The "Passin'-On" Party

"An house . . . made with hands"

The "Passin'-On" Party

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PREFACE

THIS is a story of a people, one time slaves and bondsmen, now free-tongued freeholders in a western land: the old new type, adopted and adapted. They combine all the "heart-tellin's" and simple faith of slave days, with the oratorical habit and view-holding propensities of their environment. It is to be expected, therefore, that these Kansas "Jayhawkers"—full-pinioned, though of a duskier hue—should dispraise fearlessly many of their own race frailties, as well as those of "dem white folks dey circles wif."

THE AUTHOR.

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CHAPTER I

004&, "AN HOUSE . . MADE WITH HANDS"

IF YOU were twenty, the house where the party was "give" would have made you laugh; but if you were fifty, well, you might have laughed with your mouth but not with your eyes. Something would get into them as you looked at the place — dust maybe, but 'twas more like dew.

The house was such an architectural nondescript; so insolently indifferent to appearance, yet withal so appealing,

that few passed it without concern, nor failed to recall it with interest.

It was the home of two old colored people, ex-slaves, Aunt June and Uncle Jerry Ferguson ("Unk Junk," for boys), as they were familiarly called. They had built this house with their own hands, in odd times after work hours, out of any available material. Some of it had been picked up along the Kaw River bank, or the railroad tracks; much of it had been solicited, haggled, or flattered from their employers, the town white folks. As this was a Kansas town where residence renovation was frequent, marvelous architectural effects were produced when the cast-off portions of the better homes took honored place in the humbler habitat.

It had a tin roof, had this mansion, 004& on Yam Avenue. Albeit some of the flattened-out tin cans that formed it had once borne lustier corn on their outer covering than in their sealed-up-ness, who shall say they did not compensate now by the honest roof they made?

"Dat wuz de dry year, I puttin' dat kivver on, an' folks used a heap o' can' stuff," Unk Jerry elucidatingly said. "Toted piles of 'em from Mis' Stileses boa'din' house. Mistah Walters, he smile when I show him dis ruf. 'Ef yo-all needin' mo' tin, Unk,' he say, 'I'll loan you my stomick linin'. I'm not usin' it.' He boa'ded at Mis' Stileses. Dat biggest, newest patch over dar come from Mis' Jawson's. Her ole man broke up.

"Jes' so dis ruf sheds de rain offun us! Po' niggers lak we-uns moughty thankful we don' have to sleep under deeshpans an' warsh tubs for kivvers, some dese here rainy nights, I 'm tellin' you! Mis' Slautah, a culled lady dat lives in a rented house, she say she done kotch 'nuff watah on de baid in her tub to start de warsh. Naw, suh! Dis heah house ain' no Priest o' Pallas, but we done kotch our rain watah on de outside anyhow, bress Gawd!"

But the walls outshone the roof in originality. They were a mosaic or a patchwork, accordingly as your idea of conglomerate surface was obtained from the study of art, or from remembering the covering of your old trundle-bed back in Ohio. A part of one side was made of rejected pavement

brick. Since the city "suspector" was not "suspecting" on a certain May morning when old Jerry's building instinct sent him forth, bird-like, after material, this was the most substantial part of the structure. It was marred only by the fact that Unk's masonry, guiltless of plumb-line, bulged in some spots and receded modestly in others. This made the little house, as viewed from the front, seem to be suffering from the mumps, or waiting for its jaws to settle sufficiently to get a new set of teeth, both at one and the same time. The remainder of the shanty was a mixture of weather-boarding, shingles, window frames, shutters, and two-by-fours, all put on regardless of regularity, color, shape, previous servitude, or present appearance.

It was the front of the residence, however, protruding its monstrosities into your face as you passed by, that was at once the despair of local architects and the target of curious sightseers, as well as the delight and well-spring of pleasure to the two old black folk. They had pooled their industry, acquisitiveness, and social knowledge in the construction of this portion of the dwelling.

The material had been gathered from the wreck of some box cars, the red of the boards crossed at irregular intervals by the white bands of car decoration. Conspicuously placed near the middle of the front were the large white figures, 004&, once a part of the car number. It was Aunt June's idea. When Unk brought the boards

into the yard and began to nail them up, she said: "Heah, now, ole man! Le's us hev figgers on our house, lak white folks. Den I kin tell 'em whar I lives, too, jes' lak a suah 'nuff. Laws! I hear'n 'em all sayin' it together, boasty lak, at parties whar I'm holpin': 'I lives at 911 Big Bug Boulevard. Come an' see me.' Jes' lak to let 'em know dat I got figgers, too, an' mine heap bigger 'n their'n."

"Don' go for to wearyin' 'bout dem upsticken' folks nohow, Juny," was Unk's slow response. "I'll puttin' dese ole figgers to suit you-all, suah I will. Dese short boa'ds am moughty scrumptious heah whar I gwine put dat li'l hang-bird porch dat ol' Mistah Luddahman done give me."

That the number on the small

house should begin with the utterly meaningless "oo" never disturbed Unk, nor that the ending should be the symbol of more to come. Indeed, some were mean enough to think that the reposeful attitude of the "&" was a suitable coat of arms for the lord and master of the "Hand-Made House" on Yam Avenue.

So, under the "oo," "whar de short boards come," was placed the little hang-bird porch. This was Unk's name for the small Juliet balcony, which had been given him when the old Ludderman house was displaced by the new one.

"'Pow'ful fine li'l porch, dat, Mistah Luddahman,' I say," went on old Junk to Juny. "''Taint no reg'lar porch,' he say, 'an' Miss Dor'thy don'

wan' it no more. Jes' a Ju-ly-et Balcony,' he say.

"'Law, dat make no difference to my Juny, Mistah Luddahman; she set ez hard in a *July* porch ez in a *June* one. She would n't want a Winter one, of co'se; she 's pow'ful fash'n'ble,' I say. An' he say, 'Take it along, Unk.' Then he say sompin' about July-ets comin' in 'sorted colors an' sizes, anyhow.

"'Dis suit me plenty,' I say. 'Ain't 'ticulah 'bout colors, nohow. I seed plenty white women don' match der porch color. My Juny moughty fash-'n'ble, too, but, lan' sake, she can't fix her color up lak white woman. She has to take de tints de good Lawd sorted out for her. Reckon she 's same way wif porches.'"

And so it was that in the center of the box car front, neither covering a window, nor sheltering a door, was placed the little hang-bird porch from the like of which so many stage beauties have leaned to catch the ardent love-making of their Romeos. To see Jerry perched in it on a summer evening,—Aunt June refused to occupy it on account of her weight,—was to fail forever to appreciate the tender scene behind the footlights. On such evenings the old woman preferred a seat on the low doorstep of the motley mansion where, with her spacious back to her up-hung Romeo, and with her fancy freer than that of Shakespeare's heroine, she proudly surveyed her surroundings.

Although the house was largely Unk

Junk's handiwork, the yard, even to the fence about it, was surely Aunt June's own. To her it owed its wealth of horticultural outlawry, and its barbaric decoration. 'Twas she who had begged the plants and flowers and toted them home. 'Twas her hand that planted, watered, and coaxed them into bloom. From her lips, too, came those quasi-philosophic tellings of where, and how, and of whom she obtained the riches of her garden spot.

Many a stranger, attracted by the quaint charm of the place, or patron, lured by the hope of decent laundry, halted to listen as she fondly pointed out her treasures, and went away chuckling at the strange truth and humor of her talk.

"Yes, suh, my fence take me right

smaht spell, but I guess 'twill las' me," she would say. "Got all kin's, too," referring to what appeared to be a line of samples abandoned by a traveling fence man.

And such a fence! Woven wire clutched its metal tendrils about paw-paw stakes. Discarded bank fixtures neighbored the wooden slats from a corn crib. Cellar gratings clasped hands with ornamental pickets. Barbed wire snarled its way through it all and held the motley mass to the task of guarding the dooryard of "Ole Aunt June." She knew about it, too, every splinter of it.

"You-all askin' 'bout dem white pickets over dar," she would say. "All dem pickets done come from de bury-in'-yard. Dem one-p'inted ones from

'roun' ole Cunnel Mosley's first wife; dem two-p'int pickets from 'roun' de secon' wife. Lan'! When de third wife see dem p'ints, how she cave 'roun'! 'Don' ketch me behin' no three-p'int pickets,' she say; 'first notch or none,' she say.

"Cou'se, de first Miss Mosley's chillun ain' done givin' up de one p'int, so Cunnel he jes' natchally taken 'em all out, to keep down de peace.

"Dat 's huccom dey 's diff'unt," went on the historian. "But moughty han'some fence, honey! Rech clean across de front, jes' for two wives. 'Lan', Cunnel!' I say, 'you young man yit. I 'spects ef dey gives you time 'nuff, you have to t'row 'way 'nuff fence to go cl'ar 'roun' my whole yard,' I tell 'im."

One hoped that the Colonel might be providentially removed before he succeeded in discarding enough graveyard fence to displace the tangled masterpiece that now straggled about the little enclosure. For the fence suited the yard. The first impression on viewing it was that of a half-pleasing, half-offending jumble of greenery and gleaming color; of bush and vine; of vegetable and blooming flower; of kitchen ware, crockery, and defunct household furniture. A marvelous mixture it was, of African jungle, city park, and town dump.

It was easy to see, however, that flowers dominated the herbaceous tangle. They were everywhere and of every kind. Neither order nor rank defined their placing. Old-fashioned

The garden

garden bloom jostled hot-house product, and the flower of the field usurped at will the place of either. There were no stars, nor crescents, nor massed backgrounds, but all grew contentedly in democratic confusion, wherever Aunt June's hoe or delving shoe toe had found a place for them on some tired eventime.

One noted, too, the unique receptacles for growing plants. Modern florists trust their treasures to the tender bosom of Mother Earth; but not so Aunt June. She elevated her darlings in every conceivable manner. Marigolds bloomed in butter kits, and geraniums glowed in punctured "deesh-pans." Fair Easter lilies were upheld by insolent punch-bowls, and johnny-jump-ups were ensconced in baby bug-

gies. Therein they all blossomed on, serenely unconscious of the Mardi Gras parade they made as they gaily shared our glee or dared our disapproval.

"Seem lak dem li'l jum'-pups suah do enjoy demselves crowdin' each other 'roun' in dat ole baby carriage," Aunt June would say. "Dem blue-eyed flowers make me reco-mem-ber Mis' Jedge Cartwright's chillun I use to push 'roun' in dat ole baby buggy. De two las' chillun, Miss Nina an' Miss Grace, fine young ladies now, an' de flowers of de flock. Sammy, he big man, too. Gone off to Warshington, Corn-grass-man, papah say; but, lan' sake! he wa' n't no farmer heah, I tole him.

"'Sammy,' I say, when he standin'

heah one day, 'Seem lak I hear'n you squallin' yit when you-all tumble outen dat ole buggy on yo' haid.'

"'I'm still at de fallin', Aunty, but have to cut out de squallin' now,' Sammy say, quiet lak. 'Moughty fine ole buggy, Aunt June. Take good keer of you' johnny-jum'-pups. Don' cheat 'em out of de bloomin' time. Dey cain't do dat after while.' Sam do suah make long speeches sence he gone to Warshington.

"Whose dat other baby carriage dar wif de white flowers hangin' over de sides? Dat's ole Mis' Preachah Newton's onliest li'l gal's, what's daid. Mis' Newton say, 'You-all take dat buggy home wif you, Aunt June. I cain't stand to see it 'roun' an' other babies ridin' in it.' So I plant dem

white posies in it. Just budded good when Mis' Newton come heah, Momoral Day. She lookin' hawd at dem li'l buds an' she say, 'Don't pull dem po' li'l things yet, Aunt June. Dey would be scairt out'en de cemete'y, all alone. Keep 'em twell dey bloom out full, an' give 'em to some li'l chile what's po'. An' I allus does.

"Lan' sake! dat nex' onliest kid o' hern, dat Ralph Newton, he don' git none my flowers! He suah ack lak only son. Brekin' in heah an' tearin' up Jack, trompin' down flowers, only" —dropping her voice—"he—nevah —teched—dat—*littles' baby buggy* —where dem white flowers is.

"Dat beeg brack thing wif de ferm in, clean back under dat bursh? Lak know how you-all spy dat out? Beat

all 'bout yo' eyes peerin' 'roun'. I ain' no lady joint-keeper!"

After this digression, by which Aunt June showed her complete right to citizenship in her adopted State, the talk went on.

"Dat's ole Marse Molton's ole iron warsh pot. Used to scald hawgs in it and cook Indian mess an' free barberry-cue mess for niggers 'lection times.

"Plenty o' 'Gov'ment Drops' in de jugs, too, dem days. None of de fam'ly lef' no mo', 'cept Miss Liza. She nevah foun' her no ole man. She don' necissitate much cookin' no mo', an' she given me dat ole pot. 'Plant sompin' in it, so's you-all reco-mem-ber me, Aunt June,' she say. 'I certain suah done dat,' I say. So I plant dat ferm

— maiden-haih-ferm, dey call it. Dat suah suit ole Miss Liza."

Near Auntie's elbow, as she sat on the step, was a blossom-filled urn that attracted more attention by the brilliancy of its burden than by its own beauty. 'Twas an old brass cuspidor, elevated on a stair spindle, and holding a wealth of bright-eyed four-o'clocks, with trailing morning glories. It had been fished out of the ashes after the burning of the Capital Hotel, many years ago, having graced the lobby of that famous holding place for Kansas politics, where, it is said, Governors and United States Senators were made or unmade to order. Of all this Aunt June was beautifully ignorant, as became her sex.

