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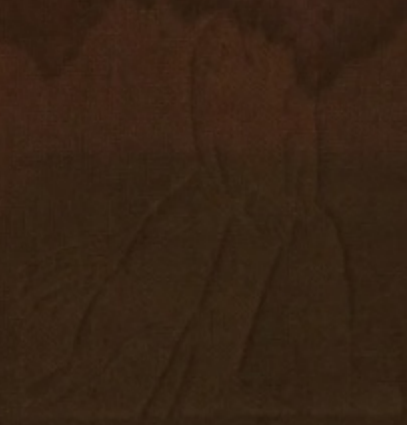

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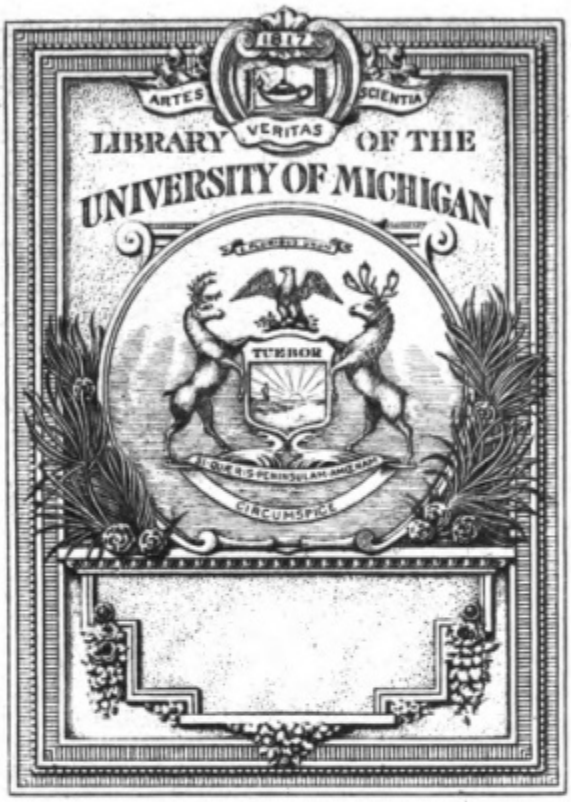

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O CANAAN!

A NOVEL

In O CANAAN! Mr Turpin achieves new importance as a novelist. His story concerns Joe Benson, Mississippi field hand who abandoned a ruined cotton crop in the bad year of 1916 to lead his family and a troop of neighbors aboard a labor train headed north, laden with black labor destined for factories which were war-hungry for workers. Weary of fruitless labor in the fields, the Negroes saw a new life ahead in the promised land to the northward. Mr Turpin pictures a great social movement and its effect on a group of sharply etched characters. Joe Benson, his family and neighbors, their ephemeral adventure with success, their slow failure or abrupt doom, depict in terms of flesh and blood the ordeal of a race set apart, struggling, with a will to live, for human rights. Here, then, is a novel of prime human significance on a theme never before approached in American literature. An unforgettable story, told with sweep and power—and with a burning conviction—O CANAAN! is a splendid achievement by a writer whose work is certain to command the interest of critic and book-buyer alike.

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BOOKS BY

WATERS E. TURPIN

O Canaan!

These Low Grounds

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WATERS E. TURPIN

O CANAAN!

A NOVEL

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FIRST EDITION

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English
Union place
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66387

828
T957n

To
my wife Jean

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PART I

Into Canaan

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. . . and how shall a Southern oak, in its full-blown prime, be transplanted to a Northern prairie where the blasts of winter howl from an inland sea . . . ?

O Canaan!

We turned our eyes toward Canaan in a day of confusion and trouble. . . .

And great was the fire in our bosoms . . . as we shook the dust of the homeland from our garments . . . as we sang a new song . . . a brave song . . . a song of hope and a new day. . . .

O Canaan!

Our peasant feet shall tread your broad avenues. . . . You shall hear our voices . . . and we shall be yours . . . and you shall be ours. . . .

Land of the rich and the blessed: you beckoned to us, and we answered. . . .

O Canaan!

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1

JOE BENSON scowled down at the relentless figures in the worn, gray-backed ledger before him on the counter. One of his hands gripped a pencil stub angrily while the other thudded the scarred boards. Finally their thick fingers spread out like the branches of the blighted willow that screened the window at his back, both hands relaxed, palms down.

"Dam' bo' weevil!"

The words rumbled out like the growl of a captive bear whose cage is too small.

Joe Benson was a big man, with a bigness that, whenever he was indoors, reminded one of a caged animal. And when he was angry, as he was now, this quality became more pronounced. At such times his great chest would heave, and his huge hands would thrust themselves into the depths of his pockets so violently that the seams gave, stitch by stitch. All these indices of his ire were evident now as he stalked from behind the counter to the doorway of his little store. There he slouched in moody contemplation of the narrow, white-dusted road whose ruts were baked to unyielding hardness by the late August sun.

Only yesterday he'd gone out with Sol to observe the

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havoc wrought by the pest upon his fifteen cotton acres. He had spat out a flavorless chew and leaned his powerful body upon a rickety fence beside which they had paused. From a wild shock of crisply curling hair he had slowly and resignedly pulled the battered remains of his dusty felt hat to let it droop, as tiredly as he, in his toil-knotted fingers. And despite the absence of the headpiece, which had warded off the brilliance of the hot bottom-land sun, the shadows had deepened in his brooding face. The alluvial black land, gift of the Great Muddy coursing off westward to the delta, had stretched out in all its seeming lushness of growth—to the casual eye a promise of future abundant yield. But Joe Benson had known—he'd seen it before—he'd known it to be the diseased harlot it was, mocking now his son's toil as it had his own and his father's before him. . . . Dam' bo' weevil!

"Mought's well gone home, son," he had said to his discouraged oldest boy.

"Don't see why we don't pull out fo' the North like the rest o' the folks is doin', Pa," the big-framed boy had ventured. Joe had grunted, noncommittal.

Now he snorted disgustedly at the silent row of whitewashed shacks perched on the opposite side of the road, like muddy leghorn hens squatting in forlorn idleness. Empty—every damned one of 'em! And here it was Saturday afternoon with not the first cropper in town! It was the second Saturday that Three Forks had been like this. . . . Joe Benson's great head lolled heavily. His leathery features, which evinced a fierce battle between the Negroid and the Indian, took on a deeper frown.

"Dam' lynchin'!" he growled once more.

From lips that were firm even in their grossness a brown stream jetted to roll amoebalike in the dust of the road. Piercing and mournful, a distant train shrilled. Joe looked at his watch, huge even in his mammoth paw. Four-twenty

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on the dot . . . Blue Comet up from the delta. Joe locked the door and swung up the road at a gait which testified that, for all his size, he had no great amount of fatty growth beneath his patched blue overalls and sleeveless shirt. His was the peasant's trudge, one that for the majority of his forty years had followed unhurried mules in the bottom lands. As he walked his corded arms crooked slightly forward from their power-sloped shoulders, and his fingers curved in a habitual posture. His was a figure that somehow seemed to belong here on this flat, dusty land—as if he had sprung from the very soil upon which he trod.

"Hey, Joe! Whar you bound?"

A prodigious tuft of hair shooting perpendicularly from the left side of an unswerving part in his small head, a short, spare man grinned at Joe from the doorway of what once had been a one-room shanty resembling the others along the road. A scrawled sign leaning beneath its one paneless window proclaimed to all and sundry that within one could procure a shave and haircut for fifteen cents.

"Hullo, Sam," answered Joe. "On my way to the depot—ain't nothin' else to do."

Sam speedily locked his door and joined Joe.

"Ain't *gonna* be nothin' mo' to do in *this* man's town, buddy!" he rejoined.

"Yeah . . . that's what I bin thinkin' fo' the last two weeks since they lynched 'at boy," said Joe disconsolately. "Look-it them shacks!"

"You know whar they's went?" asked Sam. "I'll tell you: they's went up to Jackson, jes' sho's my name's Sam Cum-mins!"

"Yeah, I know," said Joe. "That labor agent, he come through right after they raised all that hell. Told ever'body 'bout jobs an' freedom aplenty up in Chicago. Said his company was runnin' special trains from Jackson fo' 'em ef they's there Sat'dy night. They bin leavin' same's skeeters

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from anuhe! Bill Edwards an' Jeff Davis took they families yesterday. An' I ain't seed a cropper in town this week."

"You know what they's doin'?" asked Sam in his habitual way. "I'll tell you: they's leavin' the farms in wagonloads, cum dark, an' gwine up to Jackson. That what Jud Lewis' boy told me might 'to' last. 'Told me 'twas the last haircut he was gittin' in this town! An' the white folks bin after Elder Jones to git 'em to stay. But the elder jes' mought's well hold his breath, 'cause these folks bin readin' that Chicago *Champ'on* paper, an' it's bin givin' the preachers down here a fit! Says they's false leaders an' all like a-that. An' this ain't the only town, brother—ain't the only state! Man, they's gittin' out o' Georgy, Alabamy, an' all of 'em the same way! Look-a-yuh——" Cummins produced a clipping. "Read that," he finished.

Joe took the slip and slowly spelled out the inflammatory article.

"H'm . . . This here man's sayin' jes' what I *bin* thinkin'!" he declared as he returned the paper. "I *bin* tired! Yoke round yo' neck! Jes' what we's got down here, all right nuf! You cain't vote—you cain't do this—you cain't do that! What I bin tellin' Christine fo' the last ten years? But that woman o' mine jes' won't lissen—busts out in a big fre ever' time I starts talkin' 'bout leavin'—don't want leav her folks! Hell! Her folks gits 'long all right 'cause they' got p'tection from they white folks—wouldn't have that e they warn't mixed up wid 'em! That's why they's so color struck!"

"Nev' did see how you gits her in the fust place," sai Sam, his pinched face turned up inquiringly.

"Huh!" Joe's jaw hardened. "I ain't nev' let nothin' sto me from gittin' what I sho' nuf wants!" The lids of h small black eyes narrowed with memory. "Took one look : that woman when she warn't mo'n a gal an' fell head ove heels fo' her! All her folks raised hell—called me a fiel

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hand nigger! Said they warn't nev' nothin' but high-class folks—jes' 'cause ole Lem Lawson an' his pappy was butlers fo' ole Tit Lawson an' his pappy! Shucks! My pappy an' his pappy was fo'mans fo' the Lawsons—run the whole plantation fo' 'em! Ef I'd-a bin yaller they wouldn't-a said a mumblin' word!"

"I 'member," nodded Sam. "They sho' was mad when you run off to Natchez wid Christine 'at Sat'dy night! Lawdy!"

"Huh! I know—they must o' wanted Christine to do like them other gals o' theirn——"

Joe's voice was lost in the rumble of wheels as he and Sam mounted the narrow platform at the station and made their way to the car just back of the panting engine. It was half baggage and half passenger; from the windows of the latter compartment dark faces were thrust with friendly greetings.

"Whar you bound?" called Sam to one old man whose hair was a mat of white above a dried apple of a face. Beside him sat a beldam who was undoubtedly his equally aged mate. She was dressed in gingham, and her ancient straw hat shaded a worried frown.

