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THESE LOW GROUNDS

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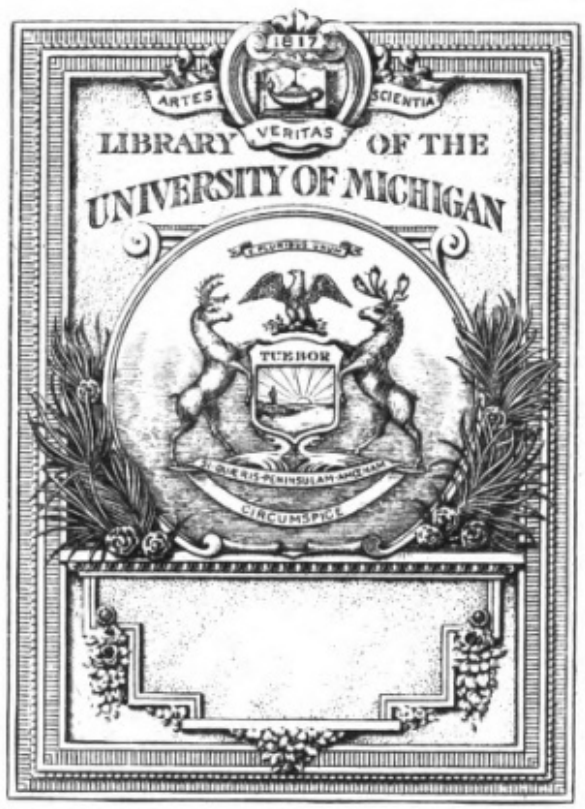

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THESE LOW GROUNDS

By

Waters Edward Turpin

Harper & Brothers Publishers

New York 1937 London

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THESE LOW GROUNDS

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FIRST EDITION

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To my Mother

REBECCA HENRY

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Chapter One

I

MARTHA unbent from the washtub, roused by a frightened clucking, and made hastily for the front lawn. "Devilish chicken-stealers!" was her first thought. At the corner of the house the rooster, Toby, scurried past, and at the same moment something thudded into Martha's middle. She sat down, breathless.

Facing her, also on the ground, was a man, a dusky mulatto, who blinked foolishly and gave off a strong odor of liquor.

Martha scowled fiercely. "What you a-doin', a-chasin' mah Toby?" she demanded. "Is you one dem fug'tives? Go 'long wid you befo' Ah calls mah missy an' she gits you put in jail!"

The man continued to blink stupidly. But his wits were not too dull. Even through the fog of whisky he could tell that Martha was as good-looking a woman as he had seen in many a day. His connoisseur's eyes took

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especial note of two provokingly shapely legs revealed to indiscreet advantage.

Martha jumped up hastily, embarrassed by his stare.

"Ah done tolt you to git 'long wid you, ain't Ah?" she said, impatiently.

"Ah warn't trying' to steal yo' chicken," muttered the man. He erected himself in sections without taking his eyes off Martha. "You sho' is purty, gal!"

Martha glared at him, but now the glare was a little forced. "Ah ain't axin' you fo' no sweet talk!" she declared. "Git 'long wid you."

The man stood brushing himself, quite at ease. Suddenly he grinned engagingly.

"When you's tired bein' mad," he said, "gimme somepn to git clean wid. Mah marse'll gimme glory-be efn he catches me like dis."

"Ah ain't gonna git you nuffin'—nuffin'!" answered Martha, struggling to maintain a frown. She'd had time to take in the fellow's good looks. Tall and slim—broad shoulders—slender waist—aquiline features—eyes jet black and yellow flecked. Not many men came cut to that pattern. And his clothes didn't look like any clothes she'd seen on Baltimore Negroes; they reminded her of those worn by Joseph, the butler back home on the plantation.

He was still grinning. "Aw, honey, don't take on so," he said, soothingly. "Ah jes' come to town yestiddy from down Tidewater way, Virginny ——"

"You-all from Virginny?" Martha's anger gave way to curiosity. "Dat's where Missy and me's from. Looka

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yere, man, you ain't tryin' to fool me, is you? What's yo' name?" It had been a time since she'd seen anyone from the Tidewater.

He breathed easier. "Mah name's Joe," he said. "Git me somepn to brush wid an' Ah'll tell you all 'bout it."

Martha sped indoors and returned with a whisk broom.

"You see," Joe began, "Ah comes from Stanbrough Manor ——"

"Den you-all's plantation is right next ours," Martha interrupted.

"You means you's one o' ole man Owens' people? Doggone mah skin! Den you must be Mis' Lucrece's gal dat went away wid 'er when she come north to be a nurse."

"Dat's right."

Joe's excitement mounted. "Look yere—you-all know dat Marse Hugh Allen done come up yere jes' fo' to see Mis' Lucrece?"

"So you's his nigger?"

"Yassah! Ah'm his vallay."

"Why fo' Marse Hugh want to see mah Missy?" Martha wanted to know. "Her don't have nuffin' to do wid de likes o' him. Her's too busy."

Joe looked wise. "He make like he jes' come up on bizness. But Ah knows he ain't fo'got how he use try to be her beau!"

"Huh!" Martha put a world of contempt into the exclamation.

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"He 'lows he's a-comin' to see her t'night." Joe handed the brush to Martha and looked at her speculatively. "How'd you like me to come, too? Huh?"

Martha shrugged. "Don't make no diff'ence to me."

Joe moved slowly away, then turned.

"Ah'll be yere—you hear me?"

As he gained the walk, Martha peered around the corner of the house, her teeth a white streak in the brown of her face.

II

It was spring. Joe came that night and other nights in the weeks that followed.

One evening Martha was hooking Lucrece into a new gown. "Missy—" she began.

"Yes, Marty?" And as Martha seemed not to hear, Lucrece repeated: "Yes, Marty?"

"When is Marse Hugh goin' home, Missy?"

"Do you mean when is Hugh going home, or when is *Joe* going home?" parried Lucrece. Her calm gray eyes were bent quizzically on her maid.

Martha looked up shyly at her mistress from beneath lowered brows. A smile played across her mistress' serene countenance.

"Wal, Ah did kindah mean dat, too, Missy."

"They're leaving day after tomorrow," Lucrece informed her, and turned to leave the room.

"Missy!" The cry was almost a scream as Martha dropped to the floor, sobbing.

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Lucrece knelt beside her. "What's the matter, child? Is it—" The question was irrelevant—Lucrece knew before Martha shook her head affirmatively. "Why that's nothing, honey," she comforted. "There's only the two of us, and there's plenty of room for a baby."

"But, Missy, dat ain't it. Ah wants mah chile to have a pappy. Ah don't want 'im to be bo'n—'cause de Good Book done say it ain't right."

"Precious much the Good Book has to do with babies! Besides, you can't have Joe, honey. You know that."

Martha was silent for a moment, drying her eyes. When she looked up at last she was calm, and there was no mistaking the resolution in her voice.

"Missy, how long Ah bin wid you?"

Lucrece frowned, trying to recall. "Why, I don't know exactly, Martha. About fourteen years, hasn't it been, since we came to Baltimore? Why?"

Martha ignored the question.

"Has Ah ever done wrong sense Ah bin wid you?" she continued. "Hain't Ah always looked atter you? Is Ah ever axed you fo' nuffin'?"

"You've been wonderful, Martha. And I appreciate everything."

They arose and faced each other, two mature women who had been together since the plantation days of their childhood and youth.

"What is it, honey?" asked Lucrece, gently.

Martha replied quietly, in an even voice: "Ah wants

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Joe, Missy. Ah wants to git married. Efn you'll buy Joe ——"

"Hugh wouldn't sell him, Marty. Besides, what do you want with him? He's no good. I can see that plainly."

"Ah wants him, Missy!" Martha was stubborn.

Lucrece's expression of amused impatience changed to one of resignation.

"All right. If you can make Joe stay, I'll make Hugh sell him."

III

So Lucrece bought Joe, and Martha got what she wanted. The birth of her child, Carrie, was almost simultaneous with the outbreak of the war. Her work called Lucrece to the battlefields. Then shortly afterward Joe left home blithely with a band of colored volunteers made up of Freedmen, and Martha was in tears.

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Chapter Two

I

LUCRECE came home—a Lucrece whose hair was iron gray and whose high, thoughtful brow was faintly lined. She had known Shiloh and the Wilderness.

Sherman had marched to the sea in spite of stubborn, gallant resistance. Grant had haunted Richmond until harassed Lee could no longer bear the misery-ridden faces of his soldiers. Western Maryland rested easily, at last, from the hoofbeats of "Beauty" Stewart's phantom cavalry. There had been Appomattox, and now there was peace.

The little house in Baltimore, where Martha and Carrie lived with Lucrece, returned to a semblance of order. Martha went out to work by the day for wages—this was Lucrece's idea; Martha saw little reason in it—and during Martha's absence Lucrece looked after Carrie. She could not stand the routine of nursing now—could not bear the faces of the sick. She preferred to

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spend her time teaching Martha's golden sprite of a daughter her letters.

Joe had not returned. He had not been heard from during several years. At first Martha had grieved. But she couldn't do that for long. She had Carrie to think of, and the future. The future involved a plan—a way to spend her glittering savings. She was going to buy a house. Then she and Carrie would have a piece of property like every provident Negro who looked ahead. It was a burning ambition.

Martha realized her ambition before she hoped. For when Carrie was eight years old Lucrece died. And her will provided that the proceeds from the sale of her own house should go toward a last payment on Martha's. So Martha and Carrie moved into the eastern section of Old Baltimore where Freedmen Negroes—those who had earned or been granted their freedom before the war—lived beside newly emancipated Negroes in a curiously mixed settlement.

II

Carrie's teacher had died—a gentle young Negro whose pioneer zeal had demanded more than his weakling body could perform—and Carrie and Martha were returning from the funeral. As the hired carriage drew up to her house Martha saw a man and woman standing on the porch. She stared aghast, then ran forward with a glad cry and threw her arms about the man.

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"Joe!—Joe!—Is it you, honey?"

Joe grinned complacently—the same Joe, a little more dissipated, not so elegantly dressed.

"Sho, honey. Didn't you-all know Ah'd be a-comin' home some day?"

"Lawsy! Ah done said all 'long you done bin kilt in de war!" Martha hugged him closer.

"Dey couldn't kill dis yere chile—nossuh!" Indicating the woman, he said, "Dis yere's mah sister Sue."

Carrie stood watching, bewildered. She had never known her father.

"Looka yere, honey—dat ain't our baby, is it?" Joe pointed to the child.

Martha assured him it was.

"She sho is purty! Come yere to yo' pappy, honey." Joe stretched out his arms invitingly.

Carrie hesitated. She was not sure that she liked this man. However, she sidled up to him and allowed him to kiss her cheek. He smelled just like a man she had come upon one Sunday morning in the gutter.

"You-all come on inside," invited Martha. "Dis yere's mah house," she added, proudly.

"Yeah?" exclaimed Joe, interestedly. He threw the woman Sue a sharp glance which was answered by a casual raising of the eyebrows.

"Yassuh!" assured Martha. "You-all jes' make you'self to home, an' me'n' Carrie'll fix up somepn fo' you." She passed into the kitchen, and soon the scent of frying fish spread through the house.

Joe settled himself beside Sue on the sofa.

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"Look yere," he said, "don't you let on to her you ain't mah sister, see? Dis yere's a place fo' us to live, and efn you don't let on, it'll be all right, see?"

Sue looked at him evilly, but did not answer. Joe was not satisfied.

"Lissen yere! Ah gits run outn Richmond on 'count o' you messin' wid white men. Didn't Ah have a good barber shop an' was makin' good money? Ah always kept you in classy style. So now you gots to help me! You hear?" He paused to see what effect this had.

Sue gave an impatient sniff.

"Now what we does is dis: Ah gwine start a barber shop yere. Efn you is mah sister, Marty ain't gone mind you stayin', an' you kin git some work to do, see? She don't have to know de diff'rence."

Sue heard him through absently, her gray-green eyes fixed on a corner of the room, as if the plan of immediate action lay there.

"Whyn't you tell me you was married?" she demanded, her voice husky with anger.