"'What's dis?' one of dem poli-

tickle gen'l'men ask, who see dat box when he come heah to git some white vestes warshed. 'Whar you git dis?'"

"'Ole Cap'tal spit box,' I say. Den he jes' march 'roun' an' 'roun' dat thing, an' look at it fru his one spec', an' don' know whether he bettah laugh er cry."

"'Well, ole frien', he say, 'did n' 'spect to fin' you-all heah. Lost yo' ole job, lak some mo' folks, did you? Plenty of flowers bloomin' 'roun' you in dem ole days. Talk flowers! Brightes' in Kansas,' he say."

Easily the most conspicuous thing in the yard, and one highly prized by Aunt June, was a mound near the gate. Here, on a rounded pile of earth, was displayed such a collection of broken chinaware and glittering, bright-

colored glass as has not greeted your eyes since you looked last on your old playhouse. Not the new carpenter-made mansion, but the kind that was popular on the thither side of the Mississippi, in the days before Santa Claus had become an excuse for jamming children's lives full of real toys, to the starvation of the imagination.

On this mound were crippled cream pitchers, hotel gravy boats, lamp chimneys, whisky bottles, bar-room fixtures, gay bits of glass from a memorial window, crowned by the shattered remains of an old stovepipe, straight, upright, ready for action. Blessed reminder was this of the elemental childhood in us all, and especially of the continuous childhood of the race to which Aunt June belonged.

Pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw.

'Tis not the modern youngster, though, to whom all this appeals. This was evidenced one evening when Ralph Newton, the privileged "only son" of Mrs. Preacher Newton, whose baby carriage now held the white flowers, led his band of senior high-school fellows in a grand charge upon the little place. Decayed vegetables were the missiles of the preliminary skirmish. One particularly odorous cabbage-head missed old Unk's petrified pate and, landing between Aunt June's shoulders, made future trouble for Ralph, the young leader of the gang.

As if this were not sufficient, the charge was renewed in the night time, with the result that much mischief was done in the little yard. The old baby

buggy that had once held pretty Nina Cartwright in some mysterious manner appeared next morning in the center of the high-school rostrum, when the speaker arose at the class-day exercises to give his final advice to the graduating class.

Poor Ralph Newton! His perfectly good Y. M. C. A. alibi ignored by the unreasonable school board, his diploma denied him, and, what was far worse, his name immediately "scratched" from the waiting list of the offended Nina Cartwright, class beauty and his senior-year sweetheart! Small wonder that his appreciation of Aunt June and her residence must come with time, as we shall later see.

Great place for reminiscence, for laughter, and for tears, was old Aunt

June's crazy patch of a house, with the crazier yard and exasperating fence about it. Laughter when you entered, reminiscence if you lingered, but lowered voices when you paused to bid good-by to Aunt June and Uncle Jerry.

It was their home — the best they knew. Though the material was incongruous, it had been borne hither on backs that ached from the day's task. Though the architecture was unspeakable, the building hand dusky and all untoolwise, yet the touch was tender and the plumb lines were the heart-strings of loyal, loving, simple folk. This a cabin? Nay, this was a shrine. Here were offered up human toil, human hopes and sacrifices — fit elements in every true home, be its builder black or white, its material

marble or mongrel, its location Governor's Square or Yam Avenue.

Hats off to all such home building! Better far is it than the shiftless tenant habit, or moving distemper, or flat-dwelling foolishness that makes for irresponsible citizens, childless homes, and homeless children. This, then, is the message of the little sprawling habitation of old Aunt June and Uncle Jerry at 004&.

Though the Commercial Club never drove location-seekers past this residence, the little lane-like street was popular, nevertheless. Many of the old-time townspeople came that way, and their interest in the place, as well as their cordial greetings, were much appreciated by the old couple, whom we left some pages back, sitting before

the mansion, to see the procession pass.

Especially was this a season of refreshing to the soul of old Aunt June. In her heart a lover of the formalities of life, she was fond of "fash'n'ble folks," as Unk Junk on occasions half-tauntingly said.

Indeed, it was this weakness of hers that finally led to the giving of the "Passin'-On-Party" at the cabin—which function, as planned and carried out by a group of the town's young people, was the occasion of as much back-porch wireless as any event that ever splashed our social pool.

This is how it happened.

Chapter Two

"Party Hankerin'"

CHAPTER II

"PARTY HANKERIN'"

AUNT JUNE was seriously ill. Too many "warshin's" in damp basements, and too much sitting out in the dooryard after, had allowed her old foe, rheumatism, to have its way.

She had suffered for some weeks. Although Uncle Jerry had given her "doctah drops" faithfully as prescribed, and although her friends, white and colored, had not allowed her to lack any comfort, still she lay weak and ill in her small cabin throughout the early Summer.

Her condition was apparent to a little group who gathered in the shanty

on a late afternoon of one of these trying days. There were Nina and Grace Cartwright, who had been supplanted but not eclipsed in beauty by the blossoms in the outdoor baby buggy; Dorothy Ludderman, whose father had contributed the Juliet balcony to the cabin's adornment; old Dr. Barman, who had cared for Aunt June without charge; and last, though not always to be so ranked, was poor, old, half-broken-hearted Uncle Jerry.

When the girls entered the cabin, they found the doctor standing at the side of the bed— big four-post affair —in whose cavernous depths, with eyes half closed in apparent sleep, lay a very much shrunken Aunt June. Uncle Jerry held his usual place at the bed's foot, dumbly watching the doc-

tor's face for some sign of cheer. Placing their basket on the table, the young ladies were tiptoeing out of the room, when Uncle Jerry, by pantomime, implored them to stay and hear what the doctor had to say. Drawing a little closer together near the center of the room, safely away from its dark corners, with the level rays of the late afternoon sun bringing out their fresh, clear beauty in sharp contrast against the dark setting, they stood waiting the doctor's word.

Presently, while they held their breath, Aunt June's lips moved and a wail-like chant, in the halting, unnatural tones of the sleep-talker, filled the little place:

"Mis' Cunnel-Jedge-John-Ferguson gwine give a party a-Thursday—

weather permittin'. Brack folks early an' late. White folks — usual hours. Seems lak — dat what I allus wanted to been readin' 'bout in de papahs — before I go to — de Glory — Lan'."

Before the weird monologue ceased its trailing echo in the cabin's darkest corner, the girls had crowded through the narrow door into the blessed daylight of the back yard.

Uncle Junk sloped rapidly after them, and stood fearful in the open, with quivering form and agonized eyes, whose encircling gaze seemed to rest nowhere.

"'Fore Gawd, she gwine dis time, suah!" he moaned. "Dat's no sleepin' drops! Dat's ha'nts! Talkin' ha'nts!" Then, half beside himself, he went on, as if in prayer:

"Deah Lawd, ef you gwine take 'er, why, take 'er! But don' make no talkin' ha'nt outen my Junie! Still ha'nts bad 'nuff, but jes' ole Satan kin stop de talkin' kin'. Good Lawd!"

Nina rallied. She was always the official speaker of the crowd.

"Uncle Jerry, of course, it's the medicine," she assured him. "She's delirious. Here's the doctor; he'll tell us."

Dr. Barman lingered. He was one of the Heaven-sent kind, who did not disguise his prescriptions in Latin, nor his diagnoses in incomprehensible English. "Nine-tenths doctor and eleven-tenths man," the town arithmetician had said, then saved our brain cells by adding, "Equals two whole doctors, you see."

"She's not doing well," he said, in a voice attuned to tenderness; then qualifyingly, at sight of Unk's scared eyes, "that is, not so well as I should like."

Turning to the others, he went on: "She seems despondent. Can't you girls do something to cheer her up a bit? Quit carrying her victuals, and put on a vaudeville," seeing the need of a laugh on the girls' faces. "What's that talk I heard in there about a party?"

"We did not hear it all," ventured Dorothy. "'Twas pleasanter out here, and — will she get well, Doctor? What can we do to help?"

"I don't know," answered the doctor. "Ask your mothers what to do. Tell more of the folks to come down

here. She's used to seeing lots of people at these parties where she helps, and she's missing them. She'll suffer anyhow, but 'twould give her something to think about."

The doctor put on his hat. This seemed to cram an idea into his head, for he turned with, "Might be a good idea to give her that party she has been dreaming about. Unk says she has talked of that before. Sounds like it had been in her system quite a spell. Most women have it dormant in some part of their anatomy. It may skip a generation or two, but it's bound to come out. Well, let me know what you decide to do. The prescriptions are in there on the table. Call me up to-morrow," and he was gone.

Uncle Jerry and the girls reëntered

the cabin. Aunt June was awake. With her head elevated on a doubled-up pillow, and an infantile interest on her face, she was surveying the walls of the room. Here, in fantastic groupings, were pasted fashion plates, Sunday supplements, floral catalogue sheets, portraits of royalty, and state fair porkers, all placed where the incoming wind demanded or fancy dictated. These had always been a great pleasure to her, and now her gaze returned childishly to their inspection.

She greeted the girls weakly, but soon her brightened old eyes wandered to the pictured walls again. At this sign of less immediate dissolution, old Jerry was once more master of his house.

"Whaffor you-all talk dat a-way

'bout a party, Juny?" he began. "Lak scared Miss Nina mos' to deff."

"Don' know 'bout no party talk, Jerry. Hain't in my min' no mo', 'less dem papah ladies up dah makin' me," feebly nodding toward a brilliantly colored fashion plate on the wall. "Seem lak dey make me all time hankerin' for Miss Lucy's weddin' 'ception and Mis' Gawge Wetherin'ton's passin'-on party, what I missed."

Unk's blood returned to the fighting pitch. "Whaffor you all time hankerin' for dem fooles' kin' ob passin'-on parties, dey calls 'ceptions, Juny, lak yo-all tellin' 'bout? Jes' pass 'em on, an' feed 'em li'l, don' res' none—but chase 'em out de do' lak turkeys in de spring. Mebbe dat's a good kin' of white folks' party, but noways fittin'

for de cullud race. You mus' has to stop honin' for 'em now, Juny."

"All de kin' of pleasure dis nigger's got." Aunt's voice was weakening. "Wish good Lawd let ole June hab jes' one reg'lah one, a real passin'-on party, 'fore—'fore she go to de Glory Lan'."

Unk's head dropped a bit.

"Bress de good Lawd!" Aunt June went on. "He gwine give me one when I git dar, suah, only"—falteringly—"only, I not know how to 'sist dem angels fix dey wings on 'em—an' lak dat. I holpin' white ladies fix false hair an' plackets heap o' times—but don' know nothin' 'bout dat winged crowd. 'Spects I not git 'sist' none up dar, needah."

"Ain' gwine be no passin'-on par-

ties in Hebben, I'm tellin' you, Juny! Gwine to set down on God's right han' an' stay ten thousand years. De preacher say dat — no chasin' through an' gittin' outen dar. I'm tellin' you furder, Juny, ef dem *pass-'em-on* parties gits common up dar, you ain' gwine be no 'sistin' angel, needah — don' you-all fret 'bout dat. You's gwine stand in dat receivin' line in Hebben, ef dey has any — or I'm not — gwine — let — you — go," broke in Uncle Jerry, with shocking theology, but fine chivalry. For in Jerry's heart theology and chivalry ebbed and flowed — the one penitentially bowing the aged form, the other drawing it to capable erectness.

"Can't go to Hebben hankerin', honey," he went on. "Hankerin' makes trouble 'nuff heah. Good Lawd hain't

gwine to have folks 'roun' Him hankerin' an' honin' all de time. He figgers dat Hebben good 'nuff — wifout none yo' parties — leas'ways, dese 'passin-on' parties."

Nina interposed. "Uncle Jerry, let's give her a party. She wishes it so much, and we girls will do all the work. You want to make Aunt June happy, and the doctor says she must have more company. It might help to make her well, you know. We'd be so glad to see it through nicely."

"Cou'se, ef you say it, Miss Nina, an' de doctah say it, an' her haid don' sot; but I don' sot no sto' by dat way of curin' rheum'tiz."

That was Jerry's subsiding cry. Like many a whiter but not wiser husband, he vanished, to reappear again when

"I don' sot no sto' by that way of curin' rheum'tiz"

needed and when fashion and his wife shall have finished with each other.

Nina had her way. She called a meeting of the girls out on the shady side of the old shack. Here, with much enthusiasm, some tears, and an occasional stuffing of handkerchiefs into laughing mouths, plans were formulated for carrying out Aunt June's wish — that of giving a formal function, "a passin'-on party." Committees on reception, refreshments, and invitation were appointed, and duties outlined. Dorothy was to head the reception committee, Grace Cartwright to manage the refreshments. Nina took the chairmanship of the committee on invitation, but finally was made general manager.

She went immediately into the cabin.

"Aunt June," she said, "we girls have decided to give you a reception here in your house. Suppose you try to tell me now whom you would like to have, and all about it. Do you think you could?"

Aunt June rallied to the situation. She was feminine to the core, and she fully justified the doctor's faith in the good effect of the gratification of a life-long "hanker."

"What does I want, honey? Why, Lawd bress you! jes' lak white ladies. Read it in de papah. Dat's de first thing. Mis' Jawn Jeh'miah Ferguson gwine give a passin'-on party, weathah permittin'. Cullud early or some later. I want a on-dressin' room—'sistin' ladies—an' receivin' line—an'—all."

"Yes, I know that, Aunty, but you

don't need all that name for Uncle Jerry, do you?"

"Ef I can't hev it reg'lah, I don' keer for it, 't all. Cou'se, Jerry hain't got no double name, but white ladies has double name for dey husbands, for marryin' an' 'ceptions, an' Jawn Jeh'miah is my man's 'ception name."

"All right, Aunt June. Don't worry; I 'll fix it. But how about this 'colored, early and late'?"

