

# Tally's Nook

A Novel

by

Dorothy K. Morris

Cover photos taken from the Diorama of Colonial Shipbuilding, by Harold Hahn, now displayed in The Mariner's Museum, and used by permission of the museum in Newport News, VA.

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**TALLY'S NOOK** is a sequel to **DIRTY RICE**. Both are in the **MOCKINGBIRD HILL** Series, which includes, in order of publication:

1999: **SECRET SINS OF THE MOTHERS**

(available only at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com))

2004: **COYOTES OF CREEK CROSSING**

2006: **THE EIGHTH EVIL**

2009: **THE TIME IN BETWEEN**

2012: **DIRTY RICE**

All of these novels, although works of fiction, are written with a serious attempt to give a bit of history and insight into how it might have been in the early days on the Low-Country coast of South Carolina for its early settlers. Even though each is a standalone book, I have been told by readers that reading them in order of publication is the most pleasant way to the best experience of the series. Those who did not read them in order, always say they wish they had done so.

They are available at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) or [Virtualbookworm.com](http://Virtualbookworm.com)

## THANKS

My gratitude goes to my daughter Desiree Johnson and to my dear friend, Diane Hagan for being my manuscript readers. Also my thanks to Lou Garard for suggesting a name for one of my characters and to Carol Curry for my continued use of the names of two of her horses in my books.

My thanks to Virtualbookworm.com, Bobby Bernshausen and his staff, who do a great job and are a pleasure to work with.

**Additionally I can think of no better dedication than to dedicate this book to all my readers who encourage me to "write another one."**

*This is a work of fiction and all persons, places, institutions and events are either a result of the author's imagination or are used in a fictitious manner.*

## NOTE TO MY READERS

IN THE YEAR 2013, like Charlie O'Donnell in *COYOTES OF CREEK CROSSING*, I got "a whole new wagon." The year brought some profound changes to my life. I relocated from Kennewick, Washington, to Tucson, Arizona; back to the Southwest that I love. I have found great new friends and interesting things to do.

The process of relocating from Washington to Arizona required most of the year and I only began to seriously address this project in late summer and early fall. It is you, my readers one and all, who encourage me to continue with my tales of the Low-Country of South Carolina, my ancestral home, and of the people who settled there and caused the land to become what it is.

As always I write about people; the human condition, with our strengths, weaknesses, courage, cowardice, love, kindness and cruelty—the things that all of us have experienced, sometimes all from the same person, because we all have the capacity to do these things. I try to bring the idea that nothing is new. We read about people in all ages from the beginning of history and categorize them as heroes and heroines. We refer to them as the good guys or the bad guys. To me they are simply people.

I also attempt, to the best of my ability to portray the time about which I write as accurately as possible. During my research I learn so much about my old home that I did not learn while growing up there. I like to create a few characters who demonstrate the best of humankind, under all conditions, because however long we might search, the human psyche being what it is, we so seldom find them in real life.

Tucson, AZ  
October 15, 2013  
As I begin:

### **T'engk' Gawd fuh Chaa'stun**

*'E, fus daa'k en' un tek me pen een han' fuh write  
Dese t'ing wuh uh t'ink 'bout Chaa'stun.*

*Uh yent hab onduhstan' fuh write lukkuh dem buckruh write  
Wuh lib tuh Brawd Skreet.*

*Bekase w'en de Lawd say mus' chuse de box wuh hol'  
De t'ing fuh mek we libbin',*

*Me old peepul chuse de hebby box wuh hol' de mo'res  
En' de box hab ax en' shubble en' hoe.*

*De buckruh tek de leetle box wuh lef' en' 'e git  
De pensul, de papuh en' de book en' t'ing.*

*Berrywellden, uh yent hab de wu'd fuh write 'bout Chaa'stun ...  
Me ole home, me "Holy Lan'."*

*But de Lawd know me h'aa't stan' same lukkuh dem buckruh  
Wuh hab 'e name 'punto de book wuh 'e write.*

*De moon done rise en' de win' fetch de smell of de maa'sh  
F'um de haa'buh ob de lan' wuh uh lub'.*

*T'engk' Gawd fuh life en' he'lt' fuh sing 'E praise.  
T'engk' Gawd fuh uh bin bawn en' uh gwi' die een Chaa'stun.*

Poem by Mawm Chrish in BITTLE en' T'ING'; compiled and interpreted by Virginia Mixson Geraty. Reprinted and used with permission of Sandlapper Publishing, Orangeburg, South Carolina.