"How come you gits yo'self messed up in Richmond, huh?" Joe countered.

Sue stared again into the corner, and came to a decision.

"Lissen. Ah gwine stay yere"—she paused as Joe brightened—"but ain't gwine be nuffin' 'twixt us! Ah gwine git a job—efn Ah kin. An' efn Ah cain't—wal, Ah cain't." She shrugged indifferently.

Martha's cheery voice broke into the conversation at this point, calling them to the kitchen. At the table,

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each one ate in the company of his own thoughts. Carrie was shyly attentive, Sue sullen, Joe speculative as he balanced the charms of one woman against the qualifications of the other. Martha was frankly curious. As Carrie cleared the table her questions tumbled forth: Where had Joe been? Was he wounded in the war? Why had he never tried to communicate with her?

Joe delayed his answers to ask whether Martha had any liquor in the house.

Martha's brows drew together uneasily. "You still drinks heavy, don't you, Joe?" she questioned.

Joe feigned a cough, and the effort brought on a genuine paroxysm which caused a shadow of anxiety to flit across Martha's face.

"Ah only takes a li'l' attah meals, honey," he explained. "It keeps mah ches' mis'ry down." He shot an appealing glance at Sue as that outraged woman gave a contemptuous snort.

Martha was too concerned to notice. "Oh, honey, you ain't bin sick, is you?"

"Wal—no—jes' a li'l' mis'ry in mah ches', dat's all," said Joe.

"Missy give me her likker when she died, an' Ah ain't teched none of it yit. Ah'll git you some." Martha hurried upstairs and returned with a small jug and two glasses which she placed on the table. Sue eyed the second glass appreciatively while Joe poured himself a generous portion.

"Go on, honey, help yo'self," offered Martha, shoving the glass towards Sue. The woman hesitated primly

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for additional assurance, which Martha gave, then tilted the jug expertly over her arm.

Another drink and Joe had the necessary courage to begin his odyssey:

"Honey, you knows Ah always was sorry fo' leavin' you, but you see Ah warn't mahself. When Ah goes to git dem vittals dat day, Ah stopped past de back do' o' de tavern. Dem waiters dere was all up in de air 'bout 'listin'—said dey wants to fight fo' freedom. Dey was a-drinkin', an' Ah jines in wid 'em. De next mo'nin' Ah wakes up an' Ah's got on a unifo'm an' we's somewhar outside Wash'ton."

One battle had cured Joe of a taste for war and sent him to hospital with a chest wound. When he had been there about a month he left. The Stanbrough plantation was near by, so he went there and found Hugh dying. Joe stayed through the war, until Hugh's sister came to take charge. Then he and Sue drifted on to Richmond.

"Ah didn't know efn you was married ag'in a-no—" Martha interrupted with earnest assurance of her fidelity.

Joe saw that he had hit upon the right track. "So Ah thought Ah'd jes' stay whar Ah was. But de Klu-Kluxahs done got so bad Ah picks up wid Sue an' left. So yere Ah is, honey!" As a concluding gesture he emptied his glass.

This was not the trim and jaunty young rascal she had known. Years of dissipation had left their mark on Joe; his clothes were untidy. He was obviously evading

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the question of his belated return. But Martha still felt tenderness toward her first and only lover. She went to him now and hugged him hungrily.

"Dat's all right, honey. We's gwine start whar we left off, ain't we?"

Joe cast a glance over her shoulder at Sue, but she had left the table with a roll of her eyes and was sauntering into the parlor, her hips switching in studied nonchalance. Joe read "finis" in the movement and resignedly enveloped Martha in his arms. After all, he decided, he might have done worse.

III

Joe wanted to start his barber shop. It wasn't ambition that urged him to work, nor was it a desire to help Martha in meeting living expenses. He missed the gossip and the back-room gambling and the chance a barber-shop window afforded to review the passing feminine show.

But Joe had no money. So he went first to Sue.

It was two weeks after their coming to Baltimore, and in this time Sue had bestirred herself—not too violently. But so perverse is fortune, her half-hearted quest had rewarded her with an easy job in a small, prosperous family. For two days, like the proverbial new broom that sweeps so clean, she did admirably. (She was a good cook, if a bit sloppy.) But on the evening of the second day, a big black sailor, in port for the first time in months, accosted her while she was on her way

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home from work. She glanced over his huge well-knit frame. A whiff of the liquor tingled into her nostrils. His toothsome grin enticed her. . . . The next morning she awoke alone in a dive on the docks. Languidly, more out of curiosity than desire to do the right thing, she dressed and approached her place of work, to have the kitchen door opened by an angular Swedish woman.

"Oh! Guess Ah'm in de wrong place," Sue giggled tipsily.

"You ban right!" asserted her successor with an energetic slam of the door.

Thus Sue was relieved of the burden of toil. But because she suspected rightly that Martha would not understand, she left the house each morning as if she were going to work. There was a "blind pig" some blocks away where she could spend the day idling with the proprietor's wife and drinking what she could get gratis. Then, night coming on, she would ply her ancient trade. She did well.

Now, listening to Joe's request for money, she oscillated her gray eyes violently. Joe's hopes oozed.

"Lissen, man," she told him, "Ah'm doin' enough keepin' mah mouth shet, ain't Ah? What's de mattah wid yo' woman?" With that she flounced off.

Lacking other alternatives, Joe went to Martha. She was dubious and said so. But she couldn't resist Joe. She loved him. She went, therefore, to Max Abrams, an immigrant Jew, who lived at his place of business in the heart of the Negro section.

Max was something of a phenomenon in the neigh-

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borhood. He was a short, slightly built man, with definitely Semitic features and eyes that took shrewd account of everything they saw. An accident had left him partially crippled in both legs, but had done nothing to daunt his intrepid spirit. Among the Negroes he was liked and admired. He was the only white man they knew who permitted them the use of his first name—and this in itself was a cause of wonderment.

"Vell, Marda, *wie geht's*?" he greeted from the back of his store as he caught sight of Martha and Carrie making their way through open barrels of flour and sugar. He liked Martha. She wasn't lazy and she always paid her bills promptly. "*Ach! Und* how *ist das schöne Mädchen* tonight, *hein*?" he beamed upon Carrie, tendering her a piece of licorice twist.

Martha nervously scanned the rolls of cloth against the fly-specked walls. Now that she was here, she didn't like the idea of the loan at all. Maybe Max wouldn't let her have it. This thought, which should have comforted her, agitated her. Joe needed the money. Joe must have that shop! Joe would make good. Joe—Joe. . . .

She wasn't versed in the arts of business, so she came right out with her request. Max listened intently, considered this woman, her husband, whom he had estimated fairly at first sight.

"But, Marda," he cautioned, "*wenn* your husband—he don't make *der gut*—" His expressive hands completed the warning.

Martha's head came up and her gaze did not flinch.

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At that moment she was like a carven figure in heroic proportions. She said what women in similar situations have said through countless ages:

"Mah man'll do all right!"

Max smiled and nodded ruefully. *"Lieb ist über alles."* His voice was resigned. He became all business. Terms were agreed upon (more lenient terms than Max's better sense dictated), the mortgage was drawn up, and the money was handed over to Martha. Then Max leaned upon his scarred counter, his shoulders drawn up to their highest, and with a hint of pity watched Martha and Carrie depart.

IV

In justice to Joe, when he stood for the first time in his starched white coat and freshly creased trousers, he had every intention of making good. And for a while there was substantial promise of success. Customers poured in, the best people of the settlement—butlers, hostlers, coachmen, and other domestics. Even Max Abrams came to get his hair-cut and shave and add prestige to the establishment; also the Reverend E. J. Jones, shepherd of Shiloh Baptist Church. Soon all the Negroes of any means had their private shaving-mugs deposited on the shelves of Joe's shop. Martha glowed proudly, while the children of the neighbors were glad to be associated with Carrie.

By the end of the first year half of the debt to Max was paid, including the small interest rate required.

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Max was surprised, but made no comment. Maybe he had been wrong.

V

Joe was industriously applying an after-shave lotion to the fat, shiny-black face of the Jamesons' well-fed butler when a surprised voice twanged from the door:

"Looka yere! Efn it ain't ole Joe!"

Joe glanced up quickly. Exclaiming his delight, he abandoned the fat man's chin and leaped to meet the newcomer.

"Jake Tillery! You yaller son of a ——" Joe disregarded the No Profanity sign on the wall, which had been placed there at the request of the Reverend E. J. Jones.

The man facing Joe was of Joe's height, slim, and of that mulatto coloring which is described by Negroes as "dirty yaller." His eyes were light hazel, his head small and egg-shaped. Adorning it was a mat of sandy kinked hair through which ran a razor-made part—a single canal in an arid waste. The shop loafers, commenting on the elegance and extreme cut of his clothes, opined that he was "dressed out de barrel." Although the man was ugly, it was not this that made him repugnant. There was something else—some indefinable quality of evil that lurked in his slinking movements and emphasized an unwholesome look of dissipation.

He and Joe entered into an animated conversation that ignored the Jameson butler until that worthy,

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growing disgruntled, wrenched himself out of the chair like a sulky bear, finished wiping his jowls, replaced his stiff collar and black tie, and stalked out.

"So you gots a wife, eh?" Jake was saying. "Looks like you done struck it rich, man!"

"Ah'm a-doin' fair-to-middlin'," Joe admitted, complacently. Just then a cough caught him. He went to a little cabinet and poured two glasses of liquor. "Yere, take one wid me."

"Luck to you," toasted Jake, briefly.

"Hopes you lives fo'ever, an' hopes Ah never dies!" responded Joe.

As they drained their glasses, a tall, thin-faced, dark-brown man came in, dressed in the sober garments of the divine calling. He eyed Jake suspiciously and glared reprovingly at Joe.

"Brethren," his high-pitched voice intoned, " 'wine is a mocker, an' strong drink is raging'! Brother Owens, whyn't you walk in de path more'n you does? Hain't Ah done tolt you . . ." The Reverend E. J. Jones was just warming to his temperance talk as he divested his frock coat and standing collar.

A true child of Satan, and not relishing this baptism of verbal holy water, Jake signaled to Joe that he would return later, and sauntered out. He wasn't interested in morals or souls.

Not far from the shop he encountered something more to his taste. It was Sue. She cruised up the dimly lighted street just as Jake turned the corner. He looked likely. She assumed her most enticing manner. Need-

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less to say, Jake was open to any promising suggestions. He returned her scrutiny. Then he looked again. There was something familiar. Where had he seen those weaving movements before?

Sue's simpering, wide-eyed look changed to one of astonishment.

"Fo' de Lawd's sake! Jake!"

"Yeah," said Jake, laconically.

"Look yere, honey, what you a'doin' yere?" Sue's eyes sparkled as she pressed a hand caressingly against his chest.

"Klu-Kluxers," answered Jake, shortly. He was thinking. Sue must be doing well, if her clothes were an indication. Better sound her first, though. . . .

"What you doin'? Workin'?" he asked.

Sue grinned. "Nope. Seem like Ah jes' cain't git no job." She winked knowingly. "But Ah'm doin' purty good."

"Look yere, baby, Ah jes' got in town an' Ah'm broke. Ah had to use all mah money gittin' 'way from Richmond." His voice became syrupy as he drew the unresisting Sue to him.

"Whar was you goin', honey?" His eyes were half-closed, like a cat's when it has scented a mouse.

Sue's hands played over his back and arms. She laughed invitingly.

"Ah reckon Ah was a-waitin' to go wid you, honey," she cooed.

"But Ah ain't got no money ——"

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Sue interrupted him to pull up her dress and point significantly to a bulge under her stocking.

"Keep yo' money, big boy. Ah knows you gots some efn dey's any in de world. Ah don't want yo' money. . . ."

Jake grinned as they swung up the street.

VI

It didn't require much effort on Jake's part to persuade Joe to open a gambling-den in the back room of the shop. He would have opened one long ago had it not been for Martha.

Jake put it this way: Business was good and Joe needed a helper on Saturdays. He, Jake, had some money with him (chiefly his share of Sue's earnings from clients he sent to her), and would buy another barber chair. In return he would receive a percentage of the increased custom.