"Laws, Miss Nina, don' you know white folks won' come when niggers does, nohow? Mos' dem colored folks gwine to dere work on first car, an' won' git to come 'less dey come 'fore seven in de mawnin', er waits 'twell after dey gits home an' cooks de chillun's suppah. Niggers — suah drawed de workin' card — in dis ole world."

"Do you want it in the paper, Auntie?"

"Suah! Suah, I do. In de s'iety papah. You ask de papah man. He suah fix it for ole Aunt June. Done warshed he shu'ts long 'fore dese laundry days. Nevah caved 'roun' none, needah, when starch sticked some. He suah put it in his papah."

Thus empowered, Nina went to the nearest telephone.

"I wish to speak to Miss West, the society reporter," as the office answered.

"She is in Europe."

"Then give me the young lady who has taken her place."

"Can't. It's a man."

"Well, let me speak to him, then," modifying her English. But the tone

changed. "Why Ralph Newton, what are you doing there?" Then a little stiffly: "I wish to give a society item to the paper."

"My! 'Tis good to hear your voice again, Nina. Thought you'd cut a fellow out entirely. The stuff will keep. Can't you talk a little?"

"No, Mr. Newton, not at present. I wish to give an item."

Ralph, feeling the frost along the line, accepted the situation and her message, very kindly suggesting the best phrasing as he wrote, but subconsciously resolving the while that there was one social function which he really must attend, although he had previously avoided such delights, while masquerading as society reporter.

What his pencil said was this:

Mrs. Jerry Ferguson, an elderly colored woman, familiarly known as Aunt June, is critically ill at her home on Alayama Avenue. The doctor reports that her great age makes her case a doubtful one. She has expressed a wish to see all her old friends, and has designated Thursday next as the most convenient time. It is hoped that as many of our people as can find it possible will call at that time.

"Hope that squares the cabbage case," the reporter added to himself, as he wrote the last word. For his mind had gone back to the night of the senior boys' escapade with the Cartwright baby carriage.

Early Wednesday afternoon, Ralph presented himself at the cabin, ostensibly for copy, but really with the hope that he might be allowed to help. He brought with him a large box, bearing a florist's card. Nina met him at

the door. Aunt June was asleep, and their low tones did not reach her consciousness.

"Gee! This is a peach of a place! How shall I write this, Nina?" The young reporter began: "'*The drawing-room was undecorated, but its unusually unique furniture unmatched for style!*'—unmatched is good—'*Inherited from*'—most of the town's prominent citizens! I feel honored; there's my mother's old silver castor! And—never mind, Nina, now—'*The original treatment of the walls!*'—Say, she's got that King of What's Its Name standing on his head—'*included most of the old masters,*'—new ones, too, I guess,—there's the Black Man's Hope. My! Aunt June's long on angels," pointing to one corner where

a copy of the Aurora shared honors with flaming-winged females in angelic guise, who blew little loops of shoe polish ads from their flaring trumpets. "She must be specializing in that line."

"No more of that now, Ralph. This is Auntie's own work. Poor old soul! maybe she has needed to think of angels lately. There! she is waking up. She 'll not recognize you — I hope."

"You enquirin' 'bout flowers, Miss Nina," began the sick woman, taking up the conversation interrupted by her nap. "You put some yard flowers 'roun' in dem fruit cans, I been savin' up."

Ralph thanked his lucky stars. "Here are a few blossoms for you, Aunt June," was his modest remark,

producing the florist's box containing a bunch of One-Week's-Salary roses.

"Lawd bress yo' heart! Dem's fine 'nuff for nigger fun'ral. Put dem on de stove in dat ole teakittle. Dey won' git upsot den, an' ladies jaw 'roun', ef water spill on 'em, lak I seed 'em do."

"Now, Aunty, what about the refreshments?" Grace broke in. "Papa said you're to have what you want. He'll pay for them."

"Don' wan' no sweetened watah ner air wafahs—dat's suttin. Niggers allus hungry. White folks, too, ef dey only 'knowledge it. I wants some fine chicken, an' roas' turkey, an' b'iled ham, an' roas' beef—mebbe don' wan' bofe—an' two or three kin' of bread—cou'se, some coffee,—an' tea,—Irish

'tatoes,—an'—sweet——" she closed her eyes again.

"Now, girls, while she's gone off on a gastronomical excursion, I arrive." Ralph came to the rescue. "If you are going to have a barbecue, you need a commissariat."

"Don' know 'bout no bar-berry-cue,—but I don' wan' nobody at my party gwine 'way hungry. Some white ladies, what boa'ds, say dat dey sometimes has to pay for suppah after—an' culled folks allus got vacantry in de stomick."

"You must not talk so much," said Dorothy, "not now nor to-morrow, neither." She was chairman of reception formalities, and had a double reason for her warning. "Most white ladies talk very little at their own re-

ceptions. Just bow and smile and pass people on."

"Yes, suh," with much vigor, "an' I seed 'em, too! Jes' shake han's high lak, an' pass 'em on, an' pass 'em on—give nex' woman a fo' finger an' pass her on, lookin' out in de hall for nex' one, 'twell Big Bug come, den brighten up lak brass kittle scoured wif vin'gah.

"No, suh! All de folks I circles wif gwine to git glad han' ef it am a ole brack, crooked one, an' some talkin' asides, in equal po'tions an' no guest of honor," wearily,—"nor unhonor—needah."

Dorothy regretted the failure of her disciplinary measure, but tried again. "Whom shall we have to open the door, Aunt June? Just leave it open,

maybe, if the afternoon is warm?" hoping for a compromise.

"How he gwine peep through de crack to 'member 'em quick ef de do's open? Niggers don' has no cards, but it do 'em good to see de plate de culled boy stick out."

"Must he be right black? Won't I do, Aunt June?" Ralph again ventured. "I'm pretty black. Some folks think I'm a regular black sheep," facing about to Nina.

"Ef you open de do', you holp ole Aunt June a heap."

Ralph turned toward the girls with a swing.

"Behold the grand past master of etiquette and decorum at the court of St. James, Peter, Paul, and the rest of them. Watch me to-morrow. Mr.

L. Chesterfield will be outclassed in his 'How-to-do-it dope.' The society reporter acting as footman, house servant, social adviser, *et al.* I foresee my career. I'll be here by the time the morning stars sing together and the surviving roosters in Alayama Avenue begin to salute the day — to let in the first shaggy son of Ham and be heap big chief."

"Ralph! You must not make fun. This is not that kind of a party. Poor old Aunt June may not live long, and she takes this seriously."

"So do I, Nina. It is a matter of life and future happiness to me. Aunt June's case is n't in it with mine for real danger."

"Auntie, let Uncle Jerry tend the door to-morrow. He knows all the

folks," said Nina, desperately — in answer to Unk's signal.

"No, suh! I ain' gwine has my ole man 'roun' my party. Not nowhar 'roun'. White ladies make dey men eat downtown on 'ception days an' don' let 'em come home 'twell las' woman's lef'. Jerry no better 'n white men. Don' wan' him nowhar 'roun'."

"Lan' sake, Juny, whar you gwine put me to-morrow? Seem lak I jes' has to be 'roun'. Ef you-all takes dem talkin' ha'nts, who keer for you den, Juny?" meekly inquired old Unk.

"You-all kin shet youse'f up in de hen roost, Jerry. Done clean'd out, an' hens shet out all summer. Cou'se we mought has to usin' dat for ladies' on-dressin' room, too, — but you kin shin out de alley winder ef you sees 'em

"You all kin has you' own way"

comin'. Don' wan' folks say ole June got no mannersment."

"You-all kin has yo' own way, jes' lak white woman's party," was Unk's quiet reply; but he writhed inwardly as he went out to inspect his quarters for the morrow, and to prepare the "on-dressin' room" for its new honors.

Chapter Three

The "Passin'-On" of the Colored Guests

CHAPTER III

THE "PASSIN'-ON" OF THE COLORED GUESTS

"PARTY" MORNING found everything ready at 004&. Woman's passion for slavish party preparation had its way until it reached the saturation point in Grace's exclamation: "Thank goodness, there's no attic to put in order, nor cellar stairs to scrub, for this function, anyhow!"

However, nothing present escaped. The cabin had been cleaned to chilliness, decorated to distraction, and refurnished until it ached from holding it all. The very yard had been swept

and, as Ralph declared, "scrubbed and dusted until not a fishworm dared show its head all night, but went to bed supperless." And Ralph knew, for he was the first to arrive. When he took his place as door-opener, he declared:

"I am not only the Columbus of this occasion, but the Goddess of Liberty as well. See me welcome the immigrants! Don't I need a torch, too, to hold high over my head? Darkness threatens."

Nina, everywhere at once, in her character of general manager, was wisely silent. For a colored man was already there — a negro policeman, Mr. Theophilus Bryan, who, at Aunt June's request, had been invited to be present and "assist through." His blue uni-

form, with resplendent star and buttons, was a compromise measure for "Mis' Morton's man servant," whom the assisting ladies had ruled out as inadmissible.

The old woman seemed very ill that morning. The girls were a-tremble with fear for the day's outcome, as they looked at her, lying there so still and lifeless, her massive, raw-boned face like a great black medallion, cut out by snowy pillow and enfolded neck-piece, and her rusty brown hands, from which the toil callouses were pitifully scaling, folded in half-open uselessness across her breast.

Jerry shared the girls' alarm, but, with masculine instinct, calmed his troubled soul at Grace's improvised back-yard lunch counter. When suffi-

ciently cheered, he spoke in slow, solemn tones and with bowed head:

"De day of time am changin'. Sho'ly, I nevah seed no such carryin' on 'fore free time. De Lawd know! Mebbe He know. But ef dis day's hellebeloo make me a widow-man, I boun' to 'spress myself to Him 'bout it—ef I gits read out of de chu'ch an' out of Hebben. But she say she don' wan' ole Jerry nowhar 'roun'—not nowhar 'roun'." So into his banishment he went,—the unused chicken house to which Aunt June had sentenced him.

At early work-going time, the colored people began to arrive by ones, twos, and threes, as they happened to fall together, their dress and manner compromised by the occasion. Their garments were a mixture of working

clothes, cast-off finery, and "Sabbath handsomes"—the last worn only temporarily—very temporarily, indeed, as the newspaper-wrapped packages left at the gate testified. Their manner was uniformly that of sincere love and pity for old Aunt June and of reverential awe for the social function now imminent.

As they approached the door, Ralph asked the name of each guest, and loudly called it out. Aunt June, refusing to notice the arrival until properly acclaimed, shook hands formally, with only small talk portions, "passin' on" each guest to the assisting ladies, for feeding purposes.

"How you do, Mis' Slautah?" and "I's makin' out po'ly myse'f," with suitable changes of name were her

replies to the kind-voiced greetings of her guests.

Occasionally, her years of pent-up feeling overcame her feebleness and fine-lady manners. Then she indulged in a few remarks: "Jes' passin' out to de dinin'-room, Mis' Hawkins. Heah, Miss Nina, you give Mis' Hawkins her secon' cup of coffee, wif plenty of cream in it. Lan' know, she don' git none whar she gwine warsh to-day, at ole Mis' Neals's. Jes' blue skim' milk at dat house for niggers' warsh-day coffee.

"Don' let Mis' Henry pass dat meat dish by. Don' you 'member dat ole Jedge Gray allus eat downtown warsh days? Dey don' has no noontime meat cookin' 'twell suppah on dem days, after niggers done gone home.

"Quit yo' 'bukin' Lilly Fo'tune for laughin'," she continued, as a neatly dressed mulatto girl suppressed a giggle at the head-shake of a somber sister. "Let Lilly laugh her fill heah at Mis' Ferguson's party. Lawd know, she don' do none in ole Mis' Martin's cellah, whar she 'bliged to iron all day on dem ruffle' party stuffs. I done tole Mis' Martin, when I cleanin' 'bove stairs: 'Lan' sake, don' all time be hammerin' an' hammerin' dem gals for talkin' an' laughin' at dey ironin'! Ought to thank de good Lawd dey's decent 'nuff to earn dey livin' dat way. Dey mought be stealin' or wuss, lak some other triflin' niggers. Don' you-all drop no money into de preacher box an' all time hammerin' Lilly!' I tell her. 'Preacher man slip it in he

pocket — but de Lawd don' tech dat money wif a fishin' cane,' I say."

"There, there, Auntie, you are wearing yourself out," interposed Nina, who succeeded in keeping down the greetings to hand-shakes for some time, while the invalid rested and indulged in the fine-lady habit of "passin' 'em on."

But when Ralph announced "Mrs. Harrison Wall and daughter," and the parties advanced to greet their hostess, she again erupted.

"Moughty glad to see you-all, Sis Wall. Is you continuin' a-scrubbin' dem ole spit boxes downtown to buy dem Latin books for Henyetta? Lawd know, He got a high-school *di*plome waitin' for yo' ole han' in de Hebbenly lan', same as Henyetta's, wif ribbon

on, an' all, ef you don' 'quire one heah.

"Henyetta," she went on, slowly, "ef I don' saw you — no mo' — you call to min' — dat you — nevah look'n down — on yo' ole muddah — an' call her ole — fogyism — even ef you is stuck-up — school teacher! White skin — don' make no bettah muddah dan yours, li'l Henyetta. Min' dat out — ef ole Aunt June don' live to see you craduate at yo' school. Will you partaken some 'freshments? Jes' pass into de dinin' 'partment." And her voice was gone.

Some of the guests were peremptorily called upon the carpet, but the old woman's condition and the good food in prospect prevented replies in kind.