## GULLAH DIALECT

To anyone who grew up in Charleston, South Carolina, the Gullah dialect is music to our ears. We heard this lovely, fascinating dialect spoken all our lives, by household workers, street vendors, in market places, and 5 & 10 stores where we worked as teenagers on Saturdays when the island folk came in to town.

There are several people who have devoted their energies to preserving this dialect, which is fast evolving from the old to the newer version. The above poem is closest to the old; however, in this story I have modified the dialect in the interest of ease of reading.



# Tally's Nook



**AUTUMN, 1727:**

**LONDON, ENGLAND**

**HIS MAJESTY'S SHIPYARD**



# 1

“Isham Holt, if you walk out that gate I’ll see that you never work in His Majesty’s shipyard again!” screamed the yard master Mr. Barnes, spittle exploding from lips. “Not this shipyard nor any other on the coast of England or any of His Majesty’s colonies!”

“Mr. Barnes, you can take this shipyard and all the others and shove ‘em up His Majesty’s bloody arse.” Isham shouted the treasonous profanity without turning back to look. “And you can go after ‘em!”

“You could be hanged for those words,” screamed Mr. Barnes, now close to an attack of apoplexy. “And you’re leaving His Majesty’s new brigantine half finished! The main aft mast ain’t even set!”

Isham Holt then turned back to glare at the Yard Master. In a less angry voice he pleaded, “Mr. Barnes, you are the chief of procurers and suppliers in this yard. Did you see what your toffs brought me to use for that mast? Did you see the trash lumber that your suppliers brought in here, Mr. Barnes? For me to use building a deck? The boards are misshapen ... twisted ... not seasoned nor dried enough to make level footing. How can I build a decent deck on His Majesty’s ship with crooked lumber? Eh? And then His Majesty’s inspector has my arse for using them? Eh? Did you pick them out or did you send one of those worthless toffs to do the job? You know we’ll all be dead before those spoiled, lazy boyos get me decent enough supplies and material on time to do the bloody work. Those young sirs would rather go on shooting parties or dance the night away. They wake up with pissy hangovers

and can't do the work they are assigned to do in the shipyard."

"The younger sons of our aristocracy don't like being corrected and told what to do by a mere shipwright," responded Mr. Barnes, his tone a bit smoother after Holt's reprimand. "Or by me."

"Well then, who is going to keep them in order? You can't, their fathers won't, and their peers are too busy doing the same."

Isham jammed his cap down over his thick mop of blond hair, turned his back again on Mr. Barnes, and strode away from the yard master and out of the shipyard gate. He had heard workmen talking all week about the HMS *Allegiance*, a cargo ship that was known to ply the waters from Boston in the Massachusetts colony to the South Carolina colony, down to the Islands and thence to Ireland and England. Isham had heard that the ship was coming into port and the ship's captain had sent out inquiries about hiring a shipwright. Isham did not know where the shipyard was, but he assumed it would be somewhere along the Irish or English coast. He intended to find out. He knew that *The Allegiance* was right now anchored in the harbor and due to dock sometime this very day. He walked the distance from the shipyard out to the docks where he would be able to see *The Allegiance* and find out exactly when she would be coming in. He intended to be there before any other man, in order to be the first to ask about the job.

Isham Holt, a genetic mixture of staid Hollanders and adventuresome English, had been restless for months and did not know why. He loved his trade. Being a Master Shipwright had been his dream since childhood and having learned this trade at his father's knee, he was the best shipwright in His Majesty's Shipyard and he knew it. He had a family; a wife, a quiet, good woman who never

was cross and three treasured, young daughters. He made a good wage, £37 a year, which was the top wage for his skill. But he chafed. He chafed at the ineptitude of his co-workers. He chafed at the slowness of the suppliers and the low quality material he was given by the buyers. He chafed at the attitude of the young aristocratic toffs placed over him, who played at night more than they worked in the day.

Isham Holt also chafed at other things which he could not or would not name; things that played at the very edge of his consciousness, because when his mind began to go there, he quickly withdrew it and occupied it with other thoughts. He was a good man and a good husband and he would not tolerate himself being otherwise. Other men might visit the houses along the waterfront, but not Isham Holt. His quiet Marjorie was at home, waiting for him, ever accommodating.

## 2

The mid-morning sun gave welcome warmth to Sir Fredrick Talleigh, captain of *The Allegiance*. He stood at the rail and watched his seasoned seamen, under the direction of First Mate Horatio Pettibone, busy themselves with the tasks of securing the brigantine. These same seamen would work for the remainder of the day and into the night offloading cargo, which would be taken to the Crown's warehouses. There it would be weighed and measured for the Crown's storage fees. These fees would obtain until the Crown purchased the cargo at a price set according to the Privy Council's Mercantile Rules.