"Jackson," quavered the old fellow, "an' from thar"—his stained teeth showed in a grin—"we's bound fo'—*Canaan!*"

As if this were a signal to the other occupants of the crowded interior (Sam saw that the very aisles were packed), they burst into song:

"O Canaan—O Canaan—
O Canaan—Canaan over me—
An' befo' I'll be a slave
I'll be carried to my grave
An' go home to my Lawd an' be free!"

Just then the engine resumed its labored puffing, and the train rattled on across the flat, hot earth.

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"You hear that?" asked Sam.

"Yeah," answered Joe slowly. "What 'd he mean by 'Canaan'?"

"That's what they's callin' Chicago, man!" exclaimed Sam as they walked back along the solitary street. "You know—like the Hebrew chillun in the Bible. This here's old Pharaoh's land an' the North is Canaan. See? They gits that from 'at feller writin' in the *Champ'on*."

"Canaan, eh? H'm . . ." Joe bit off a chew decisively. "Somep'n tells me *I'm* a-headin' fo' Canaan! Look here—how you go 'bout gittin' that comp'ny to run a train?"

"Well, it's this-a-way," explained Sam. "'Cordin' to the paper, you gits 'bout fifty to a hunnerd folks what wants to go, an' the comp'ny gits club rates fo' all you. Three-fifty's 'bout what they's payin'—the mo' goes the less'n you pays. That's why so many's goin' to Jackson—so's to git in on the club rates. This here war 'cross the water done took a whole lotta mens 'way from the comp'nies up North, an' they wants colored folks to work up there. Payin' good money, too! Jess Bowman's boy writ home he was makin' money hand over fist!"

"Look here, Sam"—Joe stopped and spat—"you ain't makin' no money an' I ain't makin' none. Now they ain't no use o' us stayin' here ef they ain't nobody gonna be here but us. Now is they?"

"Sho' nuf the truth, Joe! I swear, I ain't seed two bits fo' so long I'd drap daid ef I did, 'fo' the Lawd I would!"

"Well, s'posin' me an' you scare up some folks to git them club rates," said Joe. "I gots five chilluns, an' don't care ef 'tis Canaan, it's gonna take a sight o' money fo' me to git up North."

"Man, I sho' nuf wid you!" exclaimed Sam. Then his enthusiasm wavered. "What's them Lawsons gwine say?"

Joe's face hardened. "They ain't gonna have no say!" he declared.

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2

Christine Lawson Benson (that was the way she wrote her name in Spencerian flourishes) came of a breed whose bloodstream was threefold; it was easy to perceive which was dominant in her. After seven years in New Orleans, where she had been an indifferent charge of a boarding school, she had come home a prospective teacher. It was during the summer of 1896. From behind two sweating mules Joe Benson, only son of Titus Lawson's plantation overseer, had stolen one longing look at the auburn-haired beauty of the slender octoroon. His white grin had streaked across to her as she stood with her father, who was passing on some orders to old Joe. Her gray eyes had roved over his lean torso, bare to the waist and glistening in the sun. The slightly hawked arch of her thin nose had tilted in simulated disdain; but the sensitive nostrils had quivered—and her nostrils were one of Christine's emotional barometers. And the fields had seen more of Christine by sunlight and moonlight. . . . Neither old Joe nor his household equal in rank, Lem Lawson, had an inkling of what was happening beneath their very noses. Then came the Saturday night just before the time scheduled for Christine to assume her duties in the town's one-room school.

From that time on Joe Benson hated the appellation "field-hand nigger." Old Lem had spat it into their faces when Joe brought his bride back from Natchez. Amid the belly laughter that secretly rocked Three Forks' colored section, Joe's father had flared up at Lem Lawson's resentment. They never spoke to one another again, though they sat in the same pew of the church which knew them as deacons. Old Joe gave the bridegroom two thirds of his forty acres on the outskirts of town. But neither Lem nor

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his sister, housekeeper at Lawson Oaks, ever completely forgave Christine.

For four years her sisters, Henrietta and Consuela, lean vestiges of an earlier beauty resembling Christine's, had ceased to recognize her. And this despite the wild escapades of their youth and hints of the ball they had attended in New Orleans every year where no Negro male showed his face—all common gossip of the town. But they were married to mulatto butlers of the town's two other "aristocratic" families. So they turned up their thin noses at their sister, who had degraded herself. . . .

They were somewhat appeased, however, when after giving birth to a deep brown boy Christine produced in rapid succession pale little Lem and (hallelujah!) that veritable magnolia blossom, Connie (named as a further peace offering by Christine). With these two bright flowers of her seed as passports, Christine once more could sit upon the porches of her sisters' pretentious houses which were sandwiched between the border lines of the white and Negro quarters of the town.

"Dam' uppity cusses," Joe had boiled as he worked his fields, followed by his silent young Solomon, "I'll show 'em!"

Six years later he had shown them. He threw up a white-and-green structure beside theirs, just as pretentious and matching theirs line for line. Old Joe must have squirmed in his fresh grave at this wanton sacrifice of fifteen hard-earned cotton acres! Then, as if to celebrate this *coup de maître*, one almost on the heels of the other, Essie and the junior Joe came with snapping black eyes, strangely curling lustrous hair, and (alack!) brown as dried cotton seeds. And from her earliest days Essie hadn't cared how much her aunts sniffed at her. She ignored them; as a matter of fact she ignored most persons except her father and her brother Sol. When Henrietta, in a moment of what must have been weakness, had attempted to stroke the child's head, Essie

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had shied from the scrawny hand with a roll of her expressive eyes. Her father had chuckled robustiously and juggled her in one huge palm with malicious glee.

Essie was always by her father's side when he was at home. She was there now as the family group sat on the porch during what was to be its last Sunday afternoon in Three Forks. Joe shaded his eyes from the sunlight flickering through the oak that mingled its branches with those fronting the houses of his sisters-in-law. He spat out his chew and turned to his wife.

"We's leavin' fo' the North, come Sat'dy," he announced.

Christine whirled in her chair to face him with the look of a woman who, even after many years of marital familiarity, is pampered by a doting husband.

"There you go again!"

Her soprano shrilled plaintively. It sounded like the voice of a petulant child, and justly so, for Christine, married though she was and a mother, had never really grown up. Her father and older sisters had never allowed her to do so.

"Every time there's a bad season you get to talking about going North!" she continued. "And what good 'll that do you? None! You heard what Reverend Jones said this morning. These people leaving the South now are just good-for-nothings. They'll never amount to anything anywhere! And they're a lot better off down here than they'll be up there in Chicago—a-freezing and starving to death! White folks don't care a thing about you up there. Down here they'll at least help you——"

"You bes' start gittin' stuff together you wants to take, come tomorrer," interrupted Joe calmly. For the life of him he'd never been able to speak with genuine harshness to his wife. Where she was concerned he was like a great rock which allowed the waves of her emotional storms to dash against it unheeded.

"Ain't no use o' me foolin' myself," he went on. "These

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folks is leavin' to stay. Ain't a house wid a soul in it 'cross town. An' the bo' weevil done ruint the crops——"

"Ain't five pounds o' cotton on our place," drawled Sol. He was a young edition of Joe, inclined to moods of long silences, and always appearing to be relaxed, even at work.

He slumped now on the steps of the porch with his long legs sprawling. He was still in overalls and faded shirt. For the eight years since Joe had introduced him to the rigors of farming at the age of twelve, Sol almost always had worn nothing but his work clothes. Unlike the other blades of Three Forks, he had never seemed interested in swaggering along the one Negro street in a mail-order suit, "come Sat'dy nights." Yet he had suits—one for every Christmas of his working years, each recording in size and cut Sol's growth and the successive, ultrafashionable male styles for the years 1908 to 1916. Sol's one ambition, apparently, was the trying on of these garments on Christmas Day and the surveying of the effect in a mirror. This done, he would pack the garments in their cases and stack them carefully in a closet. After that his two pairs of overalls would suffice him until the next Yule season.

"I wants to git 'way from here, anyways," he continued, hard bunches of muscle showing at his jaw as he chewed. He scowled darkly at his big, calloused hands clasped across his robust chest. "The fust time one o' them white trash 'cross town meddles wid me they's gonna have *me* to lynch!"

"Nobody's going to bother any of us," said Christine. "The Lawsons wouldn't let——"

"The Lawsons!"

It was Connie who spoke so scornfully. She was fourteen but looked more mature. She was a replica of her mother, slightly fairer, and with eyes that held gray glints amid their hazel.

"I'm so glad this is my Sunday off, I don't know what to do!" She dropped the book she had been reading, and her

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lips curled over her brilliant teeth. "Ef Uncle Ben don't keep his hands to hisself, I'm going to take somep'n and knock his head off!"

"What's he a-doin' to you?" Joe's frame tautened. He glowered fiercely at Christine, who had sunk back at the startling words of her daughter. Joe forgot his easygoing ways with his wife. "I told you not to let 'er go to work over there!" he growled.

"You know what you're saying, Connie?" demanded the mother feebly.

"Sho' I knows what I'm sayin'!" retorted the girl. "I told ole Miss Lawson 'bout it, an' she ain't done nothin' but laugh! Says I'm out'n my head!" Connie clenched her fists savagely. "I sho' wish you would leave here, Pa! I'm sick o' this place! I wants to be somebody—an' you sho' cain't be nobody in this town!"

"Well, you's leavin' now," assured Joe. "You stay here an' help yo' ma wid the house an' packin' this week. Sol, do ole man Tibbetts still want that land?"

"Yeah, he want 'em all right nuf," answered Sol. "Come round yestiddy sayin' as how he done hear all the niggers is leavin' town an' thinkin' mebbe you had a hank'rin' the same way. Dam' his stinkin' hide! I heard he was one o' the head ones in that lynchin'——"

"More 'n likely he was," grunted Joe. "How's Lem doin' out there?"

"He's all right," said Sol. "That gimp laig o' hisn holds 'im back some—but he's all right, fo' a young'un."

"I want 'im to help me wid the stuff at the sto' this week. Reckon he's over to Henny's, Christine?"

"Dere he!" chirped Essie, pointing.

Across the neighboring lawn limped a frail lad with a curly thatch of reddish hair.

"How's your aunt Henny?" asked Christine when he had gained the porch. "Her back any better?"

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Connie snickered. She liked her aunts no better than Essie. And even at her early age she had heard old gossips of the village whisper about how Henny was beginning to reap the bitter harvest of the sins of her youth.

Christine cast a threatening look at her precocious daughter.

"Hush your mouth, gal!" she warned.

"Humph!" grunted Connie, unperturbed. "'Tain't my fault she's rotten an' stinks!"

"Hush up, gal!" ordered Joe. But he concealed a malicious grin.

Christine rose abruptly and set out for her sister's house.

"Ain't no use fo' you to say nothin' 'bout us leavin' town," Joe called after her. "This time I don't want no mouth out'n them sisters o' yourn! See?"

But Christine already was mounting Henrietta's porch. Joe shrugged and looked sheepish under Connie's amused glance. She was a slick one, that Connie—always had been.

"Where's that Joe?" he demanded by way of diverting her attention. "Confound, that boy ain't never home!"