"Good mawnin', Miss Wildeson." This to one who, arrayed in a baby-

blue silk dress and white lace hat, fluttered across the cabin floor. "Don' forgit to rense dem clothes through two watahs an' clean up de basement. I hear'n tell you done forgot it las' time. Dat laundry git yo' job nex'. No laundry evah got my warsh place —but m e b b e now dey—will——" And the old voice trailed off in a grief-broken strain.

"M i s s Gloriana Johnson," was Ralph's announcement, as, with a sweeping bow, he ushered in a slender yellow girl, whose airy party raiment, somewhat bedraggled, was held in place by many pins. Her numerous petticoats were festooned into unequal lengths by the same method. She flew to Aunt June's bedside and clasped her hand.

"Dem pins suah b'long in de Bad Place"

"My! Aunty! how well you look in your pretty white bed this morning," exclaimed Gloriana. "I don't believe you're very sick."

"Plenty sick 'nuff, Glory. I too sick, I reckon, to wear yo' scan'lous pin clo's. I suah afraid if I go to Hebben I meet ole Missus up dar first thing, an' she say, 'Don' I teach you not to pin up yo' baik lak dat, Juny?' Don' you know, Glory, mos' of de stylish angels wear draw-strings?" Aunt June's great signboard finger pointed toward the corner where were pasted her flowing-robed females, caught first-hand from the shoe polish posters. "Buttons good 'nuff for de earf, Glory — draw-strings for Hebben! But dem pins! Dey suah b'long in — de — Bad — Place."

Miss Gloriana Johnson disappeared into the dinin' 'partment, where it was noticed that she ate little, and that she soon "went away sorrowful."

Just then Ralph sang out, "Mr. W. A. Walker," and a fine-faced, well-dressed young colored man clasped Aunt June's outstretched hand.

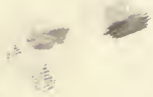
"Moughty glad you foun' ole Aunt's do' dis mawnin'. Wish you-all spare time to sing jes' one song 'fore you go to yo' fine grocery sto' job. Seem lak—I hone for you choir boys' singin' mo' dan I hone for angel ban'."

"Why, I'll sing if you want me to, Aunt June. What shall I sing?"

"Don' sing no hymn tune. Sing sompin' lak 'Love an' Lady' songs at white folks' 'ceptions."

Stepping into the middle of the

Fixing his eyes on the dusky face, the singer began



dusky room and fixing his eyes on the duskier face of the old woman, which, with its far-away look, seemed for a time to be alone in the cabin, the singer began:

> Darling, I am growing old;
> Silver threads among the gold
> Shine upon my brow to-day.
> Life is fading fast away.

As the tender words floated out upon the morning air, in the rich melody of the negro voice, all hearts within its radius melted to softness, to common love and common ecstasy of fine feeling. And with the last line,

> Life is fading fast away,

Aunt June closed her weary eyes for a rest that might be momentary or might be eternal. Ralph stepped behind

the door — to adjust his necktie. A dainty white apron corner found the moistened eyes of the "general manager." Most of the guests fled to the back yard, escorted by Policeman Bryan, to find Uncle Jerry rapidly beating it to cover, where, within the sheltering walls of the chicken house, he leaned his woolly head against an empty perch and moaned out his old heart in a monologue of prayer and pleading:

"Lawd, I knows I ornery mean,— an' don' work to suit her,— an' I humbly 'fess I layin' out to cast it up 'bout dis heah party foolishness, an' bein' 'bliged to stay in dis ole chicken house; but, Lawd, yo' arm am long, an' ef you-all save her dis time, I promise to move in s'ciety reg'lar — reg'-

lar — an' never kickin' none, ef you spares her dis time."

Aunt June was evidently unable to go on in her present condition. A council was held in the back yard, and it was decided, since the noon hour was near, to close the front door, deny entrance to the few guests who might appear, and, after the invalid awoke, to persuade her to give up the afternoon party.

"Let's quit now, without asking her," was Dorothy's advice. "She can't go on with this — she is too weak to stand it."

"She's too weak to risk the disappointment, too," ventured Ralph, whose heart was still tender from the song, but who recovered speedily to suggest that a sign be put on the front door:

"Gone to Dinner," or "Closed for Repairs."

But the others preferred to accept Policeman Bryan's offer to "guard de front entrance."

"Patterole it, you mean?" asked old Unk Junk, with the memory of the slave days strong upon him.

"Not patterole, pahtic'lah for to arrest nobody. Jes' say, 'Mis' Ferguson not to home,' which is de only proper society way of answerin' truthful."

The young ladies, seeing that it was impossible to reconcile Gotham and Africa without violating a rule or two somewhere, went to arrange the family luncheon. Later, on the waking of the invalid, they went into the room to begin arbitration.

"Don't you think, Aunt June, since

you are so tired, you would better put off the rest of the party until some day when you feel stronger?" was the general manager's initiative.

"Nah, suh! I'm keepin' a eye single to dis here 'ception. Ef de Lawd gwine take me, He won' stop for strangers, nohow. Mebbe you might git dat snake ile and *re*ply it to my right arm. Mebbe hit's de rheum'tiz achin' an' not de han'-shake achin'. But white folks dat's comin' dis aft'noon don' shake hearty, lak niggers does."

After prolonged search by Uncle Jerry, the snake oil was located in the "deesh" cupboard, which, under temporary banishment, was enjoying its plebeian self out near the alley fence. He "*re*plied" the oil ceremonially, as if it were a sacrament; then,

with a feeling of kinship for the banished bottle, was returning with it to their twin Elbas, when Nina asked:

"Aunt June, don't you think Uncle Jerry could help out in here this afternoon? Your arm might need rubbing."

"Jerry ain't ovahpowahin' 'nuff for no man servant. He all time bowin' low lak Kaintuk massa. Dese Kansas folks has to have de gran', leanin'-back kin'. Jerry no swell, ovahpowahin' kin'. I askin' Mistah *Pro*liceman Bryan to 'ficiate 'tween heah an' de do', sayin', 'Will you-all walk upstairs?' Cou'se, ain' no upstairs to go to—but—"

"I lak to serve you, Mis' Ferguson," assented Mr. Bryan, "an' I b'lieve, further, dat ef a small deesh was placed nigh onto yo' bedside, as dese white folks comin' in, wif a little

silvah in, to be a startah, I am suah you would,—well, ole Mis' Brown done dat when she give her birfday, an' some say she re'lized 'bout two dollahs from it,—yes, sah, aftah de startah was done took out."

Aunt June turned her head to the wall a minute before replying. "You suah is ig'nunt of s'iety. Don' you know dey all passes in by li'l tickets at de do'? I don' wan' you actin' irreg'lar lak, but jes' be puttin' de tickets on li'l pan an' carryin' 'em to ole June."

The next remark of the old colored woman proved that these friends, who thought they knew her, had but dimly comprehended the deeper longing of her soul.

"Miss Grace, honey bud," she said, "Aunt June wan's you to git dat li'l

book you fin' in de bureau drawer whar dem grave clo's is,—an' my spec's offun de clock she'f, an' den don' you speak no mo' 'twell I say."

Grace, half frightened at the unusual term of endearment, and wholly fearing what might come, brought out what seemed to be a student's exercise book, very much soiled and worn from long use. Aunt June took it and, with much focusing of old eyes, turning of leaves, and mumbling of lips, tried to read from its pencil-written pages.

She soon exhausted herself at this, and leaned back hopelessly on her pillow. Then, in a low tone to Grace, that the rest might not hear, she said:

"Seem lak I got no tas'e for readin' dis aft'noon, Miss Grace. You is pure good, honey! Won' you read it

for ole June?—jes' low lak—to yo' ole Aunt June."

Grace took the book with a consenting nod to the request for silence. This was unconsciously disregarded more and more as she read the astonishing contents. For here were rows and rows of long words, many of difficult pronunciation, some of them obsolete, but each written out carefully, with its meaning following, as in a dictionary. She began to spell the words, as in a spelling class at school:

A-NOM'-A-LY—"Deviation from the common rule or analogy; irregularity."

AB'-RA-CA-DAB'-RA—"A combination of letters without sense, formerly used as a charm against fevers; unmeaning babble."

"Why, Auntie June! where in the world did you get this crazy book, and what do you want with it this afternoon?"

"Dat was Miss 'Liza Speedeh, a culled gal, given it to me, honey. She was usen it when she was writin' her craduatin' papah in de high school. I wan's some bettah wu'ds dan common for dis aft'noon 'casion, an' I done forgittin' so, sence dis 'fliction. Des' fin' some me-je-ate-siz'd ones, Gracie, an' speak 'em plain to yo' ole Aunt."

"My! Auntie, you can't use these horrid long words, and folks would n't understand you if you did."

"Some of 'em I could use, honey, ef you speak 'em plain to make me 'member."

"Why do you try such foolishness?

Your own words are all right — just the kind we all love to hear. The folks would not want you to change a single one of them. Throw away this silly book, and talk in your own way."

"Ef you-all won' read 'em to me, Miss Grace,— but ole June nevah had no chance to l'arn only a-b abs. Jes' only de Lawd evah teach' me His Bible wu'ds, night times, when ole Mis' not seein' me. Den I spell 'em out an' say, 'Now, Lawd, tell me de meanin' of dat big one,' an' He suah 'splained it.

"I has to turn to de Lawd now, ef you won' he'p me out. I say,"— closing her eyes,—"'Let de wu'ds of my mouf be 'ceptable in Dy sight, O Lawd!' Ef de Lawd 'cepts 'em, de white folks 'bliged to. But *I — keeps dat — li'l book.*"

Chapter Four

"De White Folks I Circles Wif"

CHAPTER IV

"DE WHITE FOLKS I CIRCLES WIF"

SO IT was that she still clasped her treasured book when the first afternoon guests arrived. A breezy group of city officials, routed for downtown, and led by the Mayor himself, blew in through the marvelous yard. Overlooking the conventionality of the door-opener, and the obsequious attacks of Brother Bryan, they walked straight to Aunt June's bedside. They were genuinely glad to see her, and much affected by the changed appearance of their old friend. One by one, they shook her hand with the impress-

ive man-silence for suffering helplessness. At last the Mayor found his voice:

"I did not realize that you were so ill, Aunt June. How long have you been confined to your bed?"

Auntie, very happy, but a little confused at the suddenness of the situation, tightened her grasp on her little book and answered:

"I been lyin' heah 'bout seven exzecutive weeks, suh."

"Well, Auntie, that is as trying as a Mayor's job, sure," broke in another, "but you'll both soon be out now."

This loosened the tension of tightened heart-strings and purse-strings, too, as the little dish which Policeman Bryan surreptitiously had placed on a nearby table, could testify. It held sev-

eral silver pieces besides the "stahtah" when the gentlemen departed.

And thus it went on during the long afternoon. Incongruous situations sustained themselves and unusual conversations were heard. Topics tabooed at parties were discussed freely by these people of different social rank. For many walks of life were here represented. Some came from its crooked paths, some from its peaceful ways and stately boulevards. But they had one point of tangency—a common wish to bring happiness to the old colored woman whose kindly heart and faithful service was the lodestone of their coming.

"My! I've done it now!" ejaculated one of Nina's girl friends, as she made a flying leap into the back yard.

"Nina, what would you say to me, if I should express a polite hope, at your party, 'that you would soon be able to iron my shirt-waists again'?"

"Just what Aunt June said, I hope. What happened?"

"Well, you'd never do it better. She surely reduced me to zero. Just calmly looked over my new hat and 'gretted dat a young lady of my cibility had n' no better raisin!' No, thank you, no refreshments for me, 'less you got some humble pie. Here! keep my hat, and loan me that little lace jacket. I'm going back to try it again. I'll chance her not recognizing me, and I can't go home this way."

On the crest of the next crowd, out she came.

"Great! Girls, I talked of the par-

tiest things I could think of — the kind you can give an oration on, thinking how horrid your hostess looks at the same time, and never make an error in your grammar. Poor Auntie is lying there yet with that glorified smile of approval on her face. Well, girls, I can always remember that, anyhow, if — I don't see her any more." An ice soon dispelled her fears, as ices do when life is young.

Having seen the crowd for the time disappear streetward, Nina went into the cabin. She was pleased to see Aunt June resting, with closed eyes. Only one guest was there — a queer, half-scared little woman, who was evidently a new arrival. Ralph, in assisting her to feel at home, was relieving her of the many bundles she carried, one of

which was a leaky package of pancake flour. While he was depositing all these safely behind the door, the little creature, with true feminine instinct for the social parade now pending, began making preparatory changes in her toilet.

Her large, shapeless black hat, which had mercifully submerged much of her prematurely wrinkled, leather-like face, was removed and entrusted to Ralph. Then she endeavored, with saliva-moistened fingers, to persuade her sparse, dun-colored locks back toward a button-like knot on the top of her head, brushed the pancake flour from her shabby skirt, and dexterously decoyed a bit to her face. Next she made ineffectual efforts to establish reciprocity between her skirt and a recalcitrant

calico shirt-waist, and, pulling a pair of white cotton gloves over her distorted, weather-beaten hands, with no sense of impropriety in her public "slickin' up," she composed her trouble-dented features into a semblance of sociability, and ambled uncertainly over toward her hostess.

But old Aunt June! She was radiant with welcome. No one in all the day received such a smile and hand-shake. With her old black face aglow, and with feeble hand outstretched, she hardly allowed the poor woman to finish her speech:

"Don't guess you know me, Missus Ferguson, but my little crippled boy he made me come, 'cause you always speak so good to him when the children wheel him apast here."