Martha listened to the plan with misgivings. She didn't like Jake, and she didn't like the way he eyed Carrie whenever he came to the house. Moreover, Joe, since Jake's coming, had taken to drinking more heavily. Still, Joe vowed that Jake was a good barber and his best friend, and he was out of work. Finally Martha was prevailed upon. And Jake set about putting his ideas into practice.

He installed the second barber chair. Then he turned his attention to the back room, adding to its furnishings a long oblong table covered with green felt, a pair of smaller tables with chairs, and two powerful

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nickel lamps. To insure privacy—more to be desired than fresh air—he sealed the two windows, but left the door available as a means of hasty exit.

The first Saturday night passed smoothly. Jake whispered invitations to a picked group, counseling quiet, and deserted his duties in the front of the shop to act as game-keeper, or cut man, and maintain orderly play. At one o'clock everyone left quietly by the back door.

When they had gone the partners entered into financial calculations. Within a few hours they had made more money at the game than they had made all day in the shop.

"Man-dee!" exclaimed the elated Joe.

Jake, hardened gambler that he was, remained calm. "You ain't seed nuffin' yit," he prophesied. "Wait'll you start makin' *real* money, man. Dis yere's chicken feed."

Even Martha was pleased when she was informed next morning of the brisk upturn business had taken. But though she greeted Jake more amiably, she still held him at a distance.

VII

Business continued good—so good that there was a tendency to forget the caution to quiet. Strange conversations drifted from the back room to the customers out front.

One Saturday the Reverend E. J. Jones came in for his pre-pulpit shave and hair-cut, his Bible under one arm, somber preoccupation veneering his thin, ascetic

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face. He sat down in the chair next to Joe's and relaxed with hands clasped across his narrow chest—a prophet in repose.

"Whar's yo' pardner?" he inquired.

Joe wavered nervously from one foot to the other as he clipped his customer's hair. He couldn't afford to let the Elder know of the gambling, and he couldn't keep him waiting—equally hot fires burned, as it were, at his front and rear. Finally he went to the door leading into the den and opened it a crack.

There was a low hum of voices mingled with the faint click of dice. Then: "Come, li'l' bitches, come! Hah—you sev'l'"

Sometime in his vanished youth the Elder must have watched the dice, for his relaxed frame galvanized immediately into action. He leaped from his chair with astonishing swiftness and pointed a long, bony finger at the discomfited Joe.

"You gots gamblin' back dar!" he declared in a piercing voice. "Why fo' you gots it, Brothah Joe?" And he went on to deliver his best tirade, ending with bristling promises of hell fire and brimstone. Then he stalked out of the shop.

Joe rushed into the back room and drew Jake aside.

"We gots to stop dis game fo' tonight!" he panted. "De Eldah done found out 'bout it."

Jake shook his head. "Efn Ah stops dat Big Sam when he got his luck on he sho start somep'n."

Joe argued feebly, but Jake was firm. He saw money

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for himself in sight and he was against pampering the pastor in his aversion to gambling.

"Wal, fo' de Lawd's sake, keep 'em quiet!" Joe gave way. "Efn Marty find out 'bout dis, she'll jes' nacherly raise hell, sho!"

VIII

Martha was finding out at that very minute, for the Reverend Jones had not felt his duty ended with the impromptu sermon to Joe. He came upon Martha over the washtubs and delivered himself promptly in as scathing terms as he could command.

When he paused for breath Martha was wiping her arms on her apron.

"You come wid me!" she said, and there was a menace in her voice.

But the Reverend E. J. Jones was not made of the same metal as Isaiah, the dauntless prophet. He visioned the treatment he might receive at the hands of the angered gamblers, and that particular brand of martyrdom held no charm for him.

"No, Sistah Martha, Ah ain't gwine wid you. Ah'll preach me a sermon dat'll break dat thing up!"

So Martha was alone when she appeared at the shop door a few minutes later.

"Hullo, honey," Joe greeted her uneasily. "You ought'n' to come out wid no coat on—you'll git yo' death o' cold."

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The solicitude was lost on Martha. "Whar's dat gamblin' a-goin' on yere?" she demanded, abruptly.

She took her stand in the center of the shop, feet braced widely apart, hands gripping her broad hips. This was a Martha Joe had never seen. He was frightened.

"Whar is it, Ah says?" Martha's deep voice was dangerous.

Joe did not have to answer. A voice from the back room boomed, "Walk, you bitches, walk!"

Sweat broke out on Joe, and it was not caused by heat from the pot-bellied stove. He tried to intercept Martha's lunge for the door, but with one sweep of her hand she sent him sprawling. A violent twist and jerk of the knob flung the door open, and Martha stood poised on the threshold, like an angry brown goddess about to scatter destruction on her sinful subjects. The effect was instantaneous.

Hand raised high over his battered, dirty hat, Big Sam stared at this apparition which had appeared so suddenly. His big eyes popped to their uttermost, and his thick-lipped, open mouth froze on an unspoken command to the dice. The cane with which Jake shuffled the cubes broke its hopping, anticipatory antics, and lay like a miraculously petrified snake on the green cloth. Men forgot their haggling over side bets. The drunken, slobbery-mouthed youth with the consumptive face and hang-dog expression stopped annoying Jake for a free turn at the dice at the expense of the game-keeper. More than a score of eyes, displaying vari-

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ous degrees of consternation, peered through the smoke haze at Martha in a stagnant silence.

"Git!"

Like a clap of thunder the word leapt at them. With one instinct the men turned like automatons toward the door at the back of the room. Jake attempted to stop the exodus.

"Hold on, men! You don't have to go. Ah owns part o' dis place! An' dis yere woman ain't got no rights to order you out!"

He turned on Martha, his hazel eyes ugly, his brows drawn upward in a way that boded no good. "You git to hell—" and that was as far as he got.

Two swift strides brought Martha in front of him, her face an agony of wrath. She seized him by the throat. She shook him until his yellow skin paled to green. Then she flung him against the table. The men who had paused in their flight now scrambled for the exit.

"Git what belongs to you an' don't lemme ketch you 'round yere no mo'! An efn you comes near mah house, niggah, Ah'll kill you!" With that Martha stormed through the door into the front room and swept out to the street. In passing, she favored Joe with a withering roll of her eyes.

Jake was busily recovering the scattered money when his partner joined him.

"Reckon dat 'bout breaks up de whole shootin'-match, Yaller," ventured Joe, easing timidly into a chair.

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"Yeah," agreed the kneeling Jake without looking up.

"Reckon we bettah count up an' split de kitty, den," suggested Joe. He coughed nervously.

Jake arose slowly. He arranged the gathered coins into small neat stacks on one of the card-tables along with the square box containing the "cuts." His eyes fondled them. He passed a caressing hand over them, much in the manner of a father patting the heads of his children. Then he squinted at Joe and asked in low, cold tones:

"What kitty you talkin' 'bout?"

Joe licked his dry lips. He had a foreboding that all was not well. Words would not come.

"You see dat?" Jake pointed to the wrecked table. "Wal, dat's yo' kitty! Yo' woman done bust it an' you gots to pay fo' it! See?"

"But dat ain't cost much as dat money, Jake!" protested Joe.

"Go haid 'n' take yo's, den," Jake invited, grimly sarcastic. His eyes held the same hateful gleam that had burned at Martha. His right hand, like a hydra-headed serpent, glided stealthily toward his hip pocket.

Joe shivered. He had witnessed that glinting, upward flash of steel once before at Richmond, and remembered the bloody aftermath. In his haste to be gone he stumbled over the door sill.

Jake shrugged contemptuously, swept the stacks of money into the box, and departed.

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IX

True to his word, the Reverend E. J. Jones preached a sermon exposing Joe's moral failings, and his obedient flock cried their "amens" in vigorous approval. When he was finished Joe had lost a great portion of his clientele. And as the days passed other customers—those upon whom Martha's fury had descended—drifted over to the barber who was Joe's only competitor. Martha had not foreseen this effect of her action.

Idleness settled upon Joe and he turned more frequently to his bottle. He hadn't even Martha's sympathy for comfort; contempt was at last eating away her blind love for this weakling. She refused to sleep with him—his slobbering embraces revolted her.

One cold night he fell into a drunken stupor and lay in a gutter until Martha found him and carried him home. Already honeycombed with tuberculosis, he lingered two feverish weeks, then a hemorrhage spurted out his life.

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Chapter Three

I

MARTHA spoke to Carrie across the dinner table. It was the Sunday following Joe's burial.

"You cain't git off to school dis year, chile," she said.

Carrie's bright eyes dulled. She had set her heart upon going to the Institute.

Martha went on: "We's got to pay our debt. Efn we works hard dis year, next year you kin go. Warn't fo' dat good-fo'-nuffin' Joe you could a-gwine dis year! Missy told me dat man warn't no good!" She took Carrie's chin in her roughened hand and lifted it gently. "Lissen, chile," she said, bitterly, "don't nevah let no no-'count man make no fool outn you! Ain't no man no-'count! Y'ear me?"

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II

They made an heroic effort, but after a year bent over their tubs the mortgage was still unpaid. And Carrie's hope of attending the Institute was little nearer realization. The ceaseless drubbing toil was hardest on Carrie, and for hours and days at a stretch the girl would be plunged into the black moods that are the affliction of adolescence. Was all her life to be cut to this dreary pattern? Was she to go on forever rubbing, rinsing, bluing, ironing, delivering clothes? She saw no other fate in store. And it wasn't fair! It wasn't fair! Lucrece had put the thought of schooling into her mind and the young Negro teacher had fostered it. She was a good student—bright and quick. She was wasting herself over endless batches of clothes.

So she fretted. Spring gave way to summer, summer to autumn, autumn to winter. And each day was hopelessly like the one just past.

Then one morning, before the Christmas season, she was in the back yard hanging out a basket of clothes when she heard a cry.

"Carrie! Carrie!"

In the kitchen she found Martha collapsed beside the ironing-board, on which a sheet was smoking.

"Mah—arm—honey," Martha panted. "It—ain't ——"

Carrie took one look at her mother's twisted lips and

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sped toward the front of the house, where footsteps sounded. Fright leaped in her heart.

In the dining-room she collided with Sue.

"Lawdy!" Sue exclaimed when she saw Martha's drawn face. "It acts like mah uncle Mark's when he was strick. Help me git 'er to de couch," she directed Carrie, "an' den you run git de doctah."

III

Sue was in deep conversation with Jake in a basement room not far from Martha's house. It was Jake's new place of business.

"Look yere," he was saying, "didn't you tell me dat Joe tolt Martha you was his sistah?"

"Yeah, but ——"

"Nev' mind de *but*—you jes' stay his sistah! See?"

"Yeah—but don't dat make me have to take care dat gal, Carrie, efn Martha dies? Ah ain't used to ——"

"Nev' mind what you's used to! Don't you see, you fool?—efn de gal comes to you, so's de house!" Jake paused to see what effect this would have.

Sue slapped her fleshy thigh. "Dog-gone! Dat's right, ain't it?" She thought a minute. "Look yere, Martha mo'gaged dat house to set Joe up in dat shop. S'posin' dey ain't paid it off?"

"Wal, Ah was figgerin' dat you an' me could kindah hang together," Jake confessed. "Ah gots a li'l' pile what Ah done made yere—an' dey's mo' comin'. What say, hon'?"

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Smiling her agreement, Sue snuggled against him and explored his lean body with plump fingers. Jake responded abstractedly but with expertness. Then with a kiss, and a pat on a rounded buttock he sent Sue on her way and turned to the task of tidying the den. In one corner he spied a slimy pool where some one had unloaded an excess of liquor.

"Damn pigs!" he exclaimed, disgustedly, as he reached for a pail of sawdust.

IV

Martha's death profoundly affected a number of people. It left Carrie to the questionable protection of Sue, with no one to turn to for love and understanding. It gave Sue and Jake a home to which their wits did not entitle them. Incidentally, it afforded the Reverend E. J. Jones with a theme for one of his most eloquent sermons. Martha had not attended church after the night of the gambling-den episode, and this digression from the Path of Light—according to the Reverend Jones's interpretation—in all probability contributed directly to her demise.