"Reckon he's down by the branch," conjectured Sol.

"I'll git him," said Essie, and was off in a twinkling.

Joe stole a look at Connie, but she was buried once more in her book.

3

" . . . An' ain't nothin' you or nobody else do is gonna stop me! You's jes' wastin' yo' breath!"

Joe leaned over the counter and fairly bellowed the words into the sharp face of his father-in-law. He hadn't been surprised to see old Lem hobble into the store just before noon. Christine had been "raisin' ruckus" all week in addition to having enlisted the aid of her sisters. He had blasted them back to their homes in short order, and now he was treating their sire to a heavy barrage.

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"So you won't listen to me, eh?" quavered the old man. "You's jes' mulish like yo' pappy befo' you! Here I done told you Mistah Lawson 'll let you have the job o' fo'man ef you stays here whar you b'longs, an' you's jes' too blame cussed to take it! You ain't had no business settin' up no sto' noways—orter stayed on the land whar you b'longs——"

"Jes' a *field-hand nigger*, huh?" sneered Joe. He leaned nearer his visitor as he grated: "Well, I ain't gonna be no *field-hand nigger!* See? An' I ain't gonna stay here an' let no gal o' *mine* be no strumpit fo' nobody! See?"

"What you mean, nigger?" Old Lawson flinched, and his gray eyes flashed as the red flooded his freckled neck.

"You knows what I means!" leered Joe. "Ever'body knowed 'bout Connie an' Henny back there b'fo' they was married! Ever'body knowed where them purty clo'es use come from——"

"Shet yo' black mouth!" shrieked the old man, turning livid.

Joe laughed unpleasantly. "Ain't no use gittin' on no high hosses wid me!" he retorted. "You knows I don't give a dam' 'bout nobody in this town, jes' like my pappy b'fo' me! See? An' ef they tries anything on me an' mine . . ." Joe jerked a revolver from beneath the counter and spun it expertly. Old Lawson recoiled. Joe's deep chuckle was ugly as the weapon disappeared. "Now ef you thinks you kin stop me from takin' my wife wid me, you bes' git the fool notion out'n yo' haid!"

"You ain't comin' to no good! You hear me, Joe Benson?" The subdued butler fingered his black bow nervously. "You wait 'll you gits up North wid hard times a-pest'rin' you! Jes' wait!" With that he shambled out as haughtily as his years would permit. Joe's laugh mocked him.

A few minutes later Sam Cummins came in and took a seat upon a box. He was dusty and fatigued, but he wore an air of suppressed excitement.

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"What you doin', man?" he inquired, wiping his face.

"Makin' a list fo' Dave Lennert's boy 'cross town what jes' set up in business," answered Joe. "He's a purty nice po' white boy—somep'n like his pappy. Says he'll gimme what the list calls fo'—takin' the whole caboodle. How'd you make out up the country?"

"Man," exclaimed Sam, "ever'thing's set! Some o' them folks up there's *walkin'* 'way! An' look——" He produced a letter. "These here people says they's runnin' a train Labor Day night all the way from the coast! All you needs is three-fifty from Jackson——"

"Hot dam'!" shouted Joe. "Man, you's all right! 'Bout how many's leavin' wid us?"

"Near 'bout fifty, countin' chilluns. Man, Moses ain't got nothin' on us! They's leavin' Sunday night. Me an' my ole woman's mos' ready." Sam hesitated a minute. "Look here, Joe," he said haltingly, "I'm kind o' short o' money—you knows how things bin wid me. An' I cain't git nothin' on my house——"

"Here." Joe took out a roll of bills and peeled off three tens. "You gone home an' finish gittin' ready. You kin pay me when you gits started in Chicago."

Sam was profuse with gratitude, but Joe waved him out and went on with his accounts.

4

"Come on—git over an' give a lady a seat! What's the matter wid you menfolks? Ain't you got no manners nohow?"

With his youngest son in his lap, Joe sat facing the sleeping Christine, at whose side, slumbering with his head on her shoulder, was Lem. Connie shared the seat with Joe and held the wide-awake, excited Essie on one knee.

Joe looked up from his calculations on a scrap of wrapping

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paper. The strident voice belonged to a buxom brownskin of Christine's age. She was clad in widow's weeds but had not the least vestige of sorrow in her bearing. She was addressing the group seated directly behind Christine and Lem. One of her plump hands straddled a bulging hip, while the other gripped a valiselike pocketbook. Her big, luminous eyes were full of scorn as the three men squirmed but refused to move.

"You kin set here, lady," offered Joe. He rose with an inviting wave of his hand.

"Well, now—that's real nice o' you, mister," beamed the woman. She threw a last contemptuous look at the indifferent group before she moved.

The train had just jolted out of Memphis and was roaring on into the night. Joe upended a suitcase and sat facing this woman, who even in repose bubbled with limitless energy.

"Here, gimme that lil rascal," she commanded, reaching for young Joe. She grunted, surveying the car with swift glances. "Folks sho' nuf leavin' from down here, ain't they? Never seed so many colored folks on one train in all my bo'n days—'cludin' 'scursions!"

"Yeah," agreed Joe. He had wanted to talk for some time; the journey was becoming monotonous. "Reckon they's all headin' fo' the same place—Chicago?"

"Near 'bout. From what I gits from the papers, though, some's stoppin' in St Louis. Big meat places there, you know."

"What's yo' name?" asked Joe. "Mine's Joe Benson. That's my wife an' these is my chilluns—an' there's my oldest boy yonder settin' wid Sam Cummins an' his wife. We's all from Mis'sippi—Three Forks——"

"Well, suh!" interrupted the woman eagerly. "I'm from down that-a-way too! Come up to Memphis wid my man twenty year ago. Name's Maggie Dawson—Maggie to my friends——"

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"Now that's sho' nuf nice," said Joe. "We's goin' to Chicago. Where you bound?"

"Same place," answered Maggie, very pleased now that she was among "home folks." "My man he went out an' got hisself shot up by a woman 'bout a month ago—serve him right fo' his two-timin' ways—so I'm a-goin' North an' start all over agin. Sold out my eat shop an' ever'thing—figgers on startin' another one soon's I gits to Chicago. Folks got to eat, you know!"

"I'm gone do 'bout the same thing," said Joe, and expanded. "I figgers I kin git started up there in a sto'—ought to make *real* money wid prices like they is——"

"Now you's talkin'!" agreed Maggie. "Ef I'd-a had a man like you——"

"Who's that woman?" Christine had jerked up suddenly out of her sleep. "If you'd-a had a man like who?" she demanded, her nose rearing.

"Wait a minute—wait a minute, honey!" chuckled Joe. He hastened to introduce them.

"How's you?" Maggie smiled uncertainly. "My, but you gots nice chilluns! . . . Jes' like you, this gal o' yourn—an' that purty-haired boy there, too."

Christine's face lost its hostility, for it pleased her vanity to have the looks of her children praised.

As the two lapsed into feminine conversation Joe left his seat to wander through the littered aisles that smelled of stale food, sweating bodies and the fortifying liquors which some of the migrants had brought with them. He met similar sights in each of the fetid coaches: here a raucous huddle of drunken city loafers; there a loud-mouthed group of women whose rouge, perfume and postures manifested their means of livelihood; yonder a sober parson hemmed about by his flock. But dominating all, like symbols of the strata to which they belonged, were the easily identified farm laborers, brawny stevedores and dock hands, some

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still wearing the grimy garments of their occupations—black labor of the South hearkening to the call of the bustling, fabulously rich, industrial North.

And some had visions:

". . . yeah, man! They's payin' *real* money! Gonna see my chilluns wid a fittin' eddication. . . ."

". . . gonna vote an' be a *man!*"

". . . gonna own my own house!"

And some had illusions:

". . . says you kin go *any*place you gots money to go. . . ."

". . . nobody to tell you *'stay in yo' place, nigger.'* . . ."

". . . don't work half hard's you does back home. . . ."

And some were jubilant and sang—sang the old songs while the whole coach joined in:

"Crossin' over—into Canaan—
An' I couldn't bear nobody pray!"

And on the morrow that great titan city of the Northern prairie, sprawled about an inland ocean, would fling out its wide-stretching arms to receive them for what they were. And their heartbeats would mingle with its never-ceasing throb of life. And somehow the lusty texture of its pioneer bloodstream would sweep up theirs—for better or for worse. . . .

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Lusty, virile, and boisterous city . . . city of the high, the low, the merchant prince and the consuming pauper . . . of the polyglot racial spawns spewed from all the quarters of the globe . . . Great pioneer city, sprung from the hut of Du Sable: nor Northern rigors of climate, nor disaster of fire could defeat you! You bared your brawn to the elements and roared defiance! From ashes you reared yourself to splendor! You dispatched your lake tramps, laden with commerce . . . you gathered the hogs and beeves from the prairies and Western plains and cast them with sinews of steel into the world's hungry maw. . . . You mingled your leaping heartthrobs with the economic pulse international and established your own pumping stations. . . . You stretched forth your arms in welcome and embraced, with a huge belly laughter, the polyglot racial spawns spewed from all the globe's quarters. . . . You gave them each a portion of your broad bosom to suckle as you drew strength from your commerce, waxed gigantic, and sprawled around great Michigan, monarch of land-locked waters. . . . Great Canaan, ugliest where you are ugly . . . altogether beautiful among ten thousand, where you are beautiful . . . O Canaan . . . Titan of the prairies!

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2

THE TRAIN staggered to a stop. The contents of the coaches seemed an endless stream.

"My God! Never knew so many of 'em was in the country!" ejaculated a commuter as he and a companion elbowed through the milling throng.

"Been like this all summer," panted the other. "Might be good, but I doubt it. Too *many*, b'Jesus!"

"Mistah, how you gits to Thirty-fifth an' Dearbo'n?"

"Take the State Street car . . ."

"Cousin Lonnie say he was gonna meet me. . . ."

"Hello, honey! Sho' is glad you made up yo' mind to come!"

"You seed that boy o' mine? Plague take his hide! . . . Allus gittin' hisself losted!"

"This way out! This way out!" bawled a station attendant.

"You all come wid me," bade Maggie. She helped Christine to gather countless bundles. "Here—come here, gal!" She took up Essie in one arm. "My sister Josie lives up on State Street an' she ought to be able to put us up fo' a while. I writ her I was a-comin'."

"I sho' is much 'bliged to you, Mis' Dawson," said Joe

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warmly. "Come on, Sol—you an' Lem git the rest o' them bags. Connie, you take that bundle an' git hold o' Junior's hand. Hey there, Sam, you an' Maymie——"

The little barber was standing bewildered in the aisle. Behind him his wife seemed to cower like a fat child in fright. Her mulatto features of infantile snubness were flushed, while her double chin shook with excitement. At Joe's boom, however, the pair moved forward with their baggage expectantly.

"Whar you gwine?" whispered Sam.

"Come on wid me," said Joe.

Out on the platform some thirty men, women and children were huddled. When they saw Joe they bore down upon him in a body.

"What we gone do now, Mistah Joe?"

"Whar we gwine go?"

"I sho' is hongry——"

"Mammy here ain't feelin' a bit good——"

"Kinda wish I was back home——"

They swamped him, but Joe rose to the occasion.