"Don' know you, honey! Bress yo' heart! I cog-ni-zen you in Hebben. I don' know yo' name, but de Lawd—He keep it mark' down. You-all done set down in de street car seat one day by de side of ole June, when no other white pusson would set dar, but kep' jammin' de islan's full an' hangin' on to de straps like meat hams. You suah talk good, too, 'twell I wa'n't bilin' mad no mo', an' don't has to 'tend lak I lookin' fru de car window."

"Yes, mom, Missus Ferguson," slowly came the answer; "I am most too done up to stand sometimes, comin' from work."

Aunt June's attention was momentarily distracted, else her angel friend's pinions had lost a feather or two at that juncture.

"You-all mus' taken a goodly lotion of cake to yo' li'l son when you returnin' home, Mis' Lady." The society manner was resumed, and the little book joggled her elbow. "Has you ever *re*plied snake ile to dat cripple' laig of his'n?"

When "Mis' Lady" returned from "de dinin' 'partment," to rescue her pancake flour from its temporary oblivion behind the door, it was evident that she had availed herself liberally of Aunt June's suggestion about the "lotion of cake," if the large-sized bundle, hung to her right arm by the securely tied corners of an empty flour sack, was an admissible witness.

As the afternoon grew late, many people found their way down the narrow street to the little shanty at 004&.

These were, for the most part, Aunt June's old employers; but the crowd was swelled by their friends and acquaintances, newcomers in the town, whose interest had been attracted by the newspaper notice or the unusual house. Besides, there were many of the idly curious, to whom the open door and refreshments were sufficient invitation.

Auntie was very happy. Betimes she played fine lady to her heart's content, as she did when she received her "street car" friend. Betimes she seemed a weakened invalid, with tremulous voice and shaky hand; but, following the administration of a cup of strong tea, much of her old-time felicity of speech returned, and she displayed, without reserve or bitterness, her keen knowl-

edge of human frailty, acquired by the long wash-day association with those whom she designated "de white folks I circles wif."

"You sure true frien' of ole Aunt June, but I'm anxious you hurryin' an' taken dat mohgage offun ole Dick Carter's po' starve' mule! He been payin' you-all a dollah a week 'bout long 'nuff now." This to a banker whose auto now waited outside, and at whose cashier's window, it was said, many troubled colored folk often waited also.

"Glad he got his!" the next man in the line said to himself, as he heard. His own turn came, however, when the black Nemesis said:

"Min' how yo' li'l gal cryin' dat day when you cuff her years wif de mawnin' papah? I done tole her dat she got

no bus'ness singin' 'roun' 'fore her hungry paw git 'is breakfas'."

Then one of the town's rising citizens, who was "making" this, among other important vote-getting "dates" of the afternoon, was startled into rather hurried hand-shaking by his chauffeur's tooting horn. "Glad to see you looking so fine, Aunt June. You are my wife's prime favorite, when it comes to help. I'm a little rushed just now — that's my car."

"I s'pose you-all wan' to be settlin' for dat autymobile 'fore you pays for dat las' two weeks' warsh I done for you?"

The candidate fled, convinced that it would take more of the "ready" to carry that precinct than he happened to have about him at present.

"Dese autymobiles, dey's moughty hard on de cullud people,—keep 'em all time hoppin' 'way from in front of 'em, or jerkin' our li'l warshin' wagons outen dey way; an' cain't no *pro*liceman ketch 'em, when dey's owin' folks. Sorry I bother dat genl'man—but I moughty tired climbin' dem stairs, axin' for dat money."

And on and on went the startling talk, until Ralph declared that he learned more real town history that afternoon than would ever be recorded by the Historical Society. "And all wash-day doings, too," he added, little recking that on those festal days family skeletons walk forth unabashed and human nature flauntingly parades its hidden need of suds and soap.

He learned of "ole Mis' B., who

done hangin' out dry sheets every week, so' her warshin' look bigger an' make her standin' good 'mongst de neighbors"; of "dem Joneses, what nevah had no table napkins, but lots of party fixin's"; of the "scan'lous way you gals sass yo' po' ole maw, 'cause she ast you-all to warsh de deeshes; ole Aunt June moughty nigh whop' you"; how "dat younges' gal of Mis' Perkin jes' pesterin' ole June to fin' out all 'bout how her beau's maw's silver am marked"; and all about "dat ole li'l leaky one tub an' broken wringah in Mr. C.'s basement, wif all dem handsome silk socks of his'n. I suah 'fraid I tearin' 'em."

And then came a whispered warning to one immaculate young gentleman: "Lan' sake, Jimmie, don' you

dare removin' yo' coat, whar dem s'ciety folks is, 'cause dat shu't you wearin' got fine bosom, but got de baik 'most tore' off. My min' done carries me back to de las' time I warsh it, an' cou'se it's worser now!"

Some of the hearers followed Jimmie to see how he conducted himself in the face of that revelation. Others of more sympathetic nature lingered to hear what the next man would get. Their interest was lessened when they learned that this was Dr. Barman, clearly on professional business, and who was the originator of this home treatment for rheumatism with party complications.

Accompanying the family friend was a well known surgeon, who watched with interest while Dr. Barman took

temperature and observed symptoms. Finally, calling Nina, he said:

"I believe she'll have to stop this thing pretty soon. I did not count on so high a temperature. Has she talked much?"

Nina admitted there had been some conversation, and agreed to the stipulation that there must be less of it.

The invalid heard this, and pleadingly asked, "Would it hurt me to use jes' a few big wu'ds, ef I committen de li'l ones?"

Dr. Barman assented. Then, as he took Nina aside to finish his instructions, the surgeon who had come with him approached Aunt June, telling her his name.

"I know you-all," forgetting her promise not to talk. "You is dat cut-

tin' doctor. Cou'se, you is welcome to my party, Doctor, but you need n' be plannin' no cuttin' 'roun' dis ole nigger. No, suh! Dere's a cullud man up heah, dey say, dat you has clean' dat ole nigger all out but de shell of him. No, suh, Doctor! Ole Aunt June gwine to Hebben jes' as de Lawd made her! He smahtah dan you is."

The next guests were a group of colored people, who entered with modest manner and interested air.

"I had an engagement later in the day," one of the party said to Nina, "and wish to pay my respects to Mrs. Ferguson. We have known her and Uncle Jerry for a long time. We have no desire to intrude at an hour when the colored people are not expected, but we could not come later."

Beyond asking the young woman, "Is you still pursuin' yo' cou'se in college?" the hostess did little talking—not so much from the doctor's caution as from the fact that she did not take the same interest in the prosperous, well-educated people of her own race that she did in those whom she thought needed care, guidance, or reproof. This made Nina careful to accompany the party to the refreshment table and attend to their comfort in every way. She was glad to renew her acquaintance with the young college girl. They had been classmates in high school, where the color lines are often intersected by those of scholarship and good breeding.

Inside the cabin now, a truce was on. This time it was Ralph and Aunt June.

They were alone for a few moments. The young man was quiet, thinking that the invalid was asleep. Suddenly, in slow, solemn tones, her voice stole out:

"How you-all maw comin' on?"

"Very well, I thank you, Mrs. Ferguson." Ralph was startled into the manner of a ten-year-old at his first party. He wished one of the girls would come.

"How you-all paw comin' on?"

"He is quite well, too, Mrs. Ferguson." What was coming next? Ralph contemplated calling some one. She went on:

"How is you makin' out, yo'-se'f, dese days, Mr. Ralph? You suah been moughty 'commo*dat*in' 'roun' heah dis aft'noon. Ole Aunt June boun' to ask

de good Lawd blessin' you in de basket an' de sto'room for all you doin'."

"Don't mention it, Mrs. Ferguson." He walked over towards the bed. "To tell the truth, I have always been a good bit ashamed of that beastly kid trick we played on you and Uncle Jerry, throwing cabbages and all that. You remember, don't you? I am mighty glad to have a chance to tell you."

Just then Nina came in. Aunt June put out her hand to Ralph.

"Come by an' shake dis ole han', boy! All dat clean wipe' out of my min'. Doin' good am heap sight bettah dan sayin' good!"

Then the hostess spirit returned. "How yo' maw makin' out dese days, Mr. Ralph? Miss Nina, you-all takin' dis fine young man into de dinin' 'part-

ment an' gittin' him some 'freshments."

Nina hesitated for an instant. The keen old eyes missed something from the girl's manner.

"Huccom you-all not clever now, no mo', lak you bein' to dem las' batch of cullud folks? You quit lookin' sassy an' 'bukin' wif yo' purty eyes!" For there was scorn in the girl's glance. She evidently objected to this method of reconciliation.

The young chap showed his first sign of fighting back. With quick step and flashing eyes, he led the way past the "dinin' 'partment" into a vine-sheltered path. Here he turned and faced the offending young lady, who had followed.

"That was about the limit in there," he began, angrily. "Can't a fellow

sow a single wild oat, nor cabbage, neither? The one I threw in here at Unk Junk that evening was wild enough — missed the old fellow a foot. What's more, I'd shy another right now, if I had it. Sorry I ever packed that old buggy of yours back and put it out there in the yard. I would have smashed it if I had thought you'd ever act like this. You could be decent enough to those darkies — but me! — Oh, I'm quite another story! You used to act as if you cared, in the old high-school days. But lately ——"

As he swung into the path again, Nina stepped in front of him and looked frankly up into his angry face.

"Can't you see, you blind old gentleman, that you *are* quite another story? I was wrong in there."

She held out her hand. Who could resist her? Not her old high-school sweetheart. He took the offered hand. Truth to tell, he took all the hands in sight, and wished for more. The rest is private history.

They took the long way to the "dinin' 'partment," around through the front yard. As they lingered a moment in the quaint place, among the flowers, the mischievous girl said: "My! But you were angry! Would you really like to smash this old buggy of mine?"

He laughed, a bit shamefacedly:

"Not for countless plunks. That was only a figure of speech. 'Trenchant verbosity'—you know. You surely don't mind that."

There was silence for a moment, and then she said, soberly:

"There is one old buggy out here, Ralph, that I know you'll never harm —the one over there with the little white flowers in it."

"You are right again, little girl. Right again!"

The words came slowly. She vaguely regretted what she had said.

"Oh, well, let's get some lunch. We may be needed inside the house any minute."

As they strolled back, Ralph repeated her words:

"*We may be needed,* eh? Say, Nina, as a rising young lady society reporter, I dare not imperil my English, nor my budding affections, either. Honestly, was that an editorial '*we*' you used just now?"

Chapter Five

Where Social Circles Intersect

CHAPTER V

WHERE SOCIAL CIRCLES INTERSECT

NINA'S answer was lost in Grace's voice from the door, telling them to "come quick." Fearful, they hurried in, to find that 'twas not a physician who was needed, but a social arbiter.

The situation was critical. Mrs. J. George Wetherington's stylish turnout was drawn up at the gate. Her liveried coachman, footman, and maid-of-all-work, combined into the personable colored man, William, was even now assisting her to alight. In a few minutes she would be upon them—

she, whose raiment was always in accord with this morning's eastern fashion quotation! she, whose parties were town history; rooms the darkest at the daytime doings — the very lightest at the evening functions — and always so packed that to lift a cautious kerchief to a bourgeois brow was to prod an honored guest with a well-meaning but clumsy elbow!

"Why, they keep her name set up in the *Clarion* office, to save time, ready for her daily bulletin," was Ralph's remark.

"Well, she is upon us now, at any rate, and this lady will have to do her handsomest. Expect we'd better hide all that heavy food in the bushes, and serve her aërated water and Auntie June's 'wafahs'." This was Grace's

contribution, as she scudded to her task as head waiter.

Oh, to make everything go right just now and to please the sick woman, who had absorbed most of her "party hankerin'" from "holpin' at Mis' Wethahin'ton's 'ceptions"! And not one of Aunt June's "assisting ladies" had ever managed a party before!

"Look a-coming!" sang out Ralph.

The situation was complicated as well as critical. A stout peddler lady, who infested the neighborhood, had followed Mrs. J. George up the path, and was marooned under the insufficient shade of a bush, fanning herself into breath, and out of color, preparatory to charging the cabin. A providential delay was this, preventing a probable collision between labor and

leisure, and giving Mrs. J. George an opportunity to make a stage entrance.

And it was well done. The reception committee's greetings were gracefully acknowledged. Mr. Policeman Bryan's invitation to "passin' upstairs" was refused in a considerate and ladylike manner. Then, preceded by that curving "gen'l'man," who bore aloft her "name ticket in de li'l pan," in a best arm waiter style, Mrs. J. George made a slow, triumphal procession across the room.

Though the sun denied it, Aunt June's life clock was striking twelve. As she watched this finished product cross her humble floor, in all the glory of summer dressmaking and flaunting, feathered millinery, Dame Fashion herself seemed to have arrived. Mrs.

Aunt June watched this finished product cross her humble floor

Wetherington stood at the bedside for a moment longer than the social law requires, giving her old friend a liberal "lotion of party talk." Aunt June, supremely happy, lay basking in the effulgence of this crowning moment.

"How — Mr.— George — stan'in' it dese — days?" she asked, not so much for information as to prolong the pleasure of the occasion.

'Twas a fatal delay. "When Cæsar had crossed the Rubicon, Pompey prepared for battle." Substitute suitable nouns, and you have the situation. While this exchange of courtesies was going on, the peddler lady had not been idle. Backed by her overcoming personality and expansive physique, she had flung aside Ralph's "Your name, Madam?" and, with the gait

and manner of a charging hippopotamus, was in the center of the little room unfolding and displaying her goods and, in the best school-for-agents manner, disgorging her selling speech from one corner of her spacious mouth, while from the other she issued quieting proclamations to her interrupters:

"Can't I sell some o' you something to-day? Oh, no, I'll not bother her any — pins uv all kinds, needles, face-bleach, beads, buttons — I'm a pore woman with six children and a husband that's sick most uv the time,— hair dyes," glancing portentously at Mrs. J. George.