Martha was buried beside Joe. The Sisters of the Shining Star in the West Lodge stood about the fresh mound and chanted "Till We Meet." Then all took their ways home, to be submerged again in the affairs of their separate lives. It mattered to no one that Martha symbolized a link between their present freedom

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and their past condition of slavery; or that Martha and her valiant kind are rare personalities in any age.

That night Sue moved her belongings from a room over the blind pig to the neat house for which Martha had broken herself. The mongrel had usurped the kennel of the thoroughbred.

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Chapter Four

I

ON a certain morning during the rainy season between winter and spring—when the fog banks steal up the Chesapeake and fall over Baltimore with a clinging, dripping embrace—Jake awoke out of alcoholic slumber and growled disagreeably. He looked at the clock. Seven. Hell! He'd slept only five hours! He was about to settle back into his pillow when his attention was caught and held by Sue's face, and he bent upon her the gaze a man directs toward a woman of whom he has had too much; an unfavoring, searching scrutiny. What he saw did not tempt him.

Whisky had swollen the pale-yellow countenance. Sleep had flung wide her loose-lipped mouth, displaying stained teeth that had never known a brush. Her hair was a sodden mass. With a jerk of the covers Jake revealed her body, but the sight of that ungainly mound of flesh only increased his distaste. His lips curled. He lay back and stared at the ceiling.

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In two years Jake had prospered. His gambling-den had more than made its way—it had cleared the mortgage on Martha's house. The house itself, straying from its original purpose, had proved a lucrative asset, for single rooms were let regularly for the use of transient bawds.

Jake was pleased with his achievement. But lying in bed this morning he reflected that success entitled him to a woman more pleasing than the one beside him. One thought led to another until in a moment of decision he stepped cautiously out of bed and made his way to the door.

Down the damp, smelly hall he stole, past the corner bedroom where Big Lil lay with her consort of the night, past another room whose door was open, revealing a state of towering disorder—Callie had sneaked out early without paying his percentage of her fee. At a third door he stopped and listened, then exerted a steady pressure.

Carrie wakened to see Jake's evil yellow face so close that twin streams of heat from his distended nostrils pounded against her neck. She did not scream, but her black eyes clouded with hate. Jake misinterpreted her calm.

"Honey," he whispered.

Grasping her shoulders, he attempted to kiss her. Immediately ten fingernails raked his face, leaving livid streaks in their wake, while strong flashing teeth clamped the point of his chin in a painful vise. With one spring a slender brown fury leaped from the bed.

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"Ef you don't git out o' here, Ah'll call A'nt Sue!" she warned.

Jake was disconcerted but not convinced; he moved towards the girl, then stood swaying on the balls of his feet while reason battled with liquor and passion. Finally his long training over the gaming-table decided in favor of reason. He did not relish facing an aroused Sue, and he knew that Sue countenanced no liberties with Carrie—some obscure motive prompted her to take the rôle of protector very seriously.

Jake backed quietly to the door and left.

Carrie sat on the bed and drew the quilt about her shoulders. She knew what Jake had wanted. The women and men who came to the house had been a liberal education, and Sue on one occasion had informed her bluntly on the functions of sex, concluding with: "So you keep clear o' dese menfolks—dey don't mean you no good." The advice had been unnecessary. Carrie was not attracted to the men she saw about her. It was easy, with Sue's coöperation, to meet their suggestive smirks with indifference. For Carrie was as Martha had been. A tidal wave might some day engulf her, but there would be no promiscuous giving.

But the moment had come to take stock of her situation. She wanted to get out of all this—the filth, the smell of whisky . . . everything. She had not forgotten her first bright hopes of school. She wanted to know things—things Lucrece and the young teacher had known. She wanted to do things—not just cook and keep this hateful house in a semblance of order.

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The mirror reflected a pleasing young person of sixteen, slender but not angular, light brown in color. If she gathered her hair into a discreet bun and wore a dress that would conceal the absence of curves, perhaps she would look older. She would try. For Carrie had made up her mind.

"You goin' to git yo'self a job!" she told her reflection. "Efn you wants to go to school, you gots to git out of here and git some money!"

The kitchen clock on the shelf said a quarter to eight as she stepped into her slippers and eased noiselessly out of the door. From the alley she turned up the rain-slicked pavement at a rapid pace, unmindful of the puddles beneath her feet. Somewhere ahead was a job.

II

Mrs. Josiah Hobarth was having a most disagreeable morning. The fog would have been enough—it always depressed her and brought on an attack of asthma. But in addition to the fog there was Gretna. Gretna, her hired girl, had calmly left the evening before, after informing her: "Ole und me, ve ist married to be diese nacht."

Mrs. Hobarth had pleaded for a few days of grace until she could get some one else, but the girl had been firm. "Nein, mum, Ole, he ist no vant for me to hire out now. Ole, he say dat for him I vork now."

And that had ended the matter. Ole, the hack-driver, arrived for Gretna's belongings and they departed. And

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because of them Mrs. Hobarth was in the kitchen this morning, cranking viciously at the clinker-clogged grate of the stove. It gave at last, but when she attempted to start a fire the damp wood did nothing but smoke. She was dirty and perspiring from her exertions. Upstairs, Mr. Hobarth wanted to know where she had put this shirt and that tie.

The good woman could have screamed.

It did not appease her to hear a timid knock at the door, accompanied by an equally timid brown face at the window pane.

Rising impatiently, Mrs. Hobarth swung the door back so violently that the knob slipped from her hand and dislodged a piece of plaster from the wall. This damage to her newly painted kitchen was the crowning exasperation of the morning.

"What do you want?" she almost yelled at the girl on the doorstep.

Carrie shrank within her cloak and forgot her curtsy. She had had no idea it would be as hard as this! "Do you need a girl?" she blurted, in desperation, wide-eyed.

A sigh escaped Mrs. Hobarth. A smile ironed out the wrinkles which irritation had caused. She stepped aside and motioned Carrie into the kitchen.

"Can you cook?" she asked.

"Yes'm," answered Carrie.

Her sharp eyes caught the smoke wreathing from between the lids of the stove. She stepped over to it, turned the damper straight with the chimney, and

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opened the bottom door. Ashes seeped from the pile beneath the grate. She shoveled the pile into a pail, then swept up the floor.

When she turned back to Mrs. Hobarth approval was written in every line of that lady's plump florid face. A little smudge on the tip of her nose looked like an isolated polka dot in a pinkish dress. Carrie tried to suppress a smile, but failed.

"What are you laughing at?" the woman asked, good-humoredly.

Carrie decided to tell the truth.

"Yo' nose is black, ma'am," she answered, as soberly as she could.

Mrs. Hobarth bustled hastily to the mirror, and after one look at herself burst into laughter that shook her like so much gelatin. The laughter cleared the air of the last vestige of gloom.

"I'm Mrs. Hobarth. I don't know what sent you—but the Lord knows I'm glad you're here! Now, if you'll cook breakfast for Mr. Hobarth and me, we'll have a talk later about you. You'll find things in the cupboard and the pantry. Just eggs. And Mr. Hobarth likes biscuits. Can you make them?"

"Yes'm!" grinned Carrie, happily, darting for the pantry.

III

That night between sips of whisky Sue listened to Carrie tell of her job.

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"Huh!" Sue grunted. "Seems like you'd a stayed yere. You didn't have nuffin' to do but pass a li'l' likker 'round. 'Co'se, you suit yo'self. Ah promised yo' mammy Ah'd look to you. Ah done de bes' Ah could. Efn you gits tired, you come on home. See?"

"You bin real nice, A'nt Sue—but Ah wants to make enough money to go to school."

Sue made a face. "What you want go to school fo'? Ain't nuffin' but a waste o' time."

"Ah'm goin' to school!" Carrie replied, doggedly.

"All right—all right! Go 'haid!" said Sue, placatingly. She dashed off the last few drops of her liquor. "We gwine move from yere," she went on. "Jake says dat meddly Mandy Dobson talk too much. We gwine down by de docks—Jake says bizness bettah. So efn you gwine stay whar you works, you better take yo' clothes wid you tonight."

Cheerfully Carrie packed her few belongings and went back to the Hobarth home. She thought the tie broken that bound her to Jake and Sue.

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Chapter Five

I

SPRING brought light breezes up the bay and fresh foliage and new grass to tempt the robins to the Hobarths' small lawn. It brought Keith Hobarth home from the New England college where he had completed his freshman year.

Keith had neither the stolid, methodical quality of his father, who had made a small fortune in the meat trade, nor the social ambitions of his mother. He was a quiet, rather aloof young man—attractive in appearance and with a poise beyond his years.

He noticed Carrie the first night at dinner. And in the days that followed he found innumerable threadbare excuses to visit the kitchen. He wanted a snack to eat; he wanted to lend her some of his school books since she liked to read. . . .

Carrie, seeing through his pretenses, was worried. She had a good job that would bring her within the reach of school. And she wanted to keep it. School was

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much more important than any man she had ever seen. Besides, there had been instilled in her the consciousness of racial difference, and this was not easily shaken.

The crisis came one Sunday morning, a fortnight after Keith's return. He had begged off church, saying he wanted to walk over to the Falls. In a short while he stepped through the door of the kitchen.

"Busy?" he inquired, blithely.

Carrie looked up, startled, from the potatoes she was peeling. Dismay followed swiftly on surprise. She started to rise, then remembered the pan in her lap and sat down again.

"Ah thought you'd gone to church, Mr. Keith."

"You know why I didn't go?" he asked, leaning against the table. A furnace raged inside him.

"P-please don't stay, Mr. Keith!" Carrie's eyes lifted pleadingly to his.

The soft beauty of the up-tilted brown face stripped the boy of all his youthful restraints. With a single swift movement of his hand he swept the pan from her lap and jerked Carrie to her feet into his arms. He was bending his head to her lips when ——

"Keith!"

It was like the cracking of an oaken beam. The voice, reverberating across the room, put to flight Keith's passion and left him cold and limp. Carrie sank weakly into a chair.

"Go into the parlor, Keith!" Mr. Hobarth's large, fleshy face was aflame. He turned to Carrie. "I don't know whose fault it is," he said. "I don't care. I thought

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from the first you were too good-looking. I figured my son was attracted by you." The man's anger took possession of him and he stormed on: "I went over the colored neighborhood yesterday. Why did you tell my wife that you were from Virginia?"

Carrie did not answer. What was the use?

"Well, I know now where you came from, and you can go back! Your kind is dangerous to have around—even if it ain't your fault. Such as you are a result of that damn slavery."

He paused for breath.

"I'll pay you for a month. Now get your things and get out of here!"

Carrie dragged herself to her room that had been her very own for so short a time: a sanctuary securing her from the noise of harlots and their drunken companions. With deadening fingers she bundled her effects, adding at the last moment one book, a volume of Home Science. Then she hastened down the stairs and out of the house.

Josiah Hobarth watched her go, an annoying sense of injustice pricking at his conscience. But with a gesture he rid himself of the thought and turned toward the front of the house where his son waited.

II

On the sun-lit yet gloomy journey to the harbor front, two forces in Carrie's nature battled for supremacy. A sea of pessimism engulfed her. Self-pity stifled

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the spirit of Martha and left her a prey to all the weak elements that were her heritage from Joe. The flame of her ambition, that had struggled so desperately to maintain itself, made one last effort, then died.

In such a mood Carrie turned into a smelly alley-street that paralleled the waterfront. It was lined on either side by warehouses and stables that frowned down upon the few squalid dwellings, much as children scowl at their enfeebled elders who have lingered too long. From the first of these decrepit houses came the sound of a wheezy reed organ, a guitar and a whisky-cracked soprano—all blended in a doleful tune. The voice was unmistakably Sue's.

Carrie knocked at the weather-washed door, from which the paint was peeling. Instantly the discord within stopped. But no one answered the knock. Carrie called:

"Open up, A'nt Sue!"

There was a pause. The door slid open a trifle, and Sue peered out cautiously. Through the haze of her liquor she recognized Carrie. She swung the door wide, grinning her welcome. In her own way, she had learned to love this child of Martha's.

"Come on in, honey!" she cried. "What you doin' yere? Got de day off?"

"Gimme a drink," said Carrie, shortly, dropping her bundle.