No sooner had they lowered the gangplank when a man standing at the end of the gangplank, hat in hand, called up.

"Permission to come aboard? Want to see the captain."

"Mr. Rolf, go see what the man wants with the captain," said Mr. Pettibone.

"Aye, aye, Sir," replied Rolf, the ship's Second Mate, as he walked to the head of the gangplank and yelled down.

"What's yer business with Captain Talleigh?" inquired Rolf.

"Captain Talleigh, is it? Business will be between me and the captain," replied the man.

"That'll not do. Ye can go on yer way. Ye'll not come aboard until I hear what ye're after."

Isham scowled, but replied, "Your captain is looking for a master shipwright and I am here to ask for the job. That good enough to get me aboard?"

"We'll ask the First Mate. Stay there."

"Don't worry. I won't be movin' from here until he'll see me," called the man.

Pettibone heard the request from his post and spoke to Rolf, "I'll get the captain. I know he wants to speak with prospective workers, but did not expect one so early. Word must already be out about the shipyards. Uncle Joseph must have been busy."

After Pettibone had gone to get the captain, Rolf shouted down to the man, "What's yer name?"

"Isham Holt."

Captain Talleigh was already aware of the situation as Pettibone approached.

"Man on the dock says he came to apply for the job, Captain Sir," said Pettibone. "Word must have gotten out early from your uncle."

"I expect Uncle Joseph notified the shipyard masters all around the southern coast as soon as he received my letter. Tell the man to come aboard and then bring him in to my cabin. Thank you, Mr. Pettibone."

"Aye, aye, Sir," said Pettibone, speaking to the captain with the utmost respect as he did when on deck or around the seamen. In truth, he was like a substitute father to Fredrick and had helped to rear the boy to a man, so as Fredrick went to his cabin to await the applicant, he turned back and asked softly, "You sure you want a strange man in here with you alone, Freddy?"

"I'll be alright, Pettibone. Send him in."

"I'll post Mr. Rolf outside just in case."

It was only a minute or two later when Second Mate Rolf knocked on the door again. He took the liberty of opening it and Fredrick encountered a giant of a man standing beside the rather smallish Rolf.

"'ere 'e is, Captain. Name's Isham 'olt."

"Come in Mr. Holt. Mr. Rolf, that will be all for now. And thank you."

"Aye, aye, Captain, Sir," replied Rolf and took his leave as Holt lowered his head in order to enter the cabin.

"Please have a seat here at my table," invited Fredrick. "I am Captain of the *Allegiance*. Name's Fredrick Talleigh."

"Thank you, Captain, but I'll be standin'. Most ship captains in England be Lords, Captain Talleigh. Be you a Lord, Sir?"

Fredrick was astounded at the question, but felt no disrespect as he replied, "Not yet, but I suppose someday I shall be; however, where I live it doesn't really matter."

"And where is that, Sir?" asked Holt. "You from Ireland?"

Fredrick could not help but smile.

"Not Ireland. I have lived most of my life aboard this ship, but I am a Colonial from Boston and soon to be Carolina."

"I know about Boston and Carolina. Part of England. New world, right, Sir?"

"They are. But wait. You came here for me to interview you and you seem to be interviewing me."

"Sorry, Sir, I've got that way about me. I like to know what I'm getting myself into. There's some as don't take to me because of it. I'm told I speak my mind too easy."

"Well, then, so do I. How did you hear that I am looking for workmen?"

"Word got around the shipyards that a certain Sir Joseph Talleigh here in London was scouting for a master shipwright and skilled craftsmen, and that we'd need to speak with the captain of *The Allegiance* when it comes in. I've been waiting. I heard last night that *The Allegiance* was standing off and I came early while you docked. I'm the best you'll find in England, or at least on the southern coast, and I wanted to be the first to see you."

"You do speak your mind, don't you," Talleigh stated wryly. "So. I have not yet been ashore and I don't know who my uncle, Sir Joseph Talleigh, may have discovered but tell me why you think you are the best."

"My granddad came from Holland when he was a grown man with a family. He was a Master Shipwright there and he was hired at His Majesty's shipyards. My father followed him in the trade and his father taught him everything he knew. I followed my own father starting as an apprentice when I was nine years old. At night my mother taught me lessons. She taught me how to read, write and to do numbers. All the rest of the trade I learned from them two master shipwrights. They could do everything from laying the keel to finishing the captain's cabinets and so can I."