"Just step this way, where it's cooler, Madam," ingratiatingly suggested Ralph, in a low tone. "There are chairs out here."

"Thank-ee, Mister, but"—raising her voice and continuing to glance at the woman of fashion—"this is the best kind o' stuff fur the complexion—can't tell it at this distance from——" But the low-keyed tones of Mrs. J. George neither sharped nor flatted, as a less perfect lady's might have done.

Policeman Bryan was wild. In response to the girls' frantic pantomime, he was making little circling excursions about the enemy, as if in search of a point of attack, uttering meanwhile low-voiced threats:

"Ef you-all don' stop dis racket an' beat it out of heah——"

"Lay on, MacDuff!" Ralph was having the time of his life.

Entirely undisturbed by the colored gentleman's gyrations, the peddler lady

went cruelly on, her shrill voice filling all the place. "I've got some great medicine here, too — Dr. Small's Kurake. Cures ever'thing — jes' ever kind uv ache er pain."

Quick as a flash, Ralph's hand was rattling the silver in his pocket, and he ran around in front of the rotund lady, with the air of a man who has seen the light and means to follow it.

"Here, Madam, let me look at that medicine a minute — lady with a bad case of refractory heart trouble — I'd like her to try a bottle of it. Tried everything, but nothing seems to do her any good. Step over towards the door. I'll read the testimonials, and if they sound all right, I might buy it regularly."

It worked — that is, the ruse did.

With timely jingles of silver, Ralph led the commercial lady over near the doorway, then by degrees quite outside the door. And, like a collapsed cyclone, she presently ambled out of the yard —conquering, or conquered—who shall say?

The young newspaper man returned to the room, with tightly closed lips and an unreadable face. Without a glance at his friends, he walked over and placed a large bottle ("dollar size," Grace said) on the clock shelf, beside Aunt June's spectacle case.

And Mrs. J. George? Ah, she knew her business and worked at it consistently! With the help of a fluttering little fan, she dallied with the unconventionalities, and though her eyes

flashed occasionally, she finally went as she came — Aunt June's exemplar in social affairs. "Good-by, Aunt June. I have really stayed too long, but your house is so dear. Yes, I'll have some refreshments, though, and William is waiting." And she, too, vanished.

Mrs. Ferguson was the only one with enough breath left to speak, and she turned wearily on her pillow and drawled: "Am dat peddlin' woman clean gone? Wisht I got myse'f li'l pair dem pink pearline beads."

Ralph fell out of the door, and the incident closed for all but Mrs. J. George's coachman. "William" was a late importation from "San Louie," and a wise and wily person sure was he. While the source of his monthly

wage check was effulging the cabin with her presence, William was busy attending the party himself. Not, however, in the capacity of a servant. But it took skill. For while the lady would sit closely at his side on a buggy seat in the trips about town, much to the amusement of these Western people, he well knew that she would never share a hostess' hand-shake with him. So William, to use his own construction, "cons'quented." When his employer was safely indoors, he went swiftly to an old man whom he saw in the back yard. Not knowing the Fergusons, he wished to feel his way. By this same old gentleman he was led to the lunch table and fed to fullness. He then hurried around to the front door, without discovering that

the accommodating old gentleman who followed him was the exiled host of this occasion.

All this was timed so accurately that when Mrs. J. George's high-heeled boots were tapping the splinters of the back door sill, William of "San Louie" was carefully lifting his red-buttoned patent-leather pumps over the front threshold. A moment later he stood within the little room, in all the glory of his half-livery — which is about all that Kansas people will stand for. With an ivory-lined smile, he began:

"Ah'm Mistah William Jeems Evans, formahly of San Louie, and Ah'm engagin' in bus'ness in yo' town at de present time."

"Whar you-all workin'?" 'Twas

surely Aunt June, but it sounded like the snap of a rat-trap.

"Ah 'm engagin' in de livah'ry bus'-ness, an',"—a glance showed that the wearer of the white feather was still eating an ice,—"Ah'm askin' de ole cullud gen'l'man out dah ef Ah mought 'spressify mah congratulations to you." Another fearful glance yardward revealed a gloved hand placing a teaspoon on a plate. "An' he say Ah mought git in, but he wouldn' come, fearin' to distu'b you. Ah tole 'im,"—a minute more now,—"for to come on in,—dat in San Louie Ah 's allus gone to all de stylish parties."

Aunt June was furious. "He 's lyin', same as you is. Everybody weccom at my 'cepshun ef—ef he ain'

boas'in' an' blowin' lak a wind snake layin' in de pasture. Whah you livin' at?"

"Ah residin' at de presn' time at mah 'partmen's ovah mah place of bus'ness."

"You tell dat ole fool man come in heah, when you goin' towa'ds dat dar place of bus'ness, kine of sudden lak—I'm no San Louie lady, but I knowin' dat ole coat you-all wearin'! Done seed plenty of Mis' Gawge Wethahin'-ton's drivers sweatin' in dat ole coat, hot July day, when she 'tendin' dem gardenin' parties, as she call 'em. Don' you know what liahs gwine kotch? We-uns got ten comman'-men's out heah in Kansas, an' we us'n' 'em, too. Now, you git!"

William got. When the white feather

conveyed its owner down the path, William passed into place properly, and Unk Jerry watched the strange pair disappear around the corner of the little street. "I suah hope dat's de las' of dat kin'," he muttered. "Anyhow, ef Juny kin stan' dat coon in dar, she boun' to stan' ole Jerry. I bettah git in kin' o' sly lak—'thout makin' trouble."

That was why, at the first unguarded moment, an old colored gentleman crawled along the cabin floor to a strategic position quite out of Aunt June's sight, and stretched himself, full length, at the foot of her bed, where he was seen later to be indulging in a much-needed afternoon nap.

Fortunately, the next comers were inexperienced in social affairs, so the

sight of the host's prostrate form, and the fact that they were obliged to step over it to reach the hostess' side, did not disturb them. It was a group of little girls from Dorothy's Sunday-school class. They meekly took the hurdle with little preliminary hops and, with unmoved faces, lifted calm eyes to Dorothy for direction.

She delayed her nod toward Aunt June's bedside, to feast her eyes upon the sight. As they stood there in all the charm of bare-headed, sweet-faced little-girl beauty, in their best summer frocks, each holding close in half-bare arms a bunch of yellow-hearted field daisies that clustered lovingly about the childish faces, they made a spot of sunshine within that little place, too long unused to such a sight.

An instant later, at Dorothy's beckoning smile, they moved shyly bedward, though the tiniest one fell behind, "'cause it looked so much like Little Red Riding Hood's g'an'muvver, that — was n't — a — really-an'-truly one."

But the leader spoke up bravely: "Auntie June, here 's some flowers for you. Margaret's mamma took us all out to the daisy field, and we picked them ourselves."

One by one, the pink little palms surrendered their moist treasures to the fever-dry hand, which carried each posy to the glorified black face; then, as it passed its crackling touch to a sunny or a sun-browned head, some of those who witnessed the simple ceremony found their eyes too dim to see

much more. But the old voice crept out, in almost childish joy:

"De Lawd suah bress you forevah an' evah for goin' to so much trouble for yo' po' ole Aunt! I ter'ble 'bliged to you, deahs. I wan's dese flowers put all out heah over dis baid, so's I touch 'em to cool off my ole hot han's, Miss Nina."

Deftly, Nina placed the yellow-eyed blossoms all about the old face and over the white spread, until the corner glowed with bloom.

"But we brought you sompin' else, Auntie—look here! Open the box yourself. Watch out. Maybe they'll bite!" cheerily sang out another little girl, as she put a thread box in the crinkled hand.

"No, 'taint't a mouse at all—not a

really one. It's penwipers — two of 'em. Made 'em ourselves over at Millie's this morning. We was going to send 'em to the heathen, but Millie said, 'Le's give 'em to Auntie June,' and her mamma said we could bring 'em ourselves this afternoon. No, they won't *really* bite! Jes' put your pen right 'nunder that mouse's feet there."

Poor old Aunt! 'Twas a tender spot to probe thus. But she was game. "I b'lieves I 'bout out of penswipers, honey, an' I glad to git dese. I ain' got much tas'e for writin' since I got de rheum'tiz, but I put dem right 'bout heah on my piller, so's to hab 'em handy. Good-by to you, li'l honeybuds. Miss Nina, see dese li'l ladies hab some 'freshments."

At this juncture, a woolly head rose

turtle-like over the footboard. "See heah, Juny, whaffor you-all gwine keep dem fool mouses so close to yo' face for? Dey mought come to life an' run down yo' froat." This was Jerry's facetious method of making the wife of his bosom forget the chicken-house ukase, and cancel its enforcement.

"Nevah you min' 'bout mouses, Jerry. Dese ain' no reg'-lah mouses. Dem's *education signs*. I'm layin' out to keepin' 'em right heah an' 'splay 'em 'fore some Kansas niggers dis ebenin' ef dey come heah. Dey all time callin' us slave niggers, 'Ole Fogyism.' I boun' on gittin' 'em tole sompin' when dey come heah. I'll suah l'arn 'em a few things!"

She more than kept her promise.

Not only did Aunt June "l'arn dem niggers sompin'," but her young white friends were there taught some things not found in a college course. And in this she was ably assisted by her most unusual guests.

Chapter Six

God-Given-inities

CHAPTER VI

GOD-GIVEN-INITIES

THE late afternoon callers were for the most part colored people—true sons and daughters of Africa, homeward bound from their daily tasks—the happiest toilers under the sun! Remember that, ye who blame or ridicule!

All classes were there—bent old black folk of "'fore free time," whose memories were sanctified by time and distance; embittered ones who had shared the tussle and the heart-ache of reconstruction; and the youngest set, the product of the white man's kindly meant, but somewhat misfit, educa-

tional policy. Fifty years of history —history that the world has watched —was gathered about that old black woman's bed.

Mrs. Ferguson's party "hanker" began to show sign of satiation. "These folks are tired, Aunt June. Shall we not put some chairs in here and pass the refreshments?" Nina suggested. And so the "dinin' 'partment" and "passin'-on" features were abandoned. As the company was seated within the little room, funereal silence prevailed; but later, when Ralph passed cake and coffee "to the side lines," as he phrased it, they all got "into the game," and the talk became general.

And what talk! Politicians, would you know how to trim your sails? Philanthropists, would you find where to

turn your helping hand? Educators, would you be wise for your great task? Dramatists, would you discover how to combine sound and gesture, voice and voiceful body, rhythmical motion and musical tone, until expression meets more than half way the unformed thought? Then find you such a gathering of the new-old people of the African race — slaves and captives of the long ago, freed by bloodshed, transplanted with much question into this Western country, there, as it chanced, to meet and be molded by our Western civilization. There are few richer fields for human story, nor few more difficult of successful harvesting, than was that humble cabin crowd on this late summer afternoon.

For who shall do justice to the

group? There was "Sis' Liza Logan," whose white dress failed to cover a darker one beneath, due, perhaps, to the fact that to-morrow's laundry customer was fully two sizes smaller than was Liza herself. There was Aunt Rosan, a little old ex-slave, who wore the head kerchief of her girlhood days. She had brought a white apron along for the adorning of her daughter, Mrs. Morgan, which apron was now performing that duty as best it could, albeit it was tied over the long dark gingham one, which its wearer had failed to leave with her scrub bucket outside the door. This short-sightedness might have been caused by the fact that the bucket's owner and user carried one eye in a sling.

Next sat Mr. Erastus Moore, rag

picker by occupation, and near him his crazy wife. Mr. Moore was in his shirt sleeves, or, to be exact, in his shirt sleeve, the other having been torn off, its absence adding the final touch to an already inadequate toilet. The crazy wife, Clementina, was entirely indifferent to her husband's unparty-like raiment, as well as to her own — a sure sign of feminine mental upsetness. She was large, fat, and only comfortably insane. She imagined herself to be some one else, and her impersonations were not always suited to her size. Then there was a young college student, Mr. Solomon.

Among all these, but not of them, since he occupied the seat of honor,— a revolving office chair of judicial memory,— sat Brother Marcus. His broad-

cloth coat and lime-covered shoes betrayed both his vocation and his avocation. He was now a plasterer, but a one-time preacher, and still the prime comforter of his people when their hearts were sorest. Somewhat lame and rheumatic, he carried a cane, which, with the revolving chair, he found very convenient when he wished to address a remark to some one behind him, or to make an emphatic gesture.

This was the group of guests, while in and out among them still went the young white folk at their self-imposed task of serving all with food and of seeing that Aunt June was comfortable. Unk Jerry kept his favorite place at the foot of the great bed, as from this vantage point his watchful old eyes could miss neither movement nor

change in the appearance of the invalid.

The flower-decked bed startled them all, at first.

"Hit's a sign!" gasped Sis' Liza Logan, as she dropped her hostess' hand. "Hit's a sign de Lawd gwine take 'er, suah!"

"Sign, nuffin'!" answered Mrs. Morgan, in a whisper, as she nervously smoothed her outer apron. "I calls dat a leadin'. Ef done be de Lawd take 'er, dar's all dem fun-neh-al flowahs on dat baid free fo' nuffin'. Seem lak dat Fun-neh-al Flowah Club moughty wea'ysome havin' to pay out warsh money fo' flowahs all time. An' it's gittin' pow'ful of'en, too," whispering lower. "B'leeves I'll unjine from dat club ef I don' git no flowahs

when I die." The thought wrung her heart, and she wiped her well eye.

"Huccom you-all whisp'rin' all time?"