"Drink? Sho. Water in de back room, honey."

"Ah wants likker! Likker!"

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Sue blinked her amazement. Carrie had never touched whisky, even though it had always been accessible to her.

"What's de mattah—" Carrie's scowl halted Sue's query.

"All right, honey . . . all right. . . ." she soothed, and staggered through dirty drapes to the back room.

Carrie deposited her bundle on a chair, sat down and looked about her.

The room was about ten by eight feet. The floor was bare, except for two spotty, ragged mats which sprawled like grimy poodles asleep in the sun. The walls, in the more seemly days of their past, had been papered, but now were shedding in patches. As if to offset this evidence of deterioration, flies had obligingly dotted the surface with an effect that suggested a pattern. Several people, in varying degrees of intoxication, lounged in the chairs along the walls, regarding Carrie curiously.

A pock-marked, scrawny yellow woman sat in the corner, with one arm flung about the bullish neck of her companion. At the organ was a light-skinned youth, lean and fidgety, with a brown-paper cigarette swinging limply from his mouth. Four women, unpaired, after one look at the newcomer, went back to their lusty snoring. They were resting for the evening, when men would be coming from the harbored boats in search of diversion.

Sue brought in a small demijohn of rum and set it on a side-table along with some glasses.

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"Help yo'self, honey—but you bettah go slow, seein's it's yo' first."

Carrie ignored this counsel, poured a brimming glassful and drained it at a gulp; poured another and drank that. Sue's eyes rounded in astonishment.

"Lawsy, chile! You gwine to git drunk sho's you bo'n!" she warned. "It makes me drunk to watch you!"

"Ah don't care!" Carrie avowed, tempestuously. She approached the organist.

"Play that song ag'in," she ordered.

The youth turned readily to the organ and struck from it a few groaning, preliminary chords, then swung into the tune Carrie had heard from the street. The bull-necked black man disengaged himself from the skinny arms of the yellow woman and strummed an accompaniment.

"Sing it, A'nt Sue!" laughed Carrie, crazily.

Sue caught up the refrain, which told of a certain brown-skin "papa," for whom a dolorous brown-skin gal was longing. The verses were mere jumbles, liberally supplied with obscenity. But the whole wove a rhythmical pattern which beat into Carrie's liquored brain until she began to hum along with Sue. As she caught the words she sang louder in a deep contralto, and as she sang she swayed her trim hips in time to the music. The guitarist's eyes were dark slits. His yellow companion sulked angrily.

Heavy boots fell upon the steps outside, the door was jerked open, and Jake waved four men into the room. He evinced no surprise at Carrie's presence.

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"Mistah Hen'y Taylor"—he introduced the first man, a black giant with huge, square jaws and incredibly thin lips. The awakened women eyed him appreciatively.

"Mistah Zack Wheelah." That stubby one hunched his shoulders a trifle and grinned.

"Mistah Hank Tate an' Mistah Slim Hackins." Tate and Hackins were too drunk to display any interest and remained placidly blank.

Jake finished the introductions by turning to the women:

"An' dis is Jinny." Jinny was chocolate-colored and robust.

"An' dis is Kate—" A midgety, faded-yellow jade smiled invitingly; she wasn't choicy.

"Dis yere's Josie." Cynical lips twisted across a colorless face, like a streak of blood on a piece of bleached putty, and hard eyes fixed themselves on the weak-faced Hackins. He involuntarily staggered over to her.

"An' Cassie," Jake ended. That squat, black one grinned the width of her broad face. Hank scampered to her, like a mouse to a piece of cheese.

"Who dat?" asked the big man, indicating Carrie. Before Jake could answer, Sue confronted the fellow.

"Dat's mah niece—why?" Her tone challenged. The huge man looked at her and looked away.

"Nuffin'," he said, and strode over to the robust Jinny. Wheeler, of necessity, took his place with the uncoupled Kate.

"Go on an' sing, Carrie," bade Sue.

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III

There were times, during the days that followed, when the old urge for an education would revive in Carrie; but never to remain for long. Too much of her father's spinelessness had been engendered by her first failure. The injustice of the Hobarth incident so shadowed her thinking that it served as an immediate check whenever she considered getting another job. She fondled the notion that all the world conspired against her. The notion became an idea and in time a fixed state of mind.

A contempt for everything and everybody fastened upon her and soured her. She despised Sue for her slovenliness. To Carrie the woman was filth personified. She loathed the seafaring men, their leering faces and lust-flamed eyes. They made her feel naked. Some of them would come alone and insist that she sit at their table. Sue assured her that she didn't have to if she didn't want to. But Carrie derived malicious pleasure from watching them try to make her drunk. She devised a scheme by which she increased Sue's liquor profits and at the same time rid herself of annoyers. Next to the wall under each table she placed a wide-mouthed crock. The first two or three drinks she drank outright—she developed a surprising ability to control her liquor—then when the man became too stupefied to notice, she deposited drink after drink secretly into the crock. The ruse delighted Sue.

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But though she loathed these others, it was Jake for whom she had a consuming hatred. She hated the cold precision with which he robbed his less brainy opponents over the crap-table. She hated the swift snakiness of his lean fingers as they curved about the dice. She hated the way he cut quarters, instead of nickels, from the winnings of a half-drunk illiterate. And, above all, she hated and shrank from the assuredness of his stare, which seemed to prophesy that some day she would be his in spite of her antipathy. She answered that stare, however, with a defiant scorn which was heartened by the knowledge that Sue's protecting bulk stood between them.

Thus Carrie kept her physical chastity, like a lusterless gem in a setting of corroded metal. She attached no value to it. She simply didn't choose to part with it.

Then, in about a year and a half, out of the lowlands of Maryland's Eastern Shore came Jim Prince.

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Chapter Six

I

SUMMER had carried over greedily into September; time of hot, sultry days and nights cooled by breezes off the Bay; time when farmers from the harvested fields of Virginia and Maryland come to Baltimore town seeking buyers.

As soon as you saw him, you knew that Jim Prince was not of an urban breed. His spanking-new clothes, the extreme cut of them, their flashy pattern, the self-conscious manner in which he wore them—all attested his bucolic origin. Further evidence was the exaggerated swagger of his narrow yet powerful shoulders, which sloped as if they were eternally lifting a heavy load. His young copper-brown face bore the imprint of toil, and the face harmonized with veined, hard hands that were obviously unaccustomed to handling dice. The very curve of the knotty fingers suggested rather a plowshare or hoe. And despite thorough scrubbing, de-

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spite the odor of cheap tonic on his freshly cut hair, he smelled of earth—clean plowed earth.

After a short time spent in Jake's gaming-room, Jim Prince left. Clearly, it was no place for one who appreciated a dollar, and Prince did. He drifted into the front room.

Two women looked up hopefully as he entered, but he dismissed them with a glance and strode over to Carrie, who was absently fingering chords at the organ. She looked at him without interest and returned to her aimless music. Nothing daunted, Prince leaned against the organ and let his eyes rove leisurely over her head and shoulders. She frowned.

"Well?" she demanded, peevishly.

He grinned, and his grin had an infectious quality.

"Mah name's Prince—Jim Prince," he informed her in a twangy, lilting drawl. "Everybody titles me Prince, though. Ah'm from de Sho'—East'n Sho,' Maryland, down to Shrewsbury and Deerfield way." He paused, waiting for Carrie to exhibit some interest, but the organ wheezed on in unconcern.

"Mah ole man he sent me to Balt'more, 'cause he's poorly, to look attah de wheat- an' corn-sellin'. Ah'm jes' 'bout finish now an' thought Ah'd have me some spreadin' joy. But dat cat-eyed hound in dar, he done tried to take me fo' a good thing. So Ah thought Ah'd git out 'fo' Ah lose mah haid." He bent confidentially over Carrie. "Now cain't 'mongst-you help a fellah out what wants a good time?"

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Carrie smiled crookedly as she gave him a hard-eyed stare.

"You better go on home, big boy, whilst you still can. These buzzards'll pick you just clean's a bone efn you hang 'round!" Why she advised him so, she didn't know. Perhaps it was because of his youth; perhaps because of his clean virility—two qualities which the other men lacked.

He began to protest: "Oh, you don't have to worry 'bout me, honey! Ah kin take care mahself, all right. All Ah wants is—is ——"

"All you wants," Carrie finished for him, with cool bitterness, "is what all the rest of the men wants what comes here! You wants a woman—to drink wid an' to sleep wid."

Prince was seized with embarrassment.

"Ah'll drink wid you. But"—Carrie looked him straight in the eye—"that's all."

She left the room and returned with a bottle, beckoning him to a near-by table. Prince took the drink she offered, but sputtered and choked trying to down it.

"You ever drink likker befo'?" asked Carrie.

"No—only Thanksgivin' an' Christmas an' New Year's," he confessed.

"Huh!" grunted Carrie. "What Ah ought to do is make you drunk an' take all yo' money from you! But Ah reckon Ah'm jes' too chicken-hearted. . . . You git outn here 'fo' some wench takes all you gots!"

"You reckon so?" queried Prince, already dizzy from his single drink.

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"Yeah, Ah reckon so!" declared Carrie, emphatically. "One mo' drink an' you ain't able to stand on yo' feet! Come on!"

"But Ah'm all right!"

"You better git on a boat an' leave fo' the Sho' efn one's goin' tonight!" With that she shoved him out into the alley.

II

He came again the next day. Sue was taking her daily nap, and Jake was out. It was too early for the other women.

"Thought you was on yo' way back to the farm?" Carrie looked up from the dress she sewed. She was neither glad nor annoyed at seeing him. "Rest yo' burden, since you's here," she invited. She motioned him to a chair.

Prince sat down and stretched his long legs. He grinned his slow, boyish grin, but said nothing.

"What's the matter?" asked Carrie. "Boats stop runnin'?"

"Nope, dey still runnin'," Prince assured her. He cut a piece from a plug of tobacco, and thrust it into his mouth, careless of the sharp edge of the knife. "Jes' didn't feel like leavin' today," he concluded.

"Oh, you wants to git robbed anyways!"

"Ain't nobody gwine rob me," vouchsafed Prince, searching for some place to deposit a mouthful of juice.

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Gingerly, with a foot, Carrie shoved a filthy cuspidor from beneath a table.

"What you come here fo', then?" she asked.

" 'Cause Ah wanted to see 'mongst-you ag'in," was his blunt answer.

"Lissen, big boy, didn't Ah tell you nothin' doin', last night? The rest o' these women do *that*—not me! Ah ain't no piece o' meat to buy!"

"Is Ah said anything 'bout *dat*?" he countered, unruffled. "An' who says Ah buys?"

"Huh! That's what they all come here fo'."

"What you stay yere fo' efn you don't like it?" retorted Prince.

"Where Ah goin' to go?" demanded Carrie. She put the dress aside and took up the conversation in earnest. "Lissen, big boy, Ah reckons this place is the only one fo' me. Ah was bo'n fo' bad luck, that's all!"

"Luck's in de Lawd, an' de devil's in de people," drawled Prince, and he spat squarely into the cuspidor.

"Huh! That's what you think, but Ah knows better! Lissen." And Carrie sketched the details of her life: her mother's death, its consequences, her failure to keep a job, her longing for an education. Prince listened sympathetically.

"Ah ain't got no eddication," he said, " 'cept'n a year or so. Ah kin read an' write an' count. An' mah ole man, he ain't got no l'arnin' a-tall. But he sho is smart. He warn't freed by no white mens a-fightin' fo' him. Nossuh!" Prince went on to tell how his father had worked seven years for his freedom and five more for

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that of his wife; how his father had struggled to make his small plot of ground yield, adding more and more land, until now he owned "a purty tol'able farm."

"But de ole man's failin' fast," Jim concluded. "Co'se, he allows he kin still keep up—but 'tain't so. He home now 'thout nobody to look attah him. Ain't bin no woman in de house since Ma died."

Despite herself, Carrie had become absorbed in the narrative. It lifted Jim Prince out of the category of all the men she knew and made an individual of him —some one clean and wholesome. She felt belittled beside him.

"It must be nice down there," she ventured, wistfully, and for the first time she smiled whole-heartedly at him.

