely," Brooks announced proudly. "But I saved the gold handle." Merchants in South Carolina applauded their senator's actions and bought him a new cane. Inscribed in the wood of the cane were these words: "Hit him again."

By mid-1860, the tension between the North and the South was nearing a breaking point. Talk of leaving the Union (the combined states of the United States) began rumbling in the South. Many people could sense the edge of war creeping nearer and nearer.

"We knew it was just a matter of time," said a farmer from Alabama. "Me and my boys were ready. Just didn't know what would set it off."

What finally "set it off" was the election of the United States' sixteenth President, Abraham Lincoln. Many Southerners believed that Lincoln was dead set on immediately freeing all slaves and turning the South into an extension of the North. Some envisioned swarms of Yankees rushing down to destroy plantations and replace them with factories, all with Lincoln's blessing.

In reality, nothing could have been further from the truth. Lincoln believed slavery was wrong, and he was against allowing it to spread to new states. Still, he understood Southerners' worries. He realized that suddenly abolishing slavery would destroy the South's economy. Lincoln cared deeply about the United States as a whole; he had no greater love for the North than he did for the South. He wasn't about to do anything drastic.

"Wrong as we think slavery is," he had said while campaigning, "we can yet afford to let it alone where it is."

Southerners, however, were not convinced. If the President thought slavery was wrong, he would find a way, eventually, to get rid of it altogether. Then, many agreed, the South would fall to ruin. In the presidential election, Lincoln did not receive a majority of votes in any Southern state. Although he narrowly won the election, it was the first time an American President had been elected without any support from the South. Lincoln knew what that meant.

"Well, boys, your troubles are over now," Lincoln wryly said to weary reporters who had been covering the election nonstop, "but mine have just begun."

Within weeks and even before Lincoln was inaugurated, South Carolina responded by seceding, or breaking away, from the Union. South Carolina

was followed by six other states: Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas. These states banded together and formed a new country that they named the Confederate States of America (also called "the Confederacy"). Before long, they would be joined by Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina.

Two years earlier, Lincoln had been speaking about slavery when he had said:

"'A house divided against itself cannot stand.' I believe this government cannot endure, permanently, half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other."

But now people in the South had taken matters into their own hands and divided the "house" in a very real way. They had, in fact, dissolved the Union by creating their own country.

In Washington, D.C., the newly elected President was reported to have put his head in his hands when he received the news. Days later, he stood on the Capitol steps in front of thousands and delivered his inaugural address.

"Plainly, the central idea of secession is the essence of anarchy," he said sternly of the South's decision to secede. "No State, upon its own mere motion, can lawfully get out of the Union. . . . They can only do so against the law, and by revolution."

At the same time, Lincoln attempted to reach out to the South. “We must not be enemies,” he pleaded.

But the South was concerned neither about breaking the laws of a country it had rejected nor about being friends with that “other” country. And even as Lincoln spoke in Washington, Confederate troops were forming in Charleston, South Carolina. The revolution was about to begin.