'Twas crazy Clementina, the impersonator, who spoke. She had risen and was glaring at them in a commanding manner. "I'm a teacher, an' I don' 'low no whisp'rin' in here." The women, startled at the words, stood nonplussed and dumb.

"Now, now, Tiny," her husband, Rastus, answered, "you-all mus' n' be no teacher here." Then, to the frightened women: "Clementina all time 'magine she teacher, er somebody else, 'cept jes' herse'f. She don' mean no harm, nohow. Jas' in 'er min'." Then, coaxingly: "Now, Tiny, don' you 'membah you promise' ef I 'low you to come

to dis party, you won' be no teacher here — dat you-all be a lady?"

"But I hear'n mo' whisp'rin' up dar in de lof'! Cain't be no lady no mo'! Whar dat whisp'rin' gwine on?" Then, in a fearful voice: "Dem's de whisp'rin' ha'nts!" And, with a Lady Macbeth stride, she was preparing for flight.

"I am a transmigrationist from now on. I believe this is my old fifth grade teacher, rehabilitated. She used to have that identical trouble in her mind." Ralph's aside remark was lost on most of the crowd, for Aunt June was saving the day.

"Cou'se, Clemma," she strategized, "dis ain' no suah 'nuff school; but ef you's a teacher, you mos' boun' to look over my copy han'writin' books up on

dat clock she'f; an' heah am a fraish penswiper. Jes' use' up my ole ones."

Clementina was soon busy and sane again, contentedly turning the leaves of the pile of "writing books" which Jerry put into her hands. She assumed a critical air as she scrutinized the scrawling that Aunt had called "my copy han'-writin'."

The superior knowledge displayed by the hostess awed the crowd momentarily—all except Mr. Solomon, the college man.

"Did n't know you were a scribe, Mrs. Ferguson! Do you write the slant hand or the vertical?"

A look from the old eyes warned him of danger. She did not risk a reply.

"That means, do you make the let-

ters stand up or lean over? You know, some instruct by one method, and some prefer the other." Mr. Solomon went gayly on to his fate.

"You-all don' know nuffin', boy! I make dem letters jes' as I'm feelin' — some a-leanin', some a-stan'in', an' some a-settin'. Ole Mr. Chase done make me a Chris'mas gif' of dem han'-writin' books, long time 'go, 'cause he hear his li'l gal tryin' teach me, an' I'm workin' an' workin' at 'em nights. Ef I do 'em 'fore I sayin' my prayers, w'y, dey's leanin' over; ef I writin' after I sayin' my prayers, dem ole letters stan'in' up mighty fine. An' some nights, when I'm happy in de Lawd, lak a Sunday — w'y, dey's leanin' 'way back. An' dat's — dat's all I knows 'bout yo' slant an' vertigo. Lettahs jes'

lak folks, I'm a-tellin' you. Folks is folks, no mattah wedder dey settin' or stan'in'. Some folks don' spell no wu'ds, needah, dey's jes' question marks an' stops." She turned impatiently on her pillow. Her prospective triumph was but dust and ashes. Her hope of "l'arnin' dem Kansas niggers sompin'" with her writing book and her penwipers had fallen to earth.

The preacher, however, was roused. He gave a threatening glare at the student Solomon, but delayed eruption, for the young man was speaking again.

"I did not mean to criticise your penmanship, Mrs. Ferguson. I just wondered who taught you," he said.

"De Lawd teach' me—dat's who show' me. Don' He say in de Book, 'Write on de table of yo' hearts'?

Don' He know 'nuff to carry out He's own comman'men's, wifout no white man stickin' in? Yas, suh! I jes' say, 'Heah, Lawd, how you make dat li'l quirly-me-quig?' an' He suah show ole Aunt June good, too—good, too! Jerry, ain' I talkin' true?"

Jerry was there. So was Brother Marcus. Indeed, it seemed for a time that there were several of the latter. The whirling office chair fairly stood on its hind feet to support him as he swung his cane and called out:

'Dat'll do, young man! Don' you-all sass Mis' Ferguson. Now you answer me! You tell me! What is de beginnin' ob wisdom? Quick, now! Don' be waitin' 'roun'! What yo' college book say, whar you pursuin' a cou'se? Lan' know, be 'long time 'fore

you kotch up wid it. What you say? What is de beginnin' ob wisdom?"

"Well, Brother Marcus, I never had just that question interrogated to me previously — not in just that form — but I should say, without a chance to look it up in the lib'ary, that it was physics, or perhaps psychology."

The Brother fortified his position. "Suah, 'tain' no doctah stuff; but whuffo' you say dat las' — psyc'ol'gy?"

"Well, Brother Marcus, it is like this. We study the mind and reasoning, both inductive and conductive, and going on like that — maybe that is what you want as the real beginning of wisdom."

The preacher rose to his crippled feet, and the office chair wabbled back to position.

"Suah sign you ain' got no wisdom, young man, ef dat's what all dat mess is. Let Bruddah Marcus tells you, boy: *'De feah ob de Lawd'*—dat's de beginnin' ob wisdom! Dat's what de ole slabes hab, an' dat's what you ain' nowise gittin', wid all dis long-wu'd book-l'arnin' you cain't un'erstan'. Dat what Mis' Ferguson mean when she say de Lawd teach' 'er—an' He teach' 'er mo' dan de copy-book writin', 'cause w'en she fearin' Him she trus' Him, an' He do holp her, suah. De feah ob de Lawd in yo' heart, my boy, is what you-all needin'—den you'll not git upstickin', an' dis han'-made book l'arnin' won' makin' no gibberin' monkey out ob you newes' niggers."

"But, Brother Marcus,"—the rest

had pushed back, giving the disputants the ring. Ralph sidled over towards the exit, and beckoned the girls after him, as the younger voice went on,— "that is the old religion. The new religion says that God is love. We don't fear Him any more."

The revolving chair kicked up its hind feet again, as the preacher slipped dangerously near its edge and raised the cane.

"What soht ob God you got a-holt ob, young man? Seem lak if you don' feah Him, you tryin' to make a God outen yo'se'f — jes' er-showin' fo'th dat you-all wan' to build yo'se'f up. No, sah! Dis heah feah am God-giv-en-inity — hit pertected yo' fo-fathers from wil' beastes an' sarpints an' de whoppen'-pos'. Don' cas' out what

de Lawd put in you fo' good, jes' 'cause you is craduated from school. Keep all de good things de Lawd give you, an' keep all de good things white folks give you. Dat's de cullud man's job nowerdays. Den de Kingdom come! But dese young niggers what don' feah de Lawd, dey mos' ginnahly"—Brother Marcus ducked his head and chuckled—"dey mos' ginnahly don' feah nuffin' else—an' some ob 'em's in de *lock-up!*"

Mrs. Morgan paused, her lips halfway around a sandwich. "Brother Marcus, you-all talk lak God's a reg'lah pat-er-ol—jes' chasin' folks 'roun' to ketch 'em. Dat's lak my mother, over dar," pointing to old Aunt Rosan. "I'm tellin her dat's *Ole Fogyism.*"

"You-all don' un'erstan' us ole

slabes, in dis day an' time, Mis' Morgan. In slabe days, we hab nuffin' fo' certain suah but ouah hearts an' ouah grabes, an' de good Lawd an' His Bible Scripture. But all de res'—ouah han's, ouah feet, an' ouah haids, an' ouah wives, an' ouah chillun—dey all ole massa's. Ef ouah lips movin', de oberseeah say, 'What dat you sayin'?' So we l'arn to talk ter God straight from ouah hearts, an' He answer back, so's nobody else kin heah. Ef you-all talk straight ter God wid yo' hearts, in *dis* day an' time, you be heap bettah off. Den you know what Ole Fogyism mean."

"Come, Rastus; it's recess—le's go out an' play." This was crazy Clementina, whose skipping step, as she crossed over and took Rastus' hand,

illy suited her weight; but her husband seemed not to notice it, and persuaded her gently back to her corner and her copy-books.

At this, Mrs. Morgan began to cry copiously into her two aprons; into the gingham one freely and fully, with her good right eye; into her clean white apron less prodigally with her bruised and battered left one.

"Wush I was crazy, too. Mebbe my ole man would n' blacken my eye dis mawnin' an' say he boun' git divo'ce papah from me."

Rastus swelled until his remaining shirt sleeve was endangered.

"Mis' Morgan, when I married Clementina, everybody sayin', 'Ras, you suah out-married yo'se'f.' An' I 'm not forgittin' it. She 's not to say

crazy, nohow — she jes' see an' hear double, sometimes mo' dan I do, mebbe. Now, I seed lots smart folks like dat. 'Cause we ain' nebbah had no chillun, an' she jes' foller me 'roun' all time."

"My gal, Mis' Morgan, hain' no chillun, needah." 'Twas the mother, Aunt Rosan, who spoke. "Dat is, none to do no good. Only got two, an' she has to live in de basin of de big Stonah house. Undah groun' all right fo' daid folks, but livin' folks ought stay 'bove groun'. Now Mr. Morgan say he gwine to git divo'ce."

"I say, let 'im git a divo'ce," tearfully went on Mrs. Morgan. "Dat white lawyah man promise', soon as my ole man brung 'im one mo' dollah, dat divo'ce be ready waitin', an' I 'spect Morgan beat me till I give up my scrub

money. I say, let 'im has divo'ce, ef — I has my chillun." Both aprons were brought into use again for the weeping eyes.

The old chair gave a sudden twirl, and Brother Marcus faced the group. "Look a-heah now, Sis' Morgan! 'Man p'ints, but God dis'p'ints,' an' you foolin' niggers ain' gwine git no divo'ce! Dat 's bad 'nuff fo' white folks, an' rich white folks at dat, but dey no good fo' po' folks — leas'wise, po' cullud folks. God done j'ine you-all. What kin' ob God you got a-holt ob, dat you gwine rip His wuck open lak dat? Dat 's ag'in Bible Scriptah — Ole an' New Test'ment. I readin' it. Moses suffah'd ter write divo'ce, an' Chris' say, 'Fo' de hardness ob yo' hearts, Moses gib it.' Is white lawyah man

done suffah any ter write 'em? No, I tell you—jes' only Satan an' dis lawyah gittin' mos' ob dese heah divo'ces.

"My ole Massa say to me, when I say mought I git married: 'Marcus,' he say, 'has you-all got 'ligi'n?' I say, 'Yes, Massa.' 'Has dat gal got 'ligi'n?' 'Yes, Massa.' Den he say, 'Go 'head an' try it, but none my folks gwine git married 'out dey git 'ligi'n, an' *'ligi'n got to come fust.*' Mis' Morgan, you tell yo' ole man what I say, an' I wan' to see bofe ob you at de mou'nahs' bench, huntin' mo' 'ligi'n. Den dat white lawyah man mebbe wait fo' he othah dollah. Lawyah man p'ints, but God dis'p'ints. Don' tole me 'bout no divo'ce! No, sah!"

"Yes, let the white people get all the divorces. If they thought they were

any good, they would n't let the darkies have 'em, anyhow. Hog 'em all themselves." Mr. Solomon said this, with a look that was not good to see.

Only Unk's watchful eye saw Aunt June's hand go out. She made a futile effort to raise her head, but sank back. But her voice was clearly under control:

"Whaffor' you 'bukin' my white folks, wif all dese fine helpers heah all day 'ten'in' me, an' feedin' you-all? I gits 'long wif de white folks. I don' 'buke back when dey 'buke ole June. I say to myse'f, ''Spects I needs it, Lawd, an' dat's you a-talkin'.'

"Ef He could talk in a bu'nin' bush, He mought leas'wise speak sometime fru white man's mouf. An' I don' look

blacker dan a kittle all de day, when I workin' for 'em, needah."

"Of course, breaking your back working for them."

"Ain' broke my back yit, an' I works fifty yeah. Don' nevah break my back no soonah dan you Kansas niggers does wearin' high heels under yo' flat feet, an' tight clo's on, an' bendin' over yo' books in de dusty school, an runnin' 'roun' nights."

"To be sure, Mrs. Ferguson; but these are newer times now. We are better educated now and must keep progressing."

"Yes, praise de Lawd!—praise de white man, too! But dat don' need make you sassy an' wicked in yo' hearts."

Quickly the young man crossed to

the bedside and took the old woman's hand.

"I am sorry that I said that, Auntie. I do not really believe it, when I think about it."

Aunt June's eyes filled with tears. Brother Marcus found his kerchief. "Live up to yo' God-givin-inities, boy. Dis schoolin' won' harm you den, nohow. I'm not quah'lin' 'bout dat."

Aunt June's anger was appeased. She turned to her oldest friend, Liza Logan.

"Huccom you-all so still over dar in de corner, Sis' Logan? Has you had some coffee? How's you makin' out sence yo' ole man's daid?"

"Po'ly, Sis' Ferguson, po'ly. Ef he done live', ole Liza not b'en 'bliged to do no warshin' in 'er ole days. But

I ain' gwine git no divo'ce, nohow. I followin' dat ole man all my life-time; followin' 'im 'roun' dem ole bi-yoes, feeshin', w'en ole Massa libin' yit; followin' 'im w'en he pack up de skillet an' say he gwine to Kansas; followin' 'im on de big boat an' walkin' de res' ob de way; followin' 'im w'en he git de heart-honger an' say he gwine back to de ole place; den, w'en he needin' mo' money an' say he comin' back to Kansas — I followin' same's evah, an' he done forgit de skillet, 'cause he startin' so quick." Sis' Logan's voice was near the breaking point, but she went bravely on: "An' now he's gone to Hebben, an' I don' wan' no divo'ce —'cause I gwine follow dat same ole man clean on —'twell I kotch up wif 'im in de Hebbenly Lan' — no divo'ce

fo' ole Liza — same ole man fo' me in de Hebbenly Lan'," — with a crooning softness,—"in de Heb-ben-lee Lan'."