" 'Mongst-you would like it!" he exclaimed, eagerly. "Some o' dese days," he prophesied, "Ah'm gwine have one o' de best farms on de Sho'." And Carrie could not help but feel that his was no idle boast.

"Looka yere—uh—" he stammered. "Looka yere, how'd you like to be down dat way? 'Mongst-you don't b'long in no place like dis." Prince indicated the dingy room which even Carrie's industry could not much remedy.

"Do you reckon Ah wants to stay here?" came the disconsolate reply. "But where am Ah goin'? Ah cain't git no job after what happened at the Hobarths'."

"Ah don't mean fo' you to stay in Balt'more," interposed Jim. "Ah means fo' you to go home wid me. We needs a woman 'round de house—me an' Pa ——"

"You means you would—marry me?" Carrie cried.

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"Co'se Ah means dat!" answered Jim, firmly. He leaned forward eagerly.

Away from the filth and the smell of raw liquor and stale smoke. Away from the debauched men and crawling women. Away from Jake's hateful face and hot eyes, from Sue's sloppiness. Away—to where she could see clear skies and clean earth, instead of drab gray walls of warehouses and crumbling bricks. . . . The picture caught and held her for a moment. Then her habitual pessimism blotted it out rudely.

"No. . . . No. . . . It wouldn't work. It mought fo' a while . . . but wouldn't last long. Ain't nothin' never goin' to last wid me! Guess Ah b'longs here."

Prince pleaded. He coaxed and argued. But Carrie remained listlessly determined. Finally he arose.

"Guess Ah'll leave tonight on de twelve-'clock boat. Good-by."

Carrie made no answer.

III

The weather had changed overnight. A blustery northeast wind rushed from the Bay, sweeping debris before it. It was not a cold wind, but it bore a chill which made the alley-dwellers close their doors. The ragged urchins who usually played about the doorsteps had carried their activities inside.

Sue was enjoying one of her alcoholic naps. Jake puttered about the gaming-table, making minute repairs. Carrie was at the organ. As she played she

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hummed softly, thinking of many things—of Jim Prince and his farm and her own dreary lot.

Suddenly Jake's voice purred above her and his fingers caressed her shoulders.

"You sho' sings purty, gal."

Carrie's fingers died on the keys.

"Take yo' dirty hands offn me!" she commanded, her voice metallic.

Jake said nothing, but pressed himself against her back and gripped her firmly.

"You hear me?" Her voice rose to a higher pitch. "Ah'll call A'nt Sue!"

"Go 'haid," snickered Jake. He held her more tightly.

"A'nt Sue! A'nt Sue!" called Carrie.

There was no answer. Jake laughed.

"Go 'haid! Holler!" he mocked.

Carrie struggled to gain her feet and Jake shifted his hold to her wrists, twisting them violently. The girl kicked and tried to bite, but without success. She felt herself weakening.

"Let me go!" she cried.

As if that were a signal, a long form hurtled through the door and leapt on Jake, while sinewy fingers, like cables, wrapped themselves about the gambler's freckled neck. Like a bag from which the contents are pouring, Jake sank to his knees, his pale eyes bulging.

From across the room, where she had been flung by the impact of the men's bodies, Carrie recognized the distorted face of her rescuer, who at the moment seemed intent on killing Jake.

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"Jim! Jim Prince!" she screamed.

The great fingers loosened slowly, and Jake dropped to the floor.

Prince picked up the limp form. "Show me whar he sleeps—an' git me some likker," he ordered Carrie.

Carrie led the way upstairs. When he had dumped his burden on the bed, Prince took the bottle and poured some of its raw contents into Jake's gaping mouth. Jake gurgled and spat feebly.

"Git yo' clothes together," Jim told Carrie.

"Mah clothes?"

"Git yo' clothes!" His voice snapped. "Whar's yo' A'nt?"

Carrie jerked a thumb at the other bedroom. "She's in there—drunk."

"Kin she read?"

"A li'l'."

"Wal, you jes' make a note sayin' you's gone," commanded Prince. "Hurry up!" he added, before she could begin to quibble; "it's 'most time fo' de boat!"

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Chapter Seven

I

IT IS a low, flat land, the Eastern Shore of Maryland. It crouches there between the Chesapeake on the west and the state of Delaware on the east. Toward the south the green waters of the Atlantic wash lazily—lazily, that is, until one of those northeastern gales frightens the ocean out of its calm. At such times, gigantic billows blast the frail man-made bulwarks and wipe away, as by the sweep of an angry god's broom, those little clusters of frame houses and hotels which are the sea-shore resorts. And the tidal waters of the Choptank, the Miles, the Shannon, the Tred-Avon, and others of the rivers, flood the inland towns, driving the population into the upper rooms of their dwellings. Then the refuse from the outhouses floats in the streets until the waters subside. And the crops of the farmers are ruined, and their live-stock lost.

It crouches there, the Shore, like a sulking, neglected child, with its scattered hamlets, towns, and villages.

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Some of them have caught the modern spirit; others lie in dull contentment with their lot beneath whatever kind of sky the fates provide. The farmers plow, plant, and reap. The river men snatch their produce from the streams. The canners pack their tomatoes and peas. And natives of all persuasions are born, live, propagate, decline, and are buried beneath the low, flat land, in order that their children may take up the thread of life.

Carrie loved these autumnal lowlands to which Prince had brought her. She loved the steady sameness of their flowing fields fringed by pine woods. Somehow the monotony of the landscape reassured her—gave her a feeling of security.

She liked, too, the way the sun regulated her life. She arose at dawn, there were so many things to do. There was the fire to be made; breakfast to be cooked; the chickens to be unroosted; the cows to be milked with Jim's coaching. At noon, Jim and his father would come in from the field, preceded by their eager mules, smelling of the manure they had been spreading. And it was a treat to watch them gobble up the meal she had prepared. After dinner the two men sat on the back porch and chewed their quids—the old man whittling aimlessly, Jim scanning his land in contemplation—while Carrie washed the dishes and went about her housework. Then back to the fields they would go, to return with the sunset and the chickens and the leisurely plodding cattle.

When supper was finished the three of them gathered about the big kitchen stove which roared with pine

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logs. Carrie might read aloud from old newspapers, the Bible, or from the one book she had brought with her. Jim rarely said much, but schemed silently. The old man was different. He could be lured easily into conversation, for he loved to talk of the past: scenes and events on the plantation. Weddings, christenings, fugitive slaves, floggings, deaths—he recalled them all as if they had been catalogued within his mind. Carrie never tired of listening to him. And she understood why Prince was so proud of him. He had known toil. He had faced years of grinding disappointment. He had met life bravely, with a purpose in mind, and he had won his reward.

Later, when deep night settled, Prince would help his father to bed. Then after locking the doors and banking the fire, Prince and Carrie would follow. And in bed, with the feel of Prince's arms about her, Carrie found contentment.

But Sunday was red-letter day, when, after morning prayers and a simple breakfast of warmed-up food—the elder Prince would allow no cooking on the Sabbath—they would attend church. The journey was made in a fringe-topped carriage, in a silence that was rarely broken, for Sunday was the day of meditation. Carrie, in her best dress of sober gray, sat beside her husband, in store-bought clothes and celluloid collar. The back seat was given entirely to Father Prince, who always wore the swallow-tail coat that denoted his deaconship.

Yes, Sunday was red-letter day because the church, which nestled on the western extremity of Shrewsbury,

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focused all the social life of the little community. One was made or broken by his standing with other church members, and by the number of church activities in which he engaged.

Carrie warmed immediately to the kindly welcome that met her from all sides on her first Sunday. Another week and she had joined the choir. Then the minister, discovering that she was a capable reader, appointed her church clerk. A class was given her in the Sunday school, and she assisted the organist. As a final crowning recognition, the Reverend Holland's wife saw to it that she entered the charmed circle of the Ladies' Aid. This last marked a seven-league stride along the social pathway. If some of the sisters begrudged a newcomer such signal favor, Carrie was too happy to notice.

II

Within the first year of Carrie's marriage, old man Prince left them to join his wife, and for a time there was a great void in the small family. Then young Jim came to make welcome and exacting demands on his mother's time. Because of the child Carrie lost her old haunting fear that her happiness could not endure. And more and more she became a part of Prince's life. His ways were her ways; his mode of thought and ambitions hers.

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Chapter Eight

I

IT WAS near the time of Carrie's second child, one evening at the close of the reaping season, when there came a terrific pounding at the door.

"Mistah Jim! Mistah Jim!"

Jim hurriedly opened the door to admit a frenzied woman.

"Please, Mistah Jim, save 'im—save mah boy! He's all Ah gots!" She careened crazily about the room, whimpering so that little Jim crept frightened to his mother's side.

"Wait!" Prince gripped the woman by the shoulders. "Now—tell me what's de matter, A'nt Hester!"

"Dey's attah him—Ben!"

"Who's attah him?" Prince demanded.

"De white mens! He an' Mistah Will Redden had a fuss an' Ben struck 'im on de haid wid a wheel-spoke attah Mistah Will shot 'im in de chest! Ah gots all de do's an' windows lock in our house whar Ben is. Oh, Mistah Jim—Ah b'lieves he dyin'!"

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Prince turned abruptly to the back stairs, and in a minute returned with an old flintlock rifle. There was a look in his eyes that Carrie remembered having seen once before—the day he was bent on choking the life from Jake.

She flung herself upon him. "Jim!" But he shook her off and was gone. Shortly there was heard the sound of swift hoofbeats. Then silence.

The old men of Shrewsbury will still tell you how Jim Prince reined his lathered mare to a stop in front of the pool-room that night and rushed into the place like a raging boar; how he mounted the single table at a leap to harangue and plead and storm at the men who stood with up-turned faces—faces that were every shade from deepest black to near-white. Some of the men were angry, some sullen, some indifferent—all were frightened. None showed the least disposition to act for two centuries of the lash had taken their toll of manhood.

"Don't 'mongst-you see dat efn we lets 'em lynch Ben, dey'll do de same to any of us?" Prince shouted at the height of his impassioned speech.

He waited for an answer, but none came. Only fright took possession of all the faces now. Even Big George, a known fighter, at whose side the endangered man had worked, said nothing.

Then Jim Prince cursed them, with the frenzy of a despairing man. The veins in his face and neck filled, and down his cheeks ran angry tears.

"Ah'll go by mahself!" he finished, leaping from the table.

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They acted then. They closed about him and a crashing blow felled him into blackness.

On the porch of the Prince homestead, A'nt Hester and Carrie turned haggard faces toward the finger of flame which had suddenly leapt into the sky. From the same direction there came faintly on the wind sharp cries of a human being in agony. The cries were mingled with a babble of hysterical shouting.

"Dey got' im! Dey got 'im!" The words were torn from A'nt Hester as she dropped, mercifully unconscious, to the floor.

Had they got Jim also? Carrie lifted tortured eyes to the sky and prayed while pains of premature labor gripped her. From the lane came slow hoofbeats. And the flame slid downward, losing itself in the jagged top of the pine wood.

II

That grim night in late October changed Prince's outlook on life.

How he managed to get Carrie and her child—born two months before its time—upstairs, he never knew. Nor how he revived A'nt Hester to a condition of usefulness and rode for the doctor. But when he had done what had to be done he sank into a fever, to emerge three days later an older, harder man. A path of white directly through the center of his crinkly hair bore wit-

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ness to the horror which had impressed itself upon his spirit.

"How's Carrie?" he demanded, and before Dr. Stevens had a chance to answer: "Ah gots to git outn yere—gots to git dat fodder in 'fo' it rain."

"Now, now, Jim," answered the doctor, quietly. "Carrie and the new little lady are coming 'round all right now. And you don't have to worry about the work, either. Big George is taking care of that."

"Big George!" snarled Prince, remembering.

"I know—I know," nodded the doctor. "All a damn shame! Damn shame!"

"Dey wouldn't *none* of 'em help me stop it!"