"Come on, all o' you, follow me!"

And like the remnant of an army, with restored confidence in its leader, they fell in step behind him. That he didn't know where he was taking them didn't disturb Joe in the least. His head was up, a light was in his eyes, and his step seemed to lose some of its peasant's trudge. Maggie threw him more than one admiring smile as she moved along at his side.

2

"Whew! Man, I ain't never walk so much in my bo'n days!"

With his toes pointed ceilingward, Joe slumped on the worn cot. Night had come. The rumble of streetcars and the clatter of other vehicles in the street below assailed the

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open windows of the small, boxlike room that served as Josie's parlor.

Josie was shorter than Maggie but just as buxom as her older sister. Aside from the one difference, they could have been twins.

"You must o' had a time gittin' places fo' all them people," she said. "Sorry I didn't have mo' room, but you see I ain't got no more 'n fo' myself—an' one o' them's rented. Dern rent's so high!"

"Yeah," chimed in her stocky husband, whose round dark countenance had lost none of its good nature at this sudden barging in of his sister-in-law and a strange family. "Ef it warn't fo' the rents an' the eats you mought make some headway up here."

"I sho' hates to be puttin' you all out like this, Mr Jethro——"

"Jes' Jethro 'll do," his host interrupted Joe with a cordial smile. "You's a lodge brother, an' I reckon we kin manage till you all gits another place. You ain't bin here more 'n half a day an' ain't had time to look round. They's some houses over on Dearbo'n Street what ain't the wuss—co'se they ain't nothin' to brag on. . . ."

"Yeah . . . I was lookin' at some o' them," said Joe. He shook his head doubtfully. "I don't mind, but Christine ain't noways hankerin' to stay in none o' them! I know that right now! Where's she at?"

"Gone to bed—plumb give out," said Josie. "Her an' Maggie both. All us women's gonna sleep in two rooms an' you menfolks kin scatter round. Yo' three boys is in the room down the hall——"

"An' I gonna sleep on that," Jethro pointed to the couch.

"Well, you all's jes' like home folks!" Joe exclaimed. "Met some folks today, though, that warn't—up on Wabash Avenue. Kinda uppish-like, they is."

Jethro grunted. "Them's folks what tries to be dickty!

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Families bin up here a long time. Mostly Pullman po'ters an' folks wid hifalutin eddication. They don't mix wid us over here—don't even want set in same pew wid you——"

"Like some folks down home, eh?" growled Joe. "I'll show 'em!"

"What you aimin' to do?" asked Jethro.

Joe told him briefly, and added: "Puttin' that oldest boy an' gal to work, an' use Lem in the sto' 'cause he cripple."

"I kin git them young'uns jobs in the stockyards wid me —comp'ny needs plenty 'cause they shorthanded now."

"That's right nice o' you, now," said Joe, "an' I ain't fo'gittin' it!" He yawned. "Reckon I'll git to bed. Ef any mo' folks from home come round, jes' say I ain't here. Look like they takes me fo' they pappy! Ef some of 'em don't git mo' backbone, they ain't gonna make it!"

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3

IT WAS a Saturday afternoon during the latter part of that first October. Already the prairie winds and the lake blasts were converging their chilling eddies upon the city, and Sam was muffled to the ears in a greatcoat as he strutted into Joe's newly established store on State Street. He flourished a sheaf of bills under Joe's nose and slapped them down on the counter exultantly.

"There's yo' thirty—count 'em!" he chuckled gleefully. He leaned complacently upon the counter and surveyed Joe's merchandise. "Got to give it to you, man," he said finally. "You sho' nuf knows what the folks wants, all right nuf!"

He watched Lem stack the cases of canned goods in neat designs on their shelves. "Sho' don't take you long to ketch on, Joe," he continued. "That's jes' the way them other sto'keepers does they things. Looks purty, too."

"You cain't let no grass grow under yo' feet, man, up here," answered Joe. "Ever' day I goes out an' sees what they's doin' in other places an' then I does 'bout the same thing—keeps my prices right 'long wid theys's an' buys from the same wholesalers. Nick Cohen—he what keeps that bake-

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shop next do'—got me in wid some friends o' hisn what's in the wholesale business 'cause Lem an' me help put out a fire in his place last month. Sho' makes a diff'ence in the prices. Ef they was 'bout five o' us fellers together we could buy bigger lots an' that 'd make things even better. I bin tryin' to git some o' the folks what come up wid us to put they money to use, but they won't listen——"

"Some of 'em done gone plumb crazy!" declared Sam with a shake of his head. "Some o' them single men—an' married ones too—what works over to the slaughterhouse wid Maymie ain't doin' a thing but givin' they money to them hussies what lives next do' to y'all——"

"Them dirty strumpits!" growled Joe. "They's the nastiest bunch o' whores I ever seed! Back in that hot spell they'd git out in they back yard wid not the fust stitch on! I cotched 'em tryin' to git Sol an' Lem to come over, an' I told them boys ef I cotched 'em havin' anything to do wid 'em I'd cut the hide off'n 'em! Nasty high yallers an' po' white trash!"

"Ain't they a mess? Us folks ought git t'gether an' go to the police 'bout it!" Sam was vehement. "An' look like they's a saloon wid a gamblin' hole in the back on ever' corner——"

"Ain't gone do no good," said Joe. "I went to the police last month an' they ain't done nothin' yit. Only thing I see to do is move 'way soon's I'm able. I ain't wantin' them gals o' mine round no sich mess like that!" He remembered a question he'd wanted to ask Sam, who, as in his Southern home, acted as a news carrier. "What's done happen to Jim Ed Boozey an' them Wilsons from up the country? Ain't seed 'em round fo' more 'n two weeks now."

"Man, they bin gone back home," informed Sam. "Jim Ed got daid drunk one Sunday night an' was late fo' work, come Monday mornin', over to the packin' house. Maymie say the boss man warn't gwine do nothin' but take off his pay, but Jim Ed was feelin' mean on 'count o' his likker an'

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went to talkin' 'bout what he gwine do ef the boss man mess wid his pay. So the boss man fires him an' Wilson 'cause Wilson was late the same mornin'."

"Now ain't that somep'n!" growled Joe. "Here they was makin' mo' money 'n they ever made in they life an' got go to cuttin' the fool! Us folks jes' ain't right, that's all——"

"They ain't—haven't—had a chance to get set, Pa," interposed Lem, who had been listening to the episode. "This is all new to us folks from the South. I ain't—I haven't—never—ever—been in school with white boys and girls before, and I find it hard 'cause it's jes'—just—strange. Everything's new . . . different . . ." Lem paused for lack of expression for his thoughts, but his sensitive face held a light of comprehension. "I remember," he continued, "how the whole class looked at Connie and me when we fust—first—started night school in September. Sho' did feel funny. . . ."

"Sho' do wish I warn't so old," breathed Cummins. "I'd go git some o' that eddication, b'lieve me!"

"But you're not too old," said Lem quickly. "Why, there are plenty of foreigners in our classes who are as old as you——"

"Nope," interrupted Sam with a positive shake of his head. "Too late now. You cain't teach a ole mule a new trot. Wal, guess I'll git back over to the shop—'bout time fo' the boys to be comin' in."

"That's the trouble with us," said Lem when Sam had gone. "We're always saying what we *can't* do instead of what we *can* do!"

"Is that sho' nuf right 'bout them furriners, son?" asked Joe slowly.

"Sho', Pa! And some of 'em are older than you!"

"Well, I reckon I'll gone over there an' see what they gots," said Joe decisively. "Come on now," he snapped, "git 'long

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wid them cans—gotta rig up them vegetables. Git a move on!"

So it was that Joe sought the portals of learning after a lapse of over thirty years. He was placed in the sixth grade, but he shut his jaw down grimly and went to work on his books. During slack hours in the store he pored over them and thumbed them until they were grimy with grease and vegetable stains. Grammar was his nemesis; as a matter of fact he dismissed it with a shrug. But history, arithmetic and geography were his meat.

"Where's Ree-o-dee January?" he'd suddenly demand of Lem.

No sooner would Lem supply the answer, or pretend he didn't know in order to give his sire a triumph, then Joe would offer some arithmetical conundrum. At times when business fell into doldrums Joe was wont to be "fretracious"; Lem would lure him away into the field of history, where they'd fight again momentous battles and discuss the significance of the "scraps of paper" with which men have padded their earthly records. In all he became an avid seeker after the knowledge he had missed in his youth.

Nor did the interest of Joe wane until he became the proud possessor of a certificate two years later. Then it was that he said he "had to git down to business" and "ef they's mo' to learn I'll learn myself." And literally he did just that. Few book salesmen with their "short cuts to knowledge" found him an unfavorable prospect. He bought books on business, law, travel and—most beloved of all—politics. He'd learned the use of the dictionary during his two-year intellectual foray, and with the aid of it he doggedly plodded through volume after volume. His chief delight was to corner Lem and Connie on some point and then roar his rich abdominal mirth at them after he had stumblingly but successfully expounded. And this fever did not leave him even after he had become the prominent figure which the South Side was

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to know as one of its leaders—the one to whom men of far superior formal training were to come for advice and help, and whose favor they were eagerly to cultivate.

For Joe Benson had that inner something which marks the born leader. Out of all that black horde which swept blindly Northward under the impetus of social, economic and political pressure from the bottom lands of the South, Joe was among those best fitted to survive. His was a physical bigness and surging health that resolutely breasted the prairie's bitter sieges of ice and snow of the winters of 1916 and 1917, and set him apart from the others. While some fled back to their Southern haunts, Joe reveled in the bite and sting of the elements.

He would be up at five in the morning and go clumping downstairs to a frigid kitchen. Soon the great fire that he had kindled would roar its summons to the rest of the family. Connie and Christine would shiver downstairs, their teeth a-chatter and their shoulders hunched.

"Come on, gals!" he'd thunder at them. "Let's git goin'—I gots to git over to the sto' an' clean off the walk! . . . You Sol! You Lem! Git up from that bed! . . . Git a hustle on! You's up North now, and you's got to git out an' git!"

And the boys would descend, sleepy and unashamed before their womenfolk, barefoot and in their long drawers, and dragging their outer garments behind them to dress in the warmth of the red-hot stove. Then Joe would get his youngest. He'd begin by tickling Essie and smacking Junior upon his quivering and rebelling buttocks; then, gathering the kicking and squealing twain under one mighty arm, he'd march back to the kitchen where the table creaked beneath the morning meal.

Though he was a good provider for his family ("Rather feed you than pay a doctor!" he'd declare) Joe was a thrifty man during those first years. His aproned, hulking form became familiar to the tellers in the colored bank

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across from his store. But he was cautious; he put the bulk of his profits in a near-by national bank.

"Don't do to trust nobody too much," he told Lem with a crafty wink. "Co'se I says with the rest o' the folks: we's got to stick together. But I done seen our folks mess up a heap, son. We gots a long way to go in this here business game—a long way!"

2

It was at a meeting held in one of the large colored churches that Joe first caught the eye of the South Side. The meeting was sponsored by several civic organizations and had as its purpose to help the migrants from the South to adjust themselves to their new environment. The main speaker was a college-bred young Negro who, from the general tone and substance of his discussion, was intensely in earnest about the welfare of his people.