"And now you are working at which shipyard?"

"I been workin' most of my adult life at His Majesty's Shipyard right here in London dry dock. But this morning I walked off."

Fredrick Talleigh studied the man for a moment, wondering if he should ask why the man left or if he should not. Holt did not smell of alcohol and his air was not one of supplication. Rather his demeanor demonstrated pride. He decided to not ask, thinking that he already knew. Instead he inquired about Holt's family.

"Are your grandfather and father still alive?"

"My father is, but Grandda died a few years ago. Where is your shipyard, Sir? West coast or east? Boston or Carolina? Islands?"

"Don't have one yet. Whoever gets the position will build it from scratch. And it will be in Carolina, near Charles Town. You are willing to move there?"

After a split second of hesitation, Hold replied, "Hadn't thought about that for truth. Figured it would be

an English or Irish shipyard, but yes, Sir, I could work that out if the conditions are to my liking."

"Oh, you have conditions, do you?" asked Fredrick, trying to hide a smile and liking this outspoken man more and more.

"I do, Sir."

"Pray tell."

"I'll be boss of the work. I won't have interfering by people who know less than I do about how to build a craft, be it a row boat or a sloop or a man o' war. I'll choose my own craftsmen. And the yard has to have someone I can count on to have supplies ready when I need 'em. Worse thing about workin' the King's yards is that all is done at a snail's pace. Supplies not ready when needed and when they come they are not fit to use. Warped lumber for a deck, mind you, they expect me to use. Workers do shoddy work and no one's to blame when it comes to faultin' but me. King's managers don't know how to run a shipyard; just how to be annoying to those of us who do, with all their rules and regulations. Takes twice as long to build a craft as it does in a private yard what's run well."

"You've worked in private yards also?"

"I have, Sir, in my youth, but my mouth got me in trouble with the owners. They can't help but try to interfere, too."

"I can understand that," chuckled Fredrick. "Do you have a family? Will they be willing to go to Carolina?"

"I have a father, a younger brother, a married sister, a wife, three young ones and one on the way. Sir, you'll have a good supplier?"

"I'll have the best," Fredrick replied, hoping that Ben Talleigh, his father's ward, who now was in charge of rice at their Carolina plantation, would agree to leave that responsibility and come to be the supplier at the new shipyards.

"Where would you get your skilled craftsmen?" Talleigh asked.

"I'd steal 'em from the King's yards, Sir. I know the best and the ones who'll work for me. I'll convince 'em to come with me and my brother is my own apprentice, learnin' what I can teach."

"Isham Holt, I'll read the list of men that my uncle provides and I will interview most or all of them. You keep in touch with me and I'll let you know my decision. It will take some time for me to speak with the other candidates."

"Fair enough, Sir. Some of them might be good ones to work under me," he said with a smile. "That is, if they're willing to go to Carolina."

"How will I reach you if I need to?"

"You won't need to, Sir. I'll be here every evening to check with you or your men. I won't be keepin' you longer, Captain. I'll be on my way."

Fredrick Talleigh offered his hand to Isham Holt and the big man, after an instant of surprise, took the hand and gave it a mighty shake.

"Aye, aye, Captain," he said as he turned and left the cabin, ducking his head again.

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Grandfather Aaron Van der Holt had passed on to his son, Bert, his vast knowledge, skill and expertise in designing and building many different kinds of ships. Father Bert had nurtured young Isham until the young man was considered one of the best shipwrights along the southern coast. He was equally known for his temper and difficult ways; always expecting the best from those above him and beneath him and full of fury when they fell short. It was because he expected so much of himself that he did the same with others. He could never understand why

people, especially men, shrugged their shoulders and avoided the challenges to excel.

By the time Isham reached his home his temper had cooled as it always did when he was close to his family, especially Marjorie. He had been thinking of how to break his news to her, his petite wife, and Bert, his father. He knew that Marjorie would never complain. She never did. His father—now that was a different matter. With trepidation he opened the front door, ducked his head to avoid bruising his forehead as he often did when excited, and stepped inside. Bert Holt was sitting in the only comfortable chair in the house, his ailing leg propped on a stool covered with a pillow borrowed from his bed. Marjorie was nowhere in sight and it was her that Isham had hoped to see first. He was not to be so blessed.

“What’re ye doin’ home in the middle of the day, Boy,” asked his father. “Don’t bother to answer, Boy. I can see on your face what ye’re up to,” Bert continued, his voice lower so as to prevent any other from hearing. “Ye quit the Yard, didn’t ye?”

