



The Man With The Silver Tongue

Will Gibson

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In my novel THE MAN WITH THE SILVER TONGUE, when only seven years old, Luther Carruthers braved the alligator-infested waters with his parents so they could join the Seminole Indians in the Florida swamps, where as runaway slaves they would be safe. And Luther and his family ended up living as Indians. It was 1794. The Seminoles hated slavery and helped runaway Negroes whenever they could. The Seminoles called Luther “the boy with the silver tongue” because of all the languages he could speak, including most of the Indian languages. When sixteen Luther went to work as an interpreter for a grizzled old English trader named Cap Adams who needed Luther to interpret for him when dealing with the Spaniards. Although Luther liked working for Old Cap and learned much from him, he always worried when the two of them traveled outside of Seminole country. For Old Cap had warned him of how strange white men sometimes walk up to Negroes traveling alone and claim them as their property, charging them with being runaway slaves. “Many free Negroes end up in slavery that way,” Old Cap told him. One day in a case of mistaken identity, Luther wound up being pursued by a white plantation owner named Hector Smote, who was sure Luther was his runaway slave named Ben. He unsuccessfully tracked Luther for years, even hiring professional bounty hunters. Years later a bounty hunter captured Luther and brought him back to the Smote farm. As the bounty hunter was about to leave, he advised Hector, “By the way, that nigger of yours is very rich. He owns most of the Town of Lutherville. You should talk to your lawyer to see if under the law all that property is legally yours. I don’t think slaves can own property, but I’m not a lawyer.” “I don’t give a damn what he owns,” Hector Smote cursed, “I don’t want anything that black bastard has. I just wanted Ben back here where he belongs.” The bounty hunter eyed Smote warily; for now he was sure he was dealing with a madman, even thinking twice about taking his money. Hector Smote held Luther in bondage for most of the rest of Luther’s life in a relationship that puzzled even Luther. Then the truly unbelievable happened.

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