"I know that you've suffered all kinds of injustice down home," he said at the conclusion of his talk, "but that's no reason why you should take it out on these people here. You mustn't become too easily insulted! Be steady in your jobs; save your money; keep your children off the streets and send them to school regularly. You have a chance up here if you'll only take advantage of it. Don't go around with a chip on your shoulder. And remember: a clean, self-respecting, intelligent, industrious Negro is welcomed here in Chicago; but a vicious, dirty, lazy, ignorant Negro is a menace to his own people as well as to the other group! That's why you've been reading these spurious—bad—articles in the newspapers about us. Whatever one of us does that is bad is placed in the account of the whole group. If you're going to get into streetcars dirty and drunk and sit beside other people because the law allows it, then you're going to bring trouble to all of us. If you're going to fight because a man accidentally knocks against you in a crowded

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street, then you're going to cause trouble. Just think—*think* more and *feel* less, and you'll become a great part of a great city!"

After the applause the chairman called for an open discussion. As is usual in such cases, an embarrassed silence fell upon the gathering. Then a deep voice boomed from the rear of the auditorium, and all eyes swung to the speaker. It was Joe Benson, his great head thrust forward and his blunt fingers raking through his shock of hair.

"I 'grees with the gen'man," he said haltingly, "but they's mo' to it than what he done say. What 'bout these here bad houses what we folks got to live in? I don't know 'bout other folks, but"—here his voice became proud—"I didn't live in no shack like I'm livin' in now 'fo' I come up here! I owned my house—an' I'm gonna own this one, too, 'fo' I'm through!" Applause broke out. "Then I'm gonna fix it up! But what I'm gittin' at is these here landlords makin' us pay these high rents fo' these shacks! Look like the law ought make 'em fix 'em up! Lawd knows it costs nuf to heat a house 'thout havin' to heat all out do's so's to keep warm!" Laughter and applause greeted this sally. "An' some o' these houses ain't got the fust water in 'em! . . . Ain't that so, neighbor?" Joe turned to a big red man at his side who nodded vigorously. "Yes sir! My neighbor here has to tote water from my place, an' he's payin' the same rent I was payin' 'fo' I start buyin' my house! An' that ain't all. What 'bout these here whore houses an' gamblin' places?"

A shocked stir ran through a group of elegantly dressed women sitting to the right of the rostrum, but Joe blurted:

" 'Tain't no use o' lookin' like that! You all don't have to be bothered wid 'em 'cause you live over on them high-class streets, but us folks what jes' come up here has to live in them hog-waller streets wid all kinds o' good-fo'-nothin' trash! Now I done come up here to stay an' I'm gonna git what I wants 'cause I ain't gonna let nothin' stop me! But

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some o' these folks I come up here wid cain't help theyselves. Now what you folks what's done bin up here fo' the Lawd knows when gonna do 'bout it? You kin hold all these here meetin' talks all you wants, but that ain't gonna do a thing ef you gonna hold yo'selves off from us like you bin 'fo' these newspapers started printin' things you all didn't like. You jes' give us a chance an' help us—an' don't think you all's so good 'cause you bin up here long 'n us—an' we'll show you somep'n!"

Amid the prolonged applause Joe sat down and mopped his face, for the unaccustomed role had taxed him mightily. At the termination of the meeting the young speaker rushed into the audience and caught Joe's arm.

"Wait a minute, mister!" he said eagerly. "I'd like to talk to you! My name's Carter."

"Mine's Benson," said Joe. "I kind o' liked yo' talk. "S'posin' you come 'long wid me to my sto' so's I kin lock up fo' the night."

"Mr Benson," said Carter as they walked along in the still cold, "you brought out tonight exactly what I've been saying all along to my superiors. Now that they've heard you, there 'll be something done about it, I hope. My plan is . . ."

He outlined his scheme of attack, which consisted of lining up all of the social welfare agencies, with the churches as focal points, in a concerted drive. He'd form clubs among the young men and women of the older families of the city who'd make visits to the homes of the migrants; he'd organize the children of the latter group into "health and civic pride" clubs; he'd have a committee meet with the landlords . . . In short, Mr Carter was at that age when one is most energetic and optimistic, with visions of the choicest idealism. . . .

However, Joe shared his enthusiasm and worked heartily with him. But human nature being as it is, and man the ani-

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mal that he is, conditions surrounding most of the migrants remained the same; for the simple reason that time-stamped traits of the common horde are not easily eradicated. The gamblers, the harlots and the saloons continued to infest the blighted section. The housewives of the transplanted families took one look at the neatly dressed, smiling daughters of "old Chicagoans" and reacted in no uncertain terms to their advice on hygiene and household cleanliness:

"Mind yo' own business!"

"Who you think you is? Round yuh tryin' tell *me* how to run *mah* house!"

Such were the rebuffs suffered by these young crusaders.

The majority of male newcomers slouched past the "Christian Welfare" building with its welcome sign in the window, squirted a stream of tobacco juice in its general direction, decided that it was too "dickty" and returned to the places of amusement more to their taste.

Young Carter's efforts were not all fruitless; nor did he and the organizations with which he was affiliated subside in their efforts. Some of the more intelligent settlers took advantage of the opportunities presented and made their children follow suit. Such was the case of the Benson family. But only Time and his chastening agents were to have a greatly significant effect upon that uncouth, surging horde which swarmed into Chicago's South Side when Joe Benson first trudged into his Canaan.

3

There was another tangible good that came of Joe's meeting Dan Carter; it brought together Connie and Mae, Dan's sister. For Dan's small, sharp eyes had squinted appreciatively from his lean, coppery face at Connie's points of beauty.

It developed that the Carters, who lived on Wabash Avenue in an ivy-grown brownstone mansion, had been a

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part of the city for generations. The Carters' record was a chronicle of success. Great-grandfather Carter had been a "free" mulatto of old Charleston and during the Reconstruction had fled his headwaitership in a famous hostelry which he had made nationally famous because of his phenomenal memory for names and faces. He had settled in what had ultimately become the Loop, and lived to see his son take over a prosperous catering business which his own industry had built. The present head of the family, Dan senior, had taken advantage of his ability to be white or colored at will and turned barrister, in which role he had been no mean player. If his real-estate holdings were an indication of the man's astuteness, he most certainly had done well by himself. And now young Dan was following brilliantly in the trail blazed by his father. Ere long, the latter predicted, his boy, whose record at the university's law school was enviable, would be headed for the legislature. And the old man would finger the fine white mustache which he knew gave him the appearance of a Solon. And his plump, sealskin-brown partridge of a wife, too, would preen her yellowish-white hair with fat hands that long since had lost traces of the laundry she had done before snatching the prize marital "catch" of the nineties from under the very noses of her more socially fortunate rivals. Now her dinners, luncheons and suppers were always listed conspicuously in all the weeklies. Also she doted on their daughter, though teen-age Mae, carrying her social diadem with a grace in spite of her tartaric attitude, often stated her antipathy for the Carter tradition.

"Make yourselves right at home," she told Connie and Lem the Sunday during the Christmas holidays when they had finally accepted Dan's invitation to call.

Connie and Lem had stared at the display of well-being in the Carter living room. Everything exemplified a taste which had developed through years: the old furniture, the not too brilliantly bulbed tree with its heaps of presents

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beneath it, the family portraits upon the soberly papered walls. And in this setting the easy conversation of Dan and Mae flowed as though it naturally belonged here.

Friendship soon drew Mae and Connie together in spite of Dame Carter's protests to her daughter. Mae had a mind of her own. Besides, she made no bones of her being smitten with the blond good looks of the girl-shy Lem.

Mae was to become one of those little women whom men are prone to regard (erroneously) as animated adult dolls. Men were to look at her and know immediately that the least too much pressure would break any one of her pretty parts. She quickly dissipated the illusion, however. From adolescence onward she was a half pint of tacks—the finely pointed kind—wrapped in cherubic, dark-eyed brown daintiness. When occasion demanded, her chirping voice carried a snarl like that of a peevish Pekingese. It had been that same snarl which had quelled the sly aspersions thrown at Connie by the snobs in Mae's set.

"Always remind 'em where they came from," Mae had advised. "If you don't know, your guess will be pretty near right. Then watch 'em run! Remember that their Plymouth Rock was an auction block, just like ours!"

Their friendship was lasting, and it was Mae who finally persuaded Connie to follow teacher training when she had finished high school at the head of her class.

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4

"How's MY BABIES TODAY? In school, are they?"

Christine smiled welcome to her blue-clad, puffing visitor, for this was Miss Jane Saunders, a school nurse of the South Side. She was a robust, energetic mulatto with something of the sprite in her chubby, youthful face, which even the thick lens of her spectacles could not disperse.

"Come right up to the stove, Miss Jane," invited Christine. "Your face is red as a beet! How in the world do you stand all that snow and cold?"

"Lord, honey!" laughed Jane, unwrapping a blue scarf from her neck. "If you had on as many clothes as I have, you'd wish it was colder!"

"Here—give me your coat," said Christine. "I'll hang it near the stove——"

"Nope," said the nurse, "I'll just sit here and blow a minute. Just stopped in to see how the kids are getting on. Check-up work, that's all."

"I'll get a nice cup of tea ready for you," offered Christine. "It 'll help warm you up. You know," she confessed shamefacedly, "I didn't like the idea of you coming here at first—

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looked like buttin' in. You see, we don't have nothing like you all down home——"

"I know," said Jane easily. "I could tell that when you didn't want me to take Essie and Junior to the hospital back in December. But I couldn't let them stay here—you know what the conditions were. I have to give it to you, though. You and your folks certainly have cleaned it up." She sighed heavily. "You ought to see *some* of the places I have to go into! Lord! I don't see how any human can stand 'em!"

Christine glanced proudly about her brightly painted and scrubbed kitchen.

"We were used to good living before we came up here," she said. "All my family's good livers. But some of these we came up here with ain't never been used to nothing. They used to live in cabins, and some of these places up here's like heaven to 'em!"

Jane nodded understandingly. "I know. It reminds me of the little town I lived in as a girl."

Christine was surprised. "Where was that?" she asked. "I thought you was born here."

Jane started buttoning her coat and laughed. "No, indeed, honey!" she exclaimed. "I was raised by an aunt down in Maryland. She was a midwife, and I guess I take after her. Folks down there—some of them—don't live any better than some of the folks you came up here with." She chuckled. "I guess nearly all the colored folk here in Chicago come from some part of the South." She moved toward the hall door. "How's Essie and Junior getting along in school? And how's your husband's store coming on? I hear he made quite a to-do at a welfare meeting not so long ago."

"They're getting on all right," said Christine. "Essie says some of the white children are mean-like sometimes, but she fights 'em and makes Junior do the same. She's got plenty spunk! The store's coming on tolerable fair—though Joe ain't never satisfied——"

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"Your husband's that kind," said Jane. "He's going to make good here in Chicago. That's the kind of men we need here. How's Sol and Connie doing at the Yards?"

"Fine. Sol's in the slaughterhouse and Connie's working in the canning—they changed her when the blood made her sick, though she didn't say nothing."