Isham nodded his head.

“Ye sure ye’re doin’ the right thing, Boy?” asked his father, still keeping his voice quiet.

“Aye, Da, I am.”

“Then it’s a done thing. How’re you tellin’ the missus? Her expectin’ and all? And yer brother?”

“Not tellin’ anyone until I make more plans. Da, I want to go to the Colonies.”

Bert Holt opened his mouth to speak but before he could utter a word, Isham held out his hand with the palm out and hushed him.

“Don’t say nothin’, Da. I got to figure this all out. I ain’t tellin’ no one but you until I’m sure and certain, but I’m hopin’ to go to Carolina.”

"I know you been threatenin' to leave the yard for months, but I didna take you serious, Son. I thought you'd come to yer senses. Ye can't go runnin' off to the Colonies like some lad what ain't dry behind the ears, seeking fun and whatnot. Ye got family to think of," Bert said, a bit stronger and louder. "What about the family? The young 'uns?"

"That's what I been thinkin' on for months, Da. And I think I got it all worked out. I quit today and went straight to talk with a captain of a ship what plies the waters from there to here and that captain is looking for a shipwright to take with him to Carolina."

"And he's willin' to take you on?"

"Not yet, he ain't," replied Isham. "He's checking out as many as he can and talkin' with 'em all so he can get the best. Said he wants the best. And I know I am."

"But ye're hard to get along with, Boy. Ye're too demandin'."

"I told him that already and it didn't seem like to bother him. Said for me to check back with him as he's talking with as many as his uncle, Sir Joseph Talleigh sends him."

"Who is this captain? What's he like?"

"He's a toff but this man seems different from most of 'em, Da. I asked if he's a Lord and he says he will be one day. But he just seemed different. I liked him and he took me as a man, not a ... ,"

"Now don't get carried away, Isham," advised his father. "How long you gonna have to wait to know?"

"Don't know, Da. He said he would take the time to talk with all who comes to ask. His uncle put word out before the ship came in so men are askin'. This captain will talk with them he's been told are good. And I know he won't find anybody better at building a ship than me. And you know I could do better if them lazy, spoiled toffs did

their assigned duties as good as I build the ship. You know that, Da."

"I do know that, Boy. I do know that. Well, we just have to wait."

"I'll go to the dock every morning and night to see if he's picked me or not."

"Carolina? A long way off, Boy. How about Marjorie and the little ones? And Lewis?"

"We'll all go. Even Lewis."

"Not me, Boy. I won't go. I'll stay here with yer sister. She and her man will make a place for me in their rooms over the bakery in the village. My old leg ain't fit for a journey that far. And Lewis won't go. He's been walkin' out wi' old man Sherwood's daughter. He up and leave her in the lurch her reputation sinks. Reckon he'll git hitched, like as not. Like as not there'll be bairns and she'll not want to leave her Ma so soon."

Bert Holt remained quiet and thoughtful for a while. Isham stood still before his father, knowing him well enough that the old man had something else to say.

"Ye trust this man, this toff, enough to give up all here and traipse off with him across the ocean, Boy?"

"I got to trust him, Da. There's naught left here for me." And then Holt added almost reverently, "Da, when we finished talkin' he offered me his hand. *He* offered me *his* hand to shake. And we shook hands. You know any toffs like that?"

Later that night when Isham lay quietly with Marjorie in their bed she softly asked, "some 'at happen today?"

"Same as usual, Lass."

"Some 'at's up, Husband. I heard you talkin' with your Da."

"Nothin' for me to tell right now, Lass," he replied. "I'll tell you more when I know more."

He reached for her and drew her close to him. When she did not resist and continued to lie quietly, he gently proceeded to lift her night gown and to move his body onto her. Marjorie accommodated him and with as little disturbance as he could manage he relieved his pent up urge—the intense pressure in his groin. Spent, he rolled away from her. She immediately left him and went to the wash basin behind the curtain to tidy herself. As he lay there, listening to the quiet movements of his wife behind the curtain, Isham wondered why he always was left with a feeling of guilt after this act with his wife. Church sanctioned, he knew that it was not sinful for a man to feel this need and to have a wife to relieve it, as Marjorie always did. But somehow he knew there was or should be more to it than their brief, quiet couplings. He had heard many times the men at the shipyard bragging about this wench or that wench—about bawdy, rough romps in bed—and he concluded that those were sinful couplings. He was grateful for his quiet, God-fearing Marjorie. Without her ... his thoughts drifted into sleep as she slipped back into bed.