"Allus thought I'd lak to go to Hebben — fo' a li'l while — jes' fo' a — li'l — while." Rastus spoke in a low tone, as if he, too, was touched by a tender memory. "'Cou'se, if Clemma's min' gits right, we mought stay continuous, but she mighty sot on movin' 'roun' on dis here earf."

"Don' you-all feah none, Bruddah. Jes' don' you feah. De Lawd hain' gwine hab no movin' in an' out in Hebben. Praise de Lawd!" And the cane went up. Brother Marcus was happy, and he took no pains to conceal the fact.

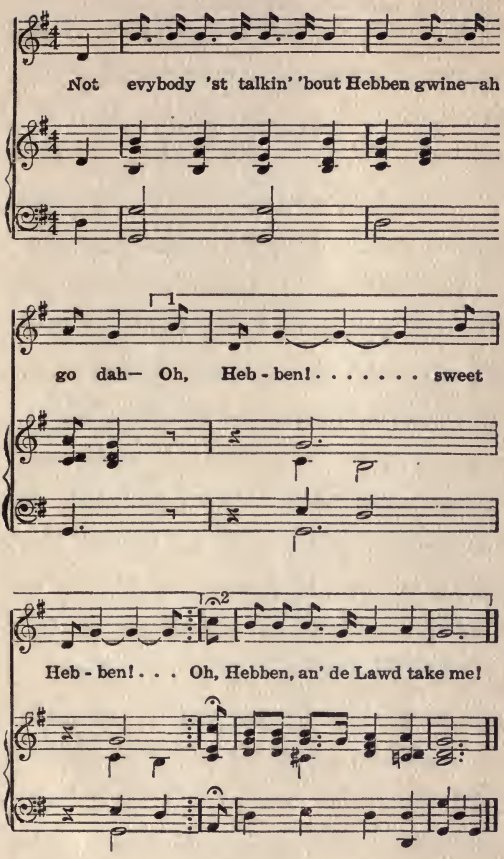
"Black man ain' gwine be no rentah up dah. Nobody gwine say, 'Dat 's nig-

ger's house — kin tell by de looks — jes' han'-made lak.' Glory! Dah'll be mansions dah not made wid han's! I knows! Yes, sah — I knows!" More swinging of the cane. "I 's got a mansion waitin' — no white man moh'gage on it, needah, an' nobody gwine say, fu'st ob every month, 'You pays yo' rent or you movin' out.' An' dah's whar — I 'm boun' — to — go!"

Aunt Rosan's turbaned head began to sway and her cracked voice led out in a faltering refrain. Brother Marcus joined when the second line was reached, and the rest came in later:

Not eveybody 'st talkin' 'bout Hebben,
gwine — ah go dah —
Oh, Hebben! sweet Hebben!
Not eveybody 'st talkin' 'bout Hebben,
gwine — ah go dah —
Oh, Hebben, an' de Lawd take me!

The Passin'-On Party



Feet were tapping, bodies swaying, eyes were full and running over. Aunt June said, feebly, "Sing some mo'."

Young Mr. Solomon spoke up quickly: "Sing 'The Rosary' or 'Whiter Than Snow.'. Those are good songs."

Aunt Rosan lifted her tear-wet face and broken voice in protest: "Don' sing none ob dem white folks' songs heah. I ain' honin' to be 'whitah dan snow,'—wan' be jes' lak de bressed Mastah made me. Sing sompin' dat de Lawd teach' us in de ole time. Dem heart songs good for de ole slabes an' soun' bes' now to ole Rosan. God moughty nigh to de ole slabe's heart—usen to whisp'rin' to 'em in de cotton fiel'—an' doin' it yit! New niggers bettah declinin' dey ears an' ah-lis'en, too—an' den sing dem kine ob songs

Feet tapping, bodies swaying, their eyes running over

dat de Lawd say—'stead dese heah po' white stuff."

"Bressed be de Lawd! Sistah Rosan, you 'membah yo' God-given-in-i-ties—let de heart song go on!" And the preacher led, marking time with his cane.

The verses were repeated over and over, with queer little quirks on the "Oh!" and running monotones on the long line. Through it all was that indescribable charm of the "heart music" of the Southern negro, now regrettably displaced by the "white folks'" songs.

And so these faith-filled people sang! They were on their feet at the end of the first line, and they stood swaying with the rhythm and with faces lifted, as for a sight of the prom-

ised land. Who shall say it came not nigh to them?

An unfortunate swing of the preacher's cane brought trouble. It caught Rastus' sole remaining sleeve, and only a quick side spring of the wearer saved it from total detachment.

"Nevah you min', Bruddah Marcus!" Rastus cried. "Dat 's only some ob my man-sewin' rippin' out. I sewed dat sleeve in by myse'f, an'——"

Clementina was sitting with folded hands beside the closed copy-books, as if she had not heard the singing. But after her husband's speech, her mind took one of its lightning-like turns. She crossed swiftly to Rastus' side and, with a puzzled look, said: "How I 'm gwine be lady, an' got a wuckin' husban'? You gottah be one ob dese set-

tin' gen'l'men, else I 'm not gwine play bein' lady."

"Now, now, Tiny," leading her gently back, as only Rastus knew how to do, "you-all go back to dat corner an' be suah-'nuff lady — jes' fo' parties — an' I won' be no wuckin' husban' today. I suah gwine be yo' settin' gen'l'man dis day — jes' fo' parties, ob cou'se — but jes' to suit you, Tiny, jes' lak you say. Ain' dat all right now, Tiny?" And Tiny subsided.

For the first time during the trying day, Nina gave way to an impulse to laugh, and turned away. By this she faced Ralph, and he, as the result of good luck or good method, was conveniently near. Seeing his advantage, he whispered: "What kin' you-all gwine be needin', Miss Nina — de

wuckin' er de settin' kin'? Made up yo' min' yit? Honestly Nina, won't you try me again — I believe I've got more sense these days. Ain' dat all right now, *Niny?* What you say?"

With a quick lift of her laughter-filled eyes: "I say that about the time Rastus Number Two went to a party with a shirt sleeve torn out like that, he, instead of his wife, would be needing some of the — the heart medicine you bought a while ago."

Ralph required neither chart nor footnotes. "Say, Nina, get that bottle off the clock shelf and come outdoors a minute. I'm needing some of it now — right now."

"Oh, no — not now! That will keep. Here, let's listen. They are getting ready to leave." But Ralph's face was

glowing as he turned with her to face the crowd.

The guests, unconscious of the by-play between their white servitors, were still standing. Their quaint groupings, swaying forms, and devout, heaven-raised faces made a fit foreground for the grotesquely papered wall and dusk-shadowed corners — a picture waiting for a modern master who shall paint the like of it some day, to his own laurel-crowning. They seemed a trans-fixed emotion waiting for a voice.

It came. In answer to Uncle Jerry's mumbled request, the preacher raised his hands in invocation. At the familiar signal, the friends dropped to their knees. Then the great voice that had found its timbre in a heart-strong, heart-wrung race, and its resonance in

the camp-meeting of the Southland, rang through the little place in wonderful, thrilling imploration to its God:

"Mos' Hebbenly Gawd, de Oberseer ob de earth an' de sea, an' all de beastes, an' de man critters! You holdin' de lightnin' in yo' lef' han' an' de thundah in yo' right han'! You holdin' de sun from fallin' on us by day, an' de moon an' de stars from fallin' on us by de night! An' you holdin' dem li'l sparrows in dey nestes w'en de earth turn ovah. Draw nigh to our sinful, dyin' bodies, prostrated befo' Dy Throne! Bress dis deah sister whose hospital we am injoyin' on dis 'casion. Ef you sees fit, tech her wid yo' healin' fingah an' make her stan' up whole an' well. But ef dat ain' handy fo' you, good Lawd, our

Bruddah Ferguson ain' gwine be 'bukin' an' kickin', 'cause he know you mus' be needin' her wuss dan he do, or seem lak you gwine leave her be. ["Amen!"] Bress dis Sistah Clementina, wid de crooked min'. W'en you callin' her up yandah, sen' yo' angel ban', 'cause she ain' able go 'roun' 'lone. Shine down on dese heah white folks dat been servin' us dis day an' hour! Save dese young cullud people in de holler ob yo' han' an' in de crookin' ob yo' arm. Don' make 'em no scapin'-goats fo' de white man's foolishment, 'twell you don' knows 'em yo'se'f, Lawd, w'en you gits yo' han's on 'em. W'en de good Gawd sayin', 'Wan's de sheeps to be settin' on my right han' an' de goats on my lef' han',' O Lawd, make all de niggers

know whah to set! [A voice: "Show me whah!"] An' dese *ole* brudders an' sisters, good Lawd, whose haids got de grabe blossoms on — praise Dy Name, dey know whah! Don' need to send no Angel notifyin' invitashun. Dey jes' a-waitin' for de sign — for de *Glory* sign ["Yes, Lawd!"] an' we all passin' in fru de inswingin' do'! An den, praise de Lawd, passin' out no mo' — no mo'!"

The voice ceased. The great arms fell. For a moment no one moved. Then, from the white-counterpaned bed, two shrunken black hands went slowly up. Again they rose and fell. And those who waited knew that the prayer had filled to overflowing Aunt June's loving heart, and that she was trying to speak.

Uncle Jerry hurried to the side of the bed; the young friends joined him quickly, and Brother Marcus hobbled nearer. But to none of these were her first words given. When she could find her voice, 'twas to the little group of half-frightened negro guests, huddled in the farthest corner of the room, to whom she spoke at last, in feeble, faltering tones:

"Ef I don' see you no mo'—don' you be a-forgittin' what Brothah Marcus—sayin'—he heap smartah dan ole June—an' you tell de res'—tell de res' 'bout dese 'God-given-inities' dat he say—'bout dese divo'ces—an' dem heart-songs an' de fear of de Lawd in yo' hearts. Ef I don' see you no mo'—tell de res'——" Her voice failed.

It was a benediction. The col-

ored guests in their incongruous array began slowly to leave the room. The path of each led past the bed for a parting and "passin'-on" hand-shake from the old black woman there. But, though Sis' Liza Logan's face was wet with tears, and Aunt Rosan's turbaned head drooped low, and crazy Clementina peered curiously as Rastus led her past, Aunt June seemed not to heed.

When all the other guests were gone save Brother Marcus, who still stood at Jerry's side, Nina and Ralph moved back again close to the bed, and waited there in silence for what might come.

Presently the invalid turned to the two young white folks, who stood so near that they caught her lowest tones:

"Chillun! Chillun!" and they saw that her mind wandered. "Time for

you to staht — go climb in yo' li'l buggies — outen dar in de yard — an' ole Aunt June push you home — 'cause it 's gittin' dark — an' I promise' bofe yo' maws — dat I brung you safe — home — early. Now, Miss Nina, — don' be all time quarrelin' an' fightin' — wif dat li'l boy — dat li'l Ralphie don' mean no harm. Don' you know, Satan git li'l gal — dat fight? Jes' de good Lawd put de lovin' in bofe yo' hearts. Dat 's you-all's 'God-given-inities.'"

A young man's strong hand went swiftly out and clasped one that came shyly forth to meet it. With bowed heads, Ralph and Nina stood while the words went on:

"Heah, li'l boy, I gwine give you dis li'l book to keep — ef you be good."

She held out the precious book that

contained the long words. Ralph accepted it reverently, and then led Nina away a little space. They turned again toward the bed, for Uncle Jerry's startled cry rang out:

"Juny! Juny! Don' you know me, Juny?"

No answer came. The old woman's wandering eyes had gone wallward, where, in all the impossible glory of line and color, were pasted the disturbing fashion plates. He tried again:

"Juny! What you wantin', Juny?"

In response came a look of beatification on the pillow-framed old face, and the slow words:

"Jerry, I wish you taken down dem papah ladies from offun dat wall. I ain' meanin' no harm — by dis passin'-on party ——" and the voice trembled.

"But mebbe, Jerry,—you bettah git some mo' angel—pictures an' pas'e 'em—up dar. Some mo' angel pictures—mebbe dey—bes'—now, for—yo' Juny."

The old voice faltered on, until it could be heard no more, not even by those who bent lowest in their loving task. The old eyes closed softly, even as in their plantation babyhood they might have done. A gentle sleep came on—a sleep that, though they who loved her waited and watched, would never break again into an earthly waking.

Jerry did not understand at first, but said, softly:

"Juny! See heah! Dis am yo' passin'-on party, dat you long time honin' fo'. Bruddah Marcus heah yit. Cain't

you-all wake up an' speak him good-bye?"

Brother Marcus hobbled over to Jerry's side and touched his arm:

"Bruddah! Don' you understan'? You mus' n' be distuhbin' her now to speak no mo' good-bye, 'cause she cain't heah you w'en de Lawd done call! Yes, my bruddah, de good Lawd done beckon yo' Junie to come up yondah in de sky—up yondah to De Lawd's Own Passin'-on Party, whah she fitten ter be."

Uncle Jerry's head bent low as the healing words flowed on: "But—He holdin' open dat inswingin' do' jes' li'l while longer fo' you—an' me—an' we gwine jine her dah, on a soon-come day—on a soon-come day!"

Brother Marcus knelt beside the

Unk Jerry's head bent low as the healing words flowed on

mute form of old Uncle Jerry and laid a comforting arm across his shoulder.

. . . . .

Ralph and Nina turned from the two bowed heads, the flower-decked bed, and the silent figure thereupon — the shadows falling softly over all. Then, with hands still clasped as when joined by the gentle words of their dead friend, they passed out into the summer twilight.

THE END