"I know—I know," the older man repeated. Then: "Listen, Prince, it won't do any good for you to get yourself all stirred up again. Those men you tried to move the other night they don't speak your language. They're just like the common run of humans—fear is their strongest feeling. You might as well know now, Prince, that there is one law your people must learn the meaning of—the law that says that only the strong shall live!" The man of science looked squarely at the man of the soil. "Don't mistake me, Prince. I don't mean that every man should get himself a club or a gun and go around doing away with whoever he thinks to be his enemy. No, not that. But you've got a farm here—one of the best in the county. That's your strength, Prince, if you have the gumption it make it so. Understand? . . . Now you stay in this bed until I tell you to get up!"

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His words fastened in Prince's mind, in a soil already prepared for them, and took root and grew. Obsessed by a single idea, the man's character changed. He grew inhuman, suspicious, and nothing could distract him from ceaseless work. There was something almost symbolic in his passion to show his independence and self-sufficiency.

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Chapter Nine

I

WHEN Prince had been married fourteen years his material assets might have been listed as follows, in the order of their importance to him:

One large well-stocked and producing farm, an accumulation of the land of farmers less astute than himself.

Farm hands who were so in his debt that payment of their wages was optional.

One general merchandise store to which nearly all of the colored population of the town was in debt.

One livery stable, patronized by both colored people and whites.

One son, who would soon take his apprenticeship on the farm.

One wife, who did most of the laundry for the well-to-do white people of the town; she was also midwife, dressmaker, and social leader.

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The best-looking house in the section to which the Negroes had moved from the outskirts of Shrewsbury.

Two daughters who would soon be able to work out as hired girls.

This last item was not just to Prince's liking. He had never quite forgiven Carrie for bringing these female children into the world. He had wanted boys to share the burden of managing the Prince estates. Furthermore, Prince had always suspected that Evenezer's last minister had had something to do with the fact that little Martha bore no resemblance to either Blanche or young Jim. She was too yellow and she was too frisky. And her hair was straight and luxuriant—the young minister's hair had been of just that quality. About that time, too, Carrie had practiced a lot on the church organ. . . . So Jim Prince put two and two together and arrived at an ugly four.

Now Blanche and Jim were different. Blanche was serious and steady, and in time would make an excellent domestic servant. As for young Jim, people were prone to say that his father had "spit 'im out." He looked like his father. He talked like his father. He even walked like his father, and was as shrewd and smart. If Prince loved anyone, he loved this son of his.

The boy stood before Prince in the store one afternoon—slim, nut-brown, with small bright eyes and sharp features.

"Pa, I'm going to finish school here in the spring. . . ." He paused, not knowing how to put it. "I been

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thinkin'—I mean—I'd like to go to the Institute next fall."

Prince knew where that idea had come from. There had been a brilliant young teacher in town from the Institute with a quartet of male singers, and during the week that he held meetings at Ebenezer Church he had fired the community with his talk of vocational education. But Prince had other plans for young Jim, who would soon be fifteen and old enough for farm work.

Seeing that his father was about to speak in disagreement, young Jim hurried his slow speech. His eyes were shining. "After that I could help you here with the business an' the farm. I'd study hard an' learn everything."

Big Jim pointed beyond the window to the turned-up earth. "You see dere?" he questioned. "Wal, you gots to dig down in dat 'fo' you kin l'arn 'bout it. Ain't no books gonna l'arn you." Then he waved his arm to take in the store and a desk which was a miracle of neatness. "Ah didn't l'arn from no books how to do dat, nuthah. You cain't l'arn right from books. Dey's all right, mebbe, but efn you wants to l'arn somep'n you gots to do it—an' keep on a-doin' it!"

"But, Pa, the man said that's what they do at the Institute," countered Jim. The light in his eyes was fading.

"Ah heard 'im speak. But Ah don't see no use o' wastin' fo' years down dere, when you kin l'arn right here. 'Sides, look at de money it cost."

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"But, Pa, you can afford it."

"How you know what Ah kin affo'd?" demanded Prince, testily. "Don't you be gittin' uppish jes' 'cause you ain't starvin'. An' don't you lissen to dese no-'count niggahs what figgers Ah got heaps. Ah says you ain't goin'! Ah knows what's best fo' you. . . . An' you better start checkin' dem 'counts."

Young Jim went to his mother to enlist her aid. But Carrie, who would gladly have had her own dream realized through her son, could not move Prince. His word was law and there was no repeal. It had been many years since he had admitted Carrie to equal partnership in his life. Yet she continued to worship him, remembering her deliverance from Sue and Jake.

So when the spring plowing began the boy went under the tutelage of Big George, who could turn the deepest and straightest furrow in that section. Plowshares were toothpicks in his giant hands. Day after day Jim kept pace doggedly, until his muscles hardened. But he grew thinner, and through the long summer months of planting and cultivating he had no appetite. Dr. Stevens, happening by, counseled a change of climate, but Prince wouldn't hear of it. The boy was brooding because he couldn't have what he wanted, that was all. Work would cure any silly fancy in time. And the father, warped by the passion of a single idea, honestly believed what he said.

When the harvest season came young Jim was working in a field beside the main turnpike, and for a week he waved good-bys to his classmates who were departing

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for the Institute. He did not complain. For when the spirit is dead, disappointments do not hurt so much.

II

Jim Prince had not reckoned all the possibilities of his money-making program. He had not known that galloping consumption has a fertile field in adolescence. Now he sat, still and tortured, watching young Jim's life go out, and there was nothing he could do about it, though he was the richest colored man in town.

Old Dr. Stevens pulled the cover over the disease-ravaged young face.

"If you'd taken my advice about sending him away, Prince, we might have saved him." He tried to make his voice matter-of-fact. If he could only teach these colored people to work on an illness in time!

Ike Johnson returned from his second year at the Institute to read the resolutions. "In the spring of life, he left us at springtime," he ended. Then they buried young Jim between his grandparents.

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Chapter Ten

I

JIM PRINCE was hard before. Now, after young Jim's death, he became mean. Those who had been jealous of his prosperity grew to hate him. They hated him for his pretense of superiority. They hated him for the way he drove his womenfolk to work for him. They hated him for his grudging aid during the hard times of an economic depression. In truth, it was only his formidable array of power that saved him from violence at the hands of his neighbors.

It was hard times which gave Prince an unaccustomed leisure, and the leisure induced his thoughts to wander, with the result that he took a mistress. As far as Carrie was concerned he had no excuse, for Carrie was as comely as when he first saw her. Perhaps it was simply the next inevitable step in an aggressive career. Work, marriage, success, leisure—then a mistress. Many a man might confess to the same sequence of events.

His choice was the young Widow Jones, also a mem-

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ber of the choir, who had been much in Prince's debt since the death of her husband. In the beginning she had employed her wiles—a fetching smile, an inviting roll of her dark eyes, and a coo—to solicit leniency when money payments were due. These overtures from a woman not his wife were too much for Prince's male vanity. One thing led to another.

Then the gossips got busy—across the back fences, in the barber shop, in the pool-room, in the very church pews: "Did you hear . . ." "Ah heard . . ." "Dey tells me . . ." "Everybody knows. . . ." For months it went on, and as is usual, Carrie had no inkling of it. She was too busy. Then like an explosion knowledge of the situation crashed into her consciousness.

The Ladies' Aid Society was meeting at the parsonage to see what could be done about that bane of church finances, "current expenses." Carrie came late, and pausing on the porch for breath—it was mid-July—heard her name, then a gust of laughter. The next words rooted her to the porch floor.

"Everybody knows 'bout it 'cep'n' Sis' Carrie. An' Prince, he a deacon, too—an' her a-singin' in de choir right wid de man's wife! Lawsy!" This was Sister Jenkins, who knew everything as soon as it happened, or was miserable.

Rachel King spoke up, a mouselike woman whose liaisons even Carrie knew about: "Did 'mongst-you see dat dress she had on last Sunday? Dey ain't givin' dem 'way like dat wid times like dey is—nossuh! An' po' Sis' Carrie she ain't had nuffin' new fo' years!"

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"Dat man o' hern sho keep her nose to de grindstone," said Sister Jenkins.

"Yass," agreed Rachel, "he jes' tryin' to see how much money he kin get. Stingiest man in town! Worked dat boy o' hisn to death, an' tryin' to do de same to his wife. 'Spect he gwine put dat biggest gal to work soon's she gits through wid school. He's a mean man!"

Carrie was stunned. As they went further into the details of Prince's shortcomings, she backed slowly from the door and down the steps. It was a dark night, lighted only by stars. She walked, with no sense of the direction, guided only by the white picket fences which, alternating with honeysuckle-covered wire, bounded the front yards. The honeysuckle gave off its delicate lovely scent but Carrie did not notice. One fact throbbed in her brain: Jim, her husband, was "runnin'" with a woman. All else they had said counted for nothing. Only Prince's unfaithfulness held any significance.

Suddenly the light from the store gleamed into the hot gloom of the night. Automatically Carrie turned in through the door. The few loafers, leaning against the posts of the entrance, winked meaningfully at each other.

"Where's Mistah Jim?" asked Carrie of the sober-faced youth behind the counter. At her voice, his sleepy eyes widened, searching her face.

"Is you got a cold, Mis' Carrie?" he inquired.

"Where's mah husband?" repeated Carrie, impatiently. The clerk started back, stammering: "'Dee-deed—Ah—Ah don't know, Mis' Carrie!"

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Carrie glared at him a moment. Then her shoulders slumped and she turned away. Out in the night again she took up her aimless walk. It led her home.

Standing before the white, green-shuttered house, she heard a party of straw-riders go singing by. Their gay young voices mocked her. That first summer, she remembered, she had had her only straw-ride. They had been young then, she and Prince. Young? Why, she was young now—only thirty-four.

But your husband's with another woman, came the answering thought, like a persistent imp.

She fought it off. Maybe they were just talking, back there in the parsonage. Of course they were just talking! Didn't they gab like that about everybody? They were jealous, that's what it was. They were jealous because she had gotten the man that nearly all of them had set their caps for!

But you haven't got him, reminded the imp.

I have!—I have!

In her bedroom Carrie undressed slowly before the mirror, and as she did so she surveyed herself critically, as she had done that morning when she went in search of a job in Baltimore. There was the same golden-brown skin. Although she was a little stouter, that only lent more pleasing curves to her figure. Her hair, loosened from its knot, fell in a rich shawl about her shoulders. There was nothing to be ashamed of, she decided.

A confident smile was on her face as she dimmed the light and lay on the bed, partially covered by the thin sheet. She waited. The reedy calls of crickets darted

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through the open window. Recurrent waves of sweetness ascended from the honeysuckle vines. The hours tolled. Finally sleep conquered her.

Once she awoke, conscious of the heat from Prince's body. She turned, but his back was to her, and he snored.

Another woman—got your man! Another woman—got your man! Another woman—got your man! The hateful refrain thudded through her brain and fell upon her pride with bruising force, second after second, hour after hour.

II

Prince had immediate evidence of Carrie's knowledge of his indiscretion. First, when he awoke next morning —it was the Sabbath—he thought it strange to find rumpled sheets but no Carrie. Then the aroma of baking rolls came from below. That explained it. Instead of biscuits, they were having fresh rolls this morning, and Carrie had risen early to prepare them.

"Sho gots de best wife dis side de Chesapeake," flashed across his mind, for Prince was partial to freshly baked rolls. But with the thought his conscience was unpleasantly stirred. He recalled what the walls of the Widow Jones' house had seen as recently as last night. Then he dismissed all consideration of the matter to turn over for another nap.

He awoke a second time to find Blanche insistently shaking him by the shoulder.

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"Mamma says breakfast is ready," she informed him. "Here's yo' hot water fo' yo' shave," and she placed the pitcher on the washstand. Prince's elder daughter never addressed him as "papa" when she could avoid it.

Downstairs, Carrie and the girls waited for him to lead the family prayers—a regular Sunday-morning custom. Carrie did not pray after him this morning, and he sent a surprised glance at her, for always before this she had followed his supplication with one of her own. The girls gave their short, incoherent utterances, after which Prince led the Lord's Prayer. Again Carrie was silent.

At the table she ate little, but watched Prince's every movement with a brooding attention. Her black eyes, at intervals, concentrated squarely on his face. He felt them bore into him when he bent down to his food. When Blanche went upstairs with Martha to dress for church, instead of getting immediately into his deacon's garments, Prince delayed in the kitchen.