"That's lovely . . . that's lovely," said Jane. "I certainly hope your husband makes them save their money. Times are good now, but they won't always be——"

"Yes, indeedy," interrupted Christine. "Joe makes 'em bring every cent to him. We ain't letting our children run wild like some of these folks. And Connie and Lem's going to night school, too."

They were at the front door and Jane paused. "Well . . . I certainly am glad you seem reconciled to being up here now," she smiled. "The Lord knows you had your husband some worried for a while! And you don't want to go back home now?"

"No, indeedy!" declared Christine. "I guess I was plumb foolish at first—and I was worried, too: no place to live, everywhere noise and dirt! But I like it now, because, just like Joe says, it's better all round."

"That's lovely . . . that's lovely. . . ." Jane patted the older woman's arm. "I guess you won't be seeing me so often now, but I'll be dropping around every now and then just to see how you're getting on." With that she pushed out into the snow and sleet that lashed the prairie for nearly forty-eight hours.

2

Christine hurriedly shut the door against the bitter cold and went about her housework. The shift from the drowsy monotony of Three Forks to the bustle of the great city had been beneficial to Christine. She had lost her listlessness. And if she had any complaints there was no one to listen to

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them. Now that she was away from Consuela and Henrietta she developed a new independence of spirit. She took pride in making a home of the wreck of a house into which Joe had moved his family—one at which the airful Henrietta would have raised horrified hands. There could be nothing done about the weather-discolored exterior until spring, Christine had decided. But with the aid of Lem, when he was not at the store, she had gone to work with paint and calcimine until the filthy six rooms were now clean-smelling and spotless. Even Essie and the shirking Junior had been enlisted in the scrubbing of the floors after school hours. And Joe, delighted by this sudden energy of his spouse, had told her to spend what she wanted for furniture. Hence Jane's approval of the house's appearance.

Hitherto neglectful of her younger children, Christine now took intense interest in them—especially Essie. That bright-eyed youngster was distinguishing herself at school and stood out in contrast to the backward older children who had accompanied their Southern parents during the summer and fall migration spurt of 1916. Noticing the slovenly condition of these children, Christine determined that Essie and Junior should be models of neatness when they left each morning and noon for school. As compensation for this new maternal care, Essie and the boy brought home report cards that were a succession of high marks. Junior's deportment column, however, was criminal. And no amount of warmings received from his father's calloused palms could bring about any change in the boy.

Christine was taking an active part in church work also, as had been her wont at home. Circumstances had chosen Bathsheba Baptist Church for hers and, therefore, the family's place of worship. It was two blocks below them on Dearborn Street. The pastor, Rev. B. V. Williams, was an enterprising soul who had, of necessity, followed his flock from Mississippi the year before. He was portly and sleekly

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brown, and his voice, coupled with his bearing, glorified the shabby "store-front" church he had established.

"I guarantee," he had cadenced during the call he made on Joe and Christine shortly after their arrival, "that within two years we'll be worshiping in our *own* church—and, Brother Benson, there won't be a Negro church to compare with it! We people from Mississippi ought to stick together. I've been to these churches up here, and I've never seen such lukewarm Christians in all my born days! They're stiff as plowshares! They makes you feel like you ain't welcome! Now you know the Lord don't like nothing like that! Now ain't that right?"

"Humph!" Joe had grunted to Christine after their visitor had gone. "I ain't never bin no church man. You an' the chilluns kin go where you wants to. But I gots to 'tend to business! That Eye-talian 'cross street from me stays open all day Sunday an' so do Nick Cohen—an' people up here buys . . ."

Notwithstanding the adverse remarks of the Rev. Williams concerning churches other than his, Christine had tried one the very next Sunday. Pastor Williams had been clever: Christine went to church with a very large and precariously balanced chip on her shoulder; she saw, or thought she saw, what she looked for.

"They sure did pop their eyes at us, all right!" she said to Connie on their way home.

"Looks like they didn't want us sho' nuf," replied the girl bitterly. "Must have been these hats an' coats we got on!" And she had sulkily snatched off her outlandish headpiece. "I saw some o' them girls a-snigglin' at me! I ain't never goin' there no mo'!"

"So they's like that, is they?" Joe had growled that evening. "Where's that Reverend Williams' address?"

From that moment the success of Bathsheba was assured. After his long conference with the pastor the latter deputized

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Joe as deacon. Joe canvassed every family from Three Forks for membership in Williams' church. He brought Sam Cummins' loquacity to play among barbershop customers. Jethro passed the word along to his fellow workers at the stockyards, and Maggie Dawson placed a huge sign of Bathsheba's invitation "to feast on the Gospel" in the window of her thriving "eat shop" next to Joe's store. By spring of that year Rev. Williams, beaming his most unctuous smile, gave out the following announcement amid vociferous rejoicing:

"Brothers and sisters: it affords me great pleasure to bring good tidings of great joy this morning! I've been informed by the trustees and deacon board, of which Brother Benson is our beloved and most earnestly working leader, that we are now able to make the first down payment on our new home, one of the finest and largest churches in the city! All of you have seen it—it's right down here on the corner—yes, sister, that's it," he assured one amazed and delighted old faithful, "that same fine, beautiful stone building—seats three thousand easy! It 'll be ready for worship Easter Sunday morning! May the Lord be praised, for His mercy and goodness endureth forever! Hear me! Hear me! And I don't want you good people to forget our good Brother Benson, who has given so much of his time and goods to help bring about this miracle—for miracle it is for a group like ours to raise so much money in so short a time—but you can't hold back true children of God! No sir! Hear me—hear me! I want every one of you under the sound of my voice to patronize Brother Benson's store! He's got the same thing for the same price! Ain't no use giving our money to somebody else, now is there? Now ain't that right? We got to learn to help one another! Now ain't that right? And don't forget Sister Maggie Dawson and Brother Sam Cummins! I tell you, Sister Dawson can sho' nuf fry chicken. I know, 'cause I gets mine there every Sunday the good Lord sends! Don't I, Sister Dawson? Yes sir! And I ain't letting nobody

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cut my hair but Brother Cummins! Hear me—hear me! Hear me, children! Bathsheba's marching to Zion! Are you with me, children? Amen! Amen!"

So Joe had been drawn into church life along with his wife. But Joe wore his new garment loosely. With Christine it was a matter of being a part of the great social program with which Williams cleverly held his growing congregation together. Christine headed committees and was a controlling voice in the Pastor's Aid, as well as being soprano in the choir. To her all this fanfare meant a dictatorial prestige among her sisters of Bathsheba. The fact that Lem and Connie were attending night school spurred other young folk of Bathsheba, upon further urging by the pastor, to do likewise. And about the two grew a group of these aspiring youths who, following the Reverend's eager suggestion, formed themselves into a B.Y.P.U. Christine's cup was sweet and full, and she was proud at last to be the wife of Joe Benson, head deacon of Bathsheba.

But to Joe the music of his cash register was more pleasing by far than that of any choir, celestial or otherwise.

3

"How's business, feller?"

Maggie Dawson stood in front of her little restaurant, her arms wrapped in the folds of a greasy apron. It was April, but there still was a penetrating chill in the air which the sunshine could not dispel.

"That's sho' nuf some nice writin' Lem's a-doin'," she observed. She nodded to the window on which Lem was skillfully printing. "Kinda wish you'd let 'im do some fo' me. I'll pay 'im what he ask——"

"Sho'," said Joe. He looked up from the cabbage he was arranging on a stall. "He'll do it free o' charge."

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"Sure, Miss Maggie," said Lem with a wink. "All I'll ask is a piece of that sweet potato pie of yours—best I ever tasted!"

"I got it, son!" grinned Maggie. "Seem like I ain't able to make nuf fo' the mens nowdays. Them rascals come a-rantin' over here from the Yards when they shift is over, an'—swear to my rest—I works like the devil! Look here, Joe—ef Connie 'll work fo' me I'll give 'er same's she makes over to the Yards. I needs help! Chance to make tips. An' I'll make her hours so she kin go to school jes' like she wants to."

"I reckons business kind o' good wid you, eh?" Joe looked directly at his neighbor.

"Guess you ain't got nothin' to kick 'bout yo'self," returned Maggie just as shrewdly. "Don't I see folks totin' whole sacks o' stuff 'way, come Sat'dy nights—an' ever' night, too? You ain't no jay bird!"

"Look-a-here, Maggie." Joe measured the big woman. "You ever think what we mought do ef we was to run our places in partners?"

"I ain't bin thinkin' nothin' diff'rent!" ejaculated Maggie. "That's what the white folks does." Her eyes widened as she looked up and down the busy street. "An' another thing I bin thinkin' 'bout: all these colored people up here in one part o' the city . . . S'pose you an' me had some houses to rent——"

"Doggone!" blurted Joe. "You know one thing? I bin thinkin' the same thing! The white folks is movin' 'way so's not to be near us—over on Prairie an' Michigan too. An' we's making money hand over fist! Wid rents like they's gittin' from colored folks—why, gal, we'd make mo' money 'n we could shake a stick at!"

"S'pose we gits together an' talks this thing over," said Maggie.

"All right," agreed Joe. "I knows a lawyer an' real 'state

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man. An' s'posin' from now on you an' me runs these two places together? What I don't sell, you cook it an' sell it. We cain't neither one lose!"

"Suits me to a T!"

They had merged.

"Befo' I'm through I'm gonna have me one o' them swell places on Prairie—see ef I don't!" cried Maggie.

"An' I gone be so close to you I kin spit right in yo' kitchen!" vowed Joe.

And both looked at each other and laughed—a peasant's full-bodied laugh of the pride of possession.

4

June 1917 came. Morose Sol and easygoing Jethro marched off to camp along with Dan Carter and other recruits of the Old Eighth Illinois. For the first time since his birth Christine drooled emotionally over her taciturn son. But Sol seemed more embarrassed than anything about his mother's display when he came home just before the regiment was ordered entrained for France in the spring of the following year.

"Aw—ain't nothin' gonna happen to me," he comforted her roughly. And in his big, khaki-clad trimness, Sol looked capable enough to take care of himself. "Only thing us boys is fretracious 'bout is this here bombin' of colored folks's houses! Wish they'd turn us loose on the dirty suckers! I bet we'd put a stop to it!"

"I'm gonna give 'em a chance to bum me!" growled Joe, chewing the end of his cigar viciously. He'd discarded his plug tobacco. This was a token of his advancing prosperity. The parlor of the Benson home was resplendent with new furniture. At the time Joe sprawled upon its mammoth, overstuffed divan. He toyed with the thick gold chain across his paunched belly and went on:

"We gonna move over on Prairie, come July. An' the first

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cracker I ketch messin' round my place is gonna git a load o' shot in his tail!"

That night, instead of the regular Sunday services, Bathsheba held a mass meeting. National songs were sung along with popular war ditties crammed with sentiment and patriotic fervor. White and colored orators swayed the crowd by extolling "the bravery and undying loyalty of the colored soldier in every war of the nation's history." Liberty bond pledges were made. At the end the gathering stood, some in tears, and sang the national anthem while the boys in khaki filed out to keep their rendezvous with whatever fate might await them.