"What's de matter, honey?" he inquired. "Ain't you feelin' good?"

Carrie stared at him until his eyes dropped, then turned to the task of clearing the table. She had not uttered a sound. He squinted back at her for an angry moment, and in a flash the realization came that she knew. He made as if to approach her, but, reconsidering, hastened to his room. As he dressed himself absently, he pondered the turn affairs had taken.

"Some hussy's done found out 'bout me an' Amy," he decided. A second suspicion tramped the heels of the

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first. "Reckon dat woman's done said somep'n to Carrie, herself? Dirty strumpit! She better not!" Just the same, he'd be wise to speak to Amy after church. He wondered who else knew. Hell! if one knew, they all knew! "Triflin' hounds! All dey gots to do is set 'round an' meddle in somebody else's business! Jealous! Every damn one of 'em."

His accusation at the moment carried conviction, for the mirror gave him back a handsome figure—slim, incased in the black swallow-tailed suit that was the emblem of his churchly rank. Deacon James Prince, Shrewsbury's leading colored citizen, looked the part.

Meanwhile, Carrie, putting on her grey muslin dress and outmoded straw hat, had reached a conclusion of her own. She resolved to speak to the Reverend Johnson at the close of the morning services. Perhaps he could persuade Prince to give up the widow. This hope, rising out of despair, drove some of the gloom from her face, and by the time they had walked to church she was able to summon a front with which to march up the aisle to her place in the choir.

They were a little tardy, as became the most distinguished family of the congregation, and their entrance created a flattering stir. The two girls came first, primly schooled, their stiffly starched frocks of pink and white standing out over their pantaloons like umbrellas. When they were deposited in the pew, Prince took his place at the right of the pastor on the rostrum and perfunctorily bowed his head in prayer. The unctuous smile of the Reverend Johnson greeted him with a spe-

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cial benignity, for was not Prince the only wholly solvent member of his flock?

It happened this morning that the pastor took his text from the incident of the Nazarene's writing in the sand. The distressing state of national, international, and local affairs the Reverend Johnson attributed to the loose and lascivious living of mortals. He listed the vices. Then he crowned his message with the thought that current hard times were but writings in the sands by which the Almighty let each one know that He was not to be deceived by an outward show of good works.

Try as he might, Prince could not but imagine that all eyes were fastened upon him while the pastor was denouncing the sin of adultery. His reason cast the idea aside. Why, he was the only paying member in the church! Wasn't he deacon? The minister couldn't be talking about him. Nevertheless, immediately after the service Prince hurried in search of Amy. He had to stop this talk.

Carrie, on the other hand, had been cheered by the sermon. It bolstered her hope that the minister would throw his moral support toward the solution of her own domestic difficulty. She stopped him as he left the pulpit and told her story, haltingly, head averted.

"Please, Elder," she ended, "cain't you do somep'n 'bout it?"

The Elder stroked his chin meditatively. Had he known his sermon would precipitate such a situation as this, it never would have been preached. He wasn't

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a timid man in the pursuit of his divine mission. And he was, essentially, a good man. But for all his consecration to his calling, the Elder was cautious. He knew of the financial support given the church by Prince. It would be unwise to incur the man's enmity, especially in times like these. It would be equally indiscreet to ignore Carrie, who was a choir member, a substitute organist, and a powerful financial agent in the Ladies' Aid. The good cleric was, indeed, in a dilemma.

"It's a ticklish situation, Sister Carrie." His ministerial voice matched his troubled moon-like face. "But for your sake I'll speak with Brother Prince. Maybe it's all just a lot of gossip."

III

The Reverend Johnson was never quite able to pray away the effects of that brief consultation he had with Jim Prince the next afternoon. It always brought the jingle of thirty pieces of silver echoing down nearly two thousand years of church history.

"Brother Prince," he began, after first clearing his throat ceremoniously.

Prince looked up from his desk where he was making entries in a large, blue-backed ledger. The sum of the money owed him had aroused him to an ugly frame of mind. He was clearly annoyed by this visitor.

"Wal?" he demanded.

The Elder fingered his tie uneasily. This was going to be trying! He coughed again.

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"Wal!" Prince repeated, and this time he squinted squarely into the cleric's face.

The exclamation acted as a vocal stimulus and the pastor blurted his mission:

"Er—uh—Sister Carrie's been telling me you ain't been walking as straight in the path as you used to ——"

Prince leaned back in his chair, listening to the coaxing, pleading tones of righteousness. As he did so, he thumbed the leaves of the ledger until he came to the J's.

"Brother Johnson," he interrupted. Shifting the blue book around so that the Elder could see it plainly, he pointed to the total entered under the caption,

Reverend I. Johnson

It amounted to fifteen dollars and seventy-five cents. The visitor opened his mouth, shut it again, and gulped.

"My son—he's at the Institute—and these are hard times, Brother Prince," he offered lamely.

"When's de interest due on de church mortgage, Rev'end?" asked Prince, shutting the ledger. Again the Elder gulped.

"Well, to tell the truth, Brother Prince, it's due next week," he admitted. He mopped his face with a large white handkerchief.

"Don't worry, Rev'end, Ah'll take care o' dat," assured Prince. "Now—what was you a-sayin' when you come in, Rev'end?"

"Why—why—nothing, nothing, Brother Prince." The words were spoken over the shoulder of the swiftly retreating cleric.

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Chapter Eleven

I

JULY blistered into white-hot August. A drought —scourge of farmers—was on. Wheat drooped away into tinder. Corn-stalks crackled in the dry breezes. And little green tomatoes dried up until you could hear their seeds rattle, while panting cattle lowed beseechingly. Nature, in this hard, uncompromising mood, decided to relieve little Annie Burns a month early of the child she carried, and old Dr. Stevens stopped by for Carrie, as was his habit when there was a childbirth in the colored section.

"Damn shame to bring babies into the world, hard as times are," he commented as he whipped his horse to a gallop.

"Yes," agreed Carrie, "specially when there ain't no pappy."

"How'd she get in trouble?"

"She was workin' out on Miles' farm—hired gal. Them dev'lish men out there'll ruin any gal!"

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The shack where they stopped was a drab unpainted affair with rags stuffed here and there at broken windows. Inside was dirt and confusion.

Guided by a whimpering noise, Carrie and the doctor went into a farther room where a mulatto girl lay groaning on a soiled, rumpled bed. Beside her sat an old hag-like woman, the mother. It was she who was whimpering.

"Get her out of here, Carrie," ordered the doctor.

The woman, protesting, accompanied Carrie to the kitchen, and while Carrie washed kettles and pans and swatted at flies, heaped torrents of abuse on her daughter's betrayer. Carrie only half listened. She was thinking of her own life with Prince, and of what her mother Martha had said about men, "Dey ain't none of 'em worth it." How many women had to learn that for themselves! And now that she had learned, how long could she stand it? How long? . . .

A little later Dr. Stevens was washing his hands after a battle that had ended in defeat.

"First two we ever lost, Carrie," he said, remorsefully. "Guess I'm getting too old."

"Tain't yo' fault, Doc' Stevens," comforted Carrie. "They jes' didn't have the right kind o' vittals befo' the chile come."

Carrie did her best to restore order to the house—no mean task. Then on her way home she stopped by at the parsonage to inform the Reverend Johnson that his services were needed. She did not linger over her message, for recent events had shaken her faith in the

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brotherhood of Christians, and Ebenezer Church would do without her in the future.

II

Jim Prince wiped his mouth and pushed himself back from the table.

"Kin Blanche cook tol'able fair?"

"Why?" countered Carrie suspiciously. She'd seen one of the Miles' farm-hands come out of the store on her way home from the parsonage the afternoon before.

"Wal, Ah gots a job fo' her, efn she kin cook purty fair."

"Where's the job?" Carrie's eyes narrowed.

"Out on Miles' farm. Two dollars a week ain't bad fo' times like dey is——"

"She ain't goin'!" Carrie's tone was final. She pushed her plate away and resolutely faced her husband across the table.

The two girls, on either side of their parents, cringed before the rising storm. They knew what to expect when the big anger vein snaked up the center of Prince's forehead, as it did now.

"Why?" he thundered, half-crouching in his chair. His fingers bit like claws into the table cloth.

"She ain't a-goin'!" repeated Carrie. Her eyes, dead black dots, seemed to recede into the brown mask of her face. "You know why Annie Burns is dead. Them dev'lish men out on Miles' would do the same to

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Blanche. You knows it. But she ain't a-goin'—you hear me? She ain't a-goin'!"

"Huh! Jes' 'cause dat gal was frisky wid de mens ain't no reason why Blanche got to be," answered Prince. " 'Sides, Ah'm losin' money every day 'count o' de drought. Ain't no ——"

"That's it! That's it! You wants to work her to death like you did Jim! But you ain't a-goin' to do it! You hear me, Jim Prince? *You ain't a-goin' to do it!*" Carrie's voice rose to an hysterical scream.

Then Jim Prince made the big mistake of his life.

"You dirty bitch!" He sprang to his feet, and sent his chair crashing against the wall. "Ah brung you down yere from dat whorehouse an' made you what you is—a 'spectable woman! An' now you tryin' to tell me how to run mah 'fairs! Mind you' own damn business! Dat's what you do!"

Carrie flinched as if from a sudden blow. All the tenderness, all the gratitude she'd had for this man, withered like grass under a scorching sun. Words droned from her, like the wintry winds that moan over the lowlands.

"Ah don't owe you nothin'—nothin', Jim Prince! Ah worked fo' you, didn't Ah? Ah didn't complain 'cause Ah didn't have no clothes like the rest o' the women. An' Ah ain't complained when you bin runnin' 'round wid another woman, have Ah?" She broke off, sobbing, and sank into her chair. "Ah knowed it wouldn't last! Ah told you so when you first asked me to come home wid you."

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Prince was not to be moved by his wife's tears, but her reference to the Widow Jones infuriated him. He made a second mistake.

"You gots a nerve!" he snarled. "Efn Ah is runnin' wid a woman, Ah ain't got no bastards by her. An' dat's mo'n you can say. Jes' 'cause Ah ain't never said nuffin' 'bout it, you thinks Ah don't know. But Ah knows you got dat Martha by dat Rev'end Thomas. You dirty ——" He stopped short and involuntarily stepped back.

A swift change had come over Carrie. Her head had shot erect. Veins stood out on her face like agonized serpents, while little gibbering sounds issued from her twisted lips. She bent forward in her chair, crouched, then advanced slowly upon Prince. Her whole body was shaking and hot tears streamed down her cheeks.

Then Jim Prince made his final mistake. He had never laid an angry hand on Carrie, but now he stepped forward and gave her a resounding slap. When he tried to grasp her arms, Carrie with a wild scream launched her body headlong into him. The impact caught Prince squarely and knocked him breathless. He fell backward with a groan, and Carrie followed up her advantage by slashing her finger nails across his face. Her strong teeth imbedded themselves in his throat; her fists rained blows upon his head.

When she felt Prince grow limp under her, Carrie rolled over on her side. As her anger ebbed, fear gripped her. She looked at the still form of her husband. She felt frantically for his heartbeat. Nothing! Panic-stricken, she leapt to her feet and spun in a circle. Her

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eyes lighted on the girls, who still crouched in their corner.

"Git mah clothes an' you-all's together, quick!" she gasped.

Blanche stared at her father but made no move to obey.

"Git the clothes, Ah say!" screamed Carrie.

Blanche made for the doorway leading to the stairs, with the small Martha in her wake. Carrie rushed out of the house and down the street to the Prince livery stable.

Jim-Ed James was cleaning manure from the eight stalls and gossiping with Charlie when he sighted Carrie dashing through the wide door. In his astonishment at her disheveled appearance his chew dropped from his mouth and he sidled cautiously out of her path.

"Hitch me two hosses to that carriage!" she commanded. "Hurry!" For the bewildered black hostler only stood there popping his round eyes stupidly.

"Wh-what's de matter, Mis' Carrie?" he questioned.

"Gimme them hosses an' that carriage, Ah tell you! Them two." She pointed out a fine pair of blacks