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5

"SALLIE AND PETE's been fighting again, Joe."

Joe mopped the profuse perspiration from his freshly shaved face. It was the fifth of July and the city was sweltering. He was about to answer Christine when a series of small explosions crackled in the back yard. He jumped to his feet and hurried to the rear porch of his newly acquired Prairie Avenue home, a finely proportioned brownstone house with something of the French in its contours.

On the lawn Essie and Junior were about to set off another of their firecrackers when the boy looked up and scampered away.

"You come on here, you Essie!" snapped Joe angrily. "What 'd I tell you 'bout raisin' a ruckus fust thing in the mornin'? Take *that!*"

Essie's hands flew to her outraged, tingling backsides where her father's expert palm had descended with precision. She choked back the tears and rushed through the house to the living room. There she plunged her dark curls into a pillow on the divan and silently sobbed out her anger.

"Sure now, Mr Benson, she's only a child and meant no harm."

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The mother of the family next door was hanging out a wash and had paused to watch the tableau. Her plump, kindly face and soft voice were conciliatory.

"Sure, my Rosie would be after doing the same thing if she had any left," she added.

"I know, Mrs Cohen," said Joe, "but you knows how the people in this block thinks 'bout me an' Maggie movin' in here. They don't want us noways. Co'se, you an' Nick don't mind 'cause we does business together. You all done got to know us an' figgers we ain't so bad an' ruckshus as these newspapers bin sayin' us colored folks is."

"Sure," smiled Mrs Cohen, shaking a sheet, "and they was the same way about me and Nick! That's the trouble—people don't wait and see what other people are before they make up their mind about 'em. People is people, is what I says to Nick when you moved in here. And my Rosie says as how your Essie is a smart girl in school. And Sammy says as how your Lem is a nice boy and all. 'So what do I care if now it's colored they are?' says I to Nick. Faith, and I'd rather have you next door than some noisy no-gooders I know!"

"That's a right nice way to look at it," said Joe gratefully but with a sigh. "Some o' our folks is right bad, though. Seem like they jes' cain't git theyselves sot right. . . . Now I gots to go over to Forty-eighth an' Wabash this mornin' an' git one of 'em out'n jail. You know 'im—Pete Thomas. Gits his bread from you all's bakeshop——"

"Sure—sure," said Mrs Cohen. "He's such a nice man when he ain't drinkin'! Pays his bills on time and everything. But he will get drunk when he gets his pay. What 'd he do now—same thing?"

"Yeah. Gits drunk an' when Sallie tries to git some sense in his head he turns on 'er an' beats 'er up—an' he's sorry after." Joe shook his head gloomily. "I tell you, Mrs Cohen, I wish sometimes I'd o' never got some o' them folks to come

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up here! Ever' time one of 'em gits in trouble they runs straight to me! An' look like ain't nothin' but death gonna cure some of 'em—jes' ain't no-count!"

"Well, now, I wouldn't be after sayin' that," reproved his neighbor. She brushed back a wisp of fiery hair from her freckled face. "You oughtn' feel that way. Faith, you ought to see some of the sights down on Maxwell Street when I was a little one! Sure, and I never seen anything worse 'n a drunk Irishman! And, faith, I ought to know because I'm Irish m'self——"

"Why," exclaimed Joe, "I thought sho' nuf you was Jewish!"

Rose Cohen laughed with a merry wave of her hand as she picked up her basket.

"A good man's a good man," she said. "And, faith, they're so hard to find, it makes no difference to me what else he is! And 'tis I, m'self, that says it!"

2

"By God, I'm so damned sick o' pickin' up drunks I could break every one o' their heads!"

Officer James Milburn lounged against the rail before the judge's bench and spat his disgust into the freshly cleaned cuspidor at his feet. His tan countenance and crumpled hair showed the effects of his twelve-to-eight patrol. Yet, sleepy as he was, the vitality of his compact body poured from his coldly gazing eyes and the even lineaments of his face. At the moment his teeth were clamped behind compressed lips, and his tautened jaw had an ugly jut.

His companion, a tall blond with a Slavic prominence of cheekbones, laughed softly.

"Take it easy, Jim," he said. "What else can you expect——"

"I wish to God they'd-a stayed South where they came

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from!" blurted Milburn. "By Jesus, as soon as they get up here where the pressure's taken off 'em they run wild!" His voice took on a drawling, argumentative note as he faced his fellow officer. "You know, Mick, we ain't had all this before!" He thrust an arm in the direction of the noisy courtroom. It was packed with what appeared to be the dregs of every racial group in the city, the majority being Negroes.

"Sure," said Mick, "but you never had so many colored and white living near each other, either. You can't expect——"

"Yeah, but look at what they're here for! This guy I just brought in—beating his wife!"

"Ho-ho!" scoffed Mick. "You oughta go over to the Yards station! Ain't no difference, Jim. If they're scum, they're scum!"

"I know," admitted Milburn, "but you don't understand. When I first came to Chicago ten years ago, the colored people here were a quiet, industrious group and getting along fine. Now this bunch comes up from the South and ruins everything! You mark my words: you're gonna see trouble—and it ain't gonna be long, either! You know people don't like this low class of Negroes to move into the same block with 'em. Hell! I don't want to live with 'em myself! These bombings we been having is just a sample. You wait!"

"Here comes that Benson fellow again," said Mick. He pointed to the back of the room. "I understand the people he came up here with look on him as a leader. They say the politicians are after him to swing votes for 'em."

"He's all right," said Milburn. "If they were all like him there wouldn't be so much friction. But he's made a mistake, moving over there on Prairie in that white block."

"I've talked with some of the people over there—it's on my beat," said Mick. "They don't seem to mind *him* so

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much, but that woman who runs that restaurant on State has moved in next to him. And she runs a rooming house. The folks over there say that those people in her house raise hell sometimes. When she's home, which ain't often on account of her shop, they act all right because she makes 'em."

"That's the way it goes," shrugged Milburn. "One or two are pretty good, but the majority—uh! The juvenile court ain't never been like it is now. Seems like that these men throw away the good money they make before they get home. Then the hungry kids go out and steal. Then as soon as the big-time crooks finds out a section is nearly all colored, in come the saloons and whore houses! Hell! What kind of a background is that for kids? Look at that house over on Dearborn—damned near a killing a week!"

"Why don't decent colored people get together and protest?" speculated Mick.

"They do. They've organized civic improvement clubs and all that. Does some little good. But the majority of the higher-class colored people are ashamed of this new element and don't want to be associated with it. You notice how many of 'em's moving out to the suburbs? Especially since Barnes, the real estate guy, was bombed?"

"Say, that was pretty bad, wasn't it?" exclaimed Mick. "They say that they had it in for him for selling and renting to colored people in white neighborhoods."

"That's right. I told him a couple o' weeks ago to watch his step after we got those orders from downtown. But he's a stubborn guy! Says now that he'll stick till hell freezes over! Says if they can move a big colored man like himself they'll figure they've won."

"I like his guts," said Mick simply.

"Good mornin'," greeted Joe as he came up. He took his cigar from his mouth and eyed both officers in a straightforward manner.

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"Hullo, Benson," answered Milburn gruffly. "What's on your mind—that Thomas guy?"

"Yeah," said Joe. "I was figgerin' mebbe you could kinda go easy on 'im when the judge come in. I bin talkin' to 'im out in the cage, an' he says he's sorry 'bout what he done——"

"Sure he's sorry!" snorted Milburn. "That's the same thing he said last time! And what 'd he do? Just soon's he gets paid he's gonna do the same thing all over again!" Milburn's conviction was emphasized by his singsong stressing of words at regular intervals. "Jesus Christ, Joe! I can't have that sort o' thing on my beat——"

"Sho'—sho'," agreed Joe tactfully. "But . . ." He paused and pointed over to a little, wretchedly thin woman. She was rocking silently back and forth in her misery on a bench occupied by a group of buzzing women whose faces and bodies bore the marks of their livelihood.

"Look at that woman's eye!" snarled Milburn. His body seemed to coil like a tightening spring. He pulled up from his lounging position, and little creases gathered about his fighter's eyes. "Why, the—why, damn his soul! I ought to go break my stick over his head!"

"Ease up—ease up, Jim!" counseled Mick. "The guy was crazy with booze."

"She says ef you put 'im in the Bride'll her an' the chilluns ain't gonna have nothin'," put in Joe hurriedly. "She says he won't do it no mo'. . . ."

Milburn swore softly and once more spat his disgust.

"By God," he breathed, "there ain't no limit to some colored women's patience! Well, if she wants him, I don't give a damn! But if I catch him beating her again I ain't listening to nobody! He's going to the Bride'll!"

Joe grinned his relief. "Thanks, Mr Milburn! You all smoke cigars?" He offered a handful to them.

"Never mind the weeds," said the gruff Milburn. He

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fumbled without success through his pockets. "Say, Mick, you got any o' them tickets for the game Saturday?"

"Sure!" Mick eagerly produced a pack.

"Here." Milburn extended two to Joe. "They're a buck apiece—police and firemen's benefit. Now you get that woman out o' here before Judge Nicolli gets in here. If that little Italian sees her eye he'll give that guy plenty time! He's a tough Oscar on wife beaters. Maybe I can get Thomas a D.W.P."

Joe thanked him again and hurried Sallie out of the courtroom.

"He's a good egg," said Mick.

"Yeah, but I still says we gonna have trouble!"

"Aw, it 'll turn out all right. You gotta give these people time to get themselves together. Besides, Chicago's a great city, Jim. Nothing's ever gonna lick it!"

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6

THE SKY was dismally overcast, but the towers of the Loop bravely flaunted their banners above the crowds that closely packed the sidewalks and overflowed against the interlocked arms of the policemen lining the triumphal march route from the Coliseum. Broad Michigan's bitter winds eddied through the canyons of masonry along its prairie shore. But the multitudes ignored the gusts of the lake. For this one day of patriotic triumph even the Problem, which was growing more acute, was forgotten. Black and white, laborer and capitalist, mingled and became one to bestow honor where honor was due. Roar on roar of acclaim poured over the heads of this dusky, proudly stepping regiment. It was February of 1919, and the survivors of the now famous Old Eighth Illinois, dubbed "the Black Devils" by war correspondents, were returning from "Over There" after having helped "make the world safe for democracy."

"Don't it make you feel tingly all over?" gasped Connie into Mae's ear.

"There's Dan!" shrieked Mae, and she pinched Lem's arm.

Lem nodded as he shifted his weight from his crippled

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leg. "It's hard to tell 'em apart," he said, craning his neck over Connie's shoulder. "You see Sol yet, Mom?"

Christine shook her head, her shining eyes riveted on the marching rows of helmeted men.

"Oh look-it!" shrilled Essie, who was perched upon her father's shoulder. "There he is! It's Sol, Daddy!"

The family group pressed forward. Christine's grip tightened on Junior's arm as she sighted the figure swinging along with the passing squad.

"Hey, Sol!" trumpeted Joe. But the effort was lost in the tumult about him.

"Reckon they cain't hear nothin' in all this ruckus," he said to the others. "Well, he'll be home soon anyways. Come on, Lem. Let's git started uptown an' open the sto'—purty nigh to fo' 'clock."

2

It was nearly a month later before Sol was discharged. He had been silent enough before his war experience; now he was doubly so. His formerly robust frame had grown gaunt, and the bones of his face stood out like rocks beneath a thin layer of earth. He dodged conversation concerning the war by giving short, curt answers or by staring vacantly at his inquisitor. And the only two members of his family who seemed to hold any interest for Sol were Essie and Junior.

Each morning he walked to school with them and Essie's playmate, Rosie Cohen. Upon his return he would sit for hours on the back porch, or upon Christine's request he would help her with the cleaning. When the weather was bad he invariably went to the cellar and whittled objects of interest for Junior and Essie. He had brought home a pocket knife which had an automatic device for opening and shutting its long keen blade.

Often as Christine went about her work he would sit in

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the kitchen opening and shutting his "switch-blade," as he called it. The action must have fascinated him, for a queer grin would break the saturninity of his face; then, like flickering light in a forest of shadows, it would swiftly disappear. One day he asked Christine suddenly:

"Where's Jethro?"

Christine looked up from her cooking, startled.

"Why . . . why . . ." she stammered, "Jethro's dead—killed in the war. . . . Don't you remember, son?"

Sol lapsed into silence. Then:

"Oh yeah—that's sho' nuf right," he said. "He lemme use his switch-blade one day an' I plumb fo'git to give it back. . . ."

He continued his aimless manipulation of the knife. Frightened, Christine stared at her son.

That night she told Joe, and he casually suggested to Sol that they have a doctor examine him. Sol flew into a fury. The matter was dropped, but Christine could not put aside her fear.

So for the first three and a half months after his return Sol lounged about home. He made no attempt to get a job, and his father did not prod him. Joe was content that Sol did not follow the example of many ex-service men, who seemed bent upon consuming all the bootleg liquor in the South Side.

3

Christine and Rose Cohen were holding a lazy discussion of the heat as they fanned themselves on their front porches.

"Hello—here comes Sol with the pretties," said Rose. "Sure, and the heat means nothing to him by the gait he's using."

Christine turned languidly in the direction of Rose's gaze. The "pretties," Essie and Rosie, were trotting at either side of their big escort, whose strides were rapid and long.

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"Mamma!" panted Rosie, scampering up the steps to her mother. "They're fighting at the beach! The colored and white people, Mamma—they're fighting!"

"The devil you say!" Rose paled. She whirled to Christine, who was remonstrating with Sol. "Mrs Benson, what's the trouble?"

As Christine turned to her neighbor the screen door slammed behind Sol.

"Sol says it's a riot!" she exclaimed. "Says he brought the girls home so's they wouldn't be hurt. Says they're heading west!"

"Oh, my God! I better call Nick at the shop!"

"Tell him to tell Joe to come home right away, Mrs Cohen! Sol's gone plumb crazy! Says he's going to kill up everything white! I can't do a thing with him—— Sol!"

Sol had slammed back through the screen door. The lackluster had been routed from his eyes by a crackling blaze. There was a bulge at his hip, and he grinned as he mechanically opened and shut his long-bladed knife.

"Sol!" Christine seized him frantically by the arm. "Don't—don't!" she entreated.

His face became more gaunt. He smiled peculiarly at his mother and patted Essie's head. Then he was gone down the street at a brisk military double-quick.

He was hardly out of sight when Lem and Connie, followed by Maggie Dawson, hurried up from the opposite direction.

"What's the matter, Mom?" asked Lem quickly. "Anybody been here yet?"

"Dad says there's a riot going on," put in Connie.

"I closed up soon's I heard 'bout it," puffed Maggie. She sank into a chair. "Mr Milburn's tellin' ever'body they bes' close up fo' the day. But Joe an' Nick's still open—says ain't nobody gonna bother 'em."

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Christine, who all the while had stood in stunned silence, groped for a rocker and trembled down into it.

"Sol's gone!" she moaned, twisting her hands.

"Gone?"

"Where?"

Connie and Lem bent over their mother while Maggie slid forward on the edge of her chair.

"Which way did he go?" asked Lem. "I'll go after him." He turned to limp from the porch.

"No!" Christine's voice was a wail. She sprang after her son and caught him frantically by the shoulder.

"Look up the street!" cried Maggie, who had started for her house.

Like a brown rabbit in flight, Junior was sailing toward home. As he took the porch steps with two effortless leaps the cause of his haste rounded the corner. A ragged body of babbling young ragamuffins were jostling one another along their destructive way. When they came to Maggie's three-story house they stopped and showered it with bricks and stones.

"The little nigger's in there!"

"Let 'em have it!"

"Run all the niggers out!"

Maggie waddled forward amid the screams and crash of glass.

"Here—here! You devilish boys! What's the matter wid you? Is you crazy in the haid?" she bayed. She rushed at them, gesticulating wildly, with Connie and Lem at her heels.

"Let 'em have it!" yelled one of the gamins, and he threw back a threatening arm.

"No, ye don't, ye rascally spalpeens!"

A fiery figure as buxom as Maggie's overtook and passed the endangered trio and planted itself in the way. It was

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Rose Cohen. Flushed of face and flashing of eye, she bristled with scorn as her freckled hands firmly braced the formidable girth of her middle.

"I know ye, Mike!" she went on, advancing at each word. "And it's to Father Brennan I'll be reporting ye in the morning!"

Her sudden appearance disconcerted them, especially their leader, whom she had singled out. When she referred to the priest several dropped their missiles, and all began backing away. She followed them the length of the block until they turned tail and fled.

"Sure, and they're a bunch of no-gooders!" she said to Maggie, who was mournfully contemplating the damage done to her property. "Brennan's Tigers, they call themselves—a club of 'em that does no good when the Father ain't around to watch 'em."

"They sho' nuf was wantin' to kill me," shivered Maggie. "You was sho' nice to stop 'em, Mis' Cohen." She stiffened with anger. "I'll fix 'em. The next time they comes round they ain't gonna git off so easy!"

"You better get inside," advised Rose. "They're a bad lot, they are. I'm going to call the station house, I am!"

4

"Say, Joe, I'm closing up! Rose just called and said they was raising hell over home a while ago."

"Reckon I better do the same, Nick," answered Joe.

Nick and his son were at the door of Joe's store. Sammy was about Lem's age and had the swarthy, aquiline features and slender build of his father. Both were excitedly wiping their hands on soiled aprons.

"Say, I forgot to tell you," added Nick, "Rose says that your wife wants you to come right home. Sol's gone out and she thinks he's going to join the fighting——"

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"What?" Joe stripped off his apron. "Help me wid these vegetables, will you, Nick?"

"Here's some! Let's git the white——"

Nick and Sammy dropped their loads and shrank against Joe's display window. Over a score of Negroes armed with clubs and stones rushed the trio from the opposite side of the street. At the sound of their babble Joe whirled and strode to the curb.

"What's the matter wid you all?" he growled as they halted. "What you meddlin' wid these people fo'? They ain't done nothin' to you——"

"Git out the way, white folks's nigger!" snarled one of the foremost. "You ain't——"

Joe's bludgeonlike fist felled the fellow with one blow. As he groaned at the feet of the others Joe leaped back, his huge revolver weaving an arc in front of them.

"Git out o' here, quick!" he snapped. "An' take him wid you!"

Mumbling threats, the subdued mobsters gathered up the limp form and moved off. When they had gone Sammy and Nick were eloquent with gratitude.

"Boy, what a sock you got!" grinned Sammy, wiping the cold sweat from his face.

"I ain't forgetting it, Joe," breathed Nick. He gave Joe's hand a nervous squeeze.

"Come on, let's git from here," said Joe.

5

For the next three days Joe kept his family indoors. During that time no word was received concerning Sol, though Joe made a special plea to Jim Milburn to be on the lookout. All the while sporadic and intense rioting flared in different sections of the city. Streetcars were stopped and victims dragged forth to be murdered brutally. Marauding groups

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of both races preyed upon all who had the misfortune to fall into their hands. It was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, all done with the dispatch of heedless mob spirit. Two vicious animals were at each other's throats, and there was no quarter to be asked or given. Jim Milburn's somber prophecy was being fulfilled.

The immediate area of Joe's store was surrounded by a cordon of police for the first two days, then withdrawn to a less quiet vicinity where the rioting had broken out with renewed vigor. Sultry and gray, Wednesday morning came. Joe argued with his distraught wife at breakfast.

"I'll be all right, honey!" he said. "I jes' cain't let my business run down—I took in right smart yestiddy."

"What do I care about business!" cried Christine. "Here Sol's gone, and now you want to go cuttin' the fool!"

"The boy's all right!" scoffed Joe. "Ef he warn't we'd-a heard 'bout it——"

"Hey! Anybody home?"

The voice was punctuated by a terrific pounding on the kitchen door.

"It's Miss Jane!" cried Essie.

"What's she doing out in all this?" exclaimed Connie.

"Hey! Open up here! It's Miss Saunders!"

Lem went to the door. Jane breezed in with her usual calm smile and energy.

"Hello there, pretty boy," she greeted cheerfully. "I rang the bell at the front, but it must be out of order——"

"It is, Miss Saunders," said Lem. He noted the glaring headlines of the paper she carried. "May I see the news?"

"Sure, go right ahead. White and colored folks are going crazy in this town, boy! Where's my babies?"

"Here they is," called Joe from the dining room.

"Well—well," beamed the nurse as she strode in. "Hello, Connie. Haven't seen you in a good while; pretty as ever. What's the matter, Mother?" She patted Christine's shoulder.

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"She's frettin' 'bout Sol," said Joe. "He ain't bin home fo' three days."

"Well, now," comforted Jane, "you oughtn' to be like that, Mother. Many bullets he ducked 'Over There,' this little fracas don't mean a thing to him——"

"Is it very bad out?" asked Connie.

"I'll say it is!" Lem whistled over the paper. "Listen to this: 'South Side in Throes of Reign of Terror'!" He read aloud the lurid account of wholesale violence.

"Aw, shucks!" disparaged Jane, taking Junior upon her lap. "That fellow's just putting in a lot of that stuff! The whole thing in a nutshell is that everybody's surprised that the colored are putting up such a scrap. They're calling out the militia, I hear, tonight. This thing's been coming on for years. They tell me some of the boys of the Black Devils have a machine gun planted down on Wentworth and they're giving 'em lead every time those gangs ride through!"

"I'll bet that's where Sol is," ventured Connie.

"Look here," said Joe as Jane got up to go, "whyn't you git some cops to go 'long wid you?"

"No sir!" replied Jane. "If they knew I was out they'd make me go back home and report me downtown. I'm not letting anything stop me from getting to *my* babies! Especially during this hot weather."

"Wait," said Joe. "I'm going 'long with you!" He ignored Christine's and the nurse's protests, seized his hat and piloted Jane out of the house.

"They've shifted the police," said Jane. "My boss called me up from downtown and told me not to go out until things quieted. But I pretended I didn't understand and hung up." She tittered at her ruse.

"I'm gonna see ain't no harm coming to you, Mis' Saunders," said Joe firmly. "You was moughty nice to us when we first come up here. Where you got to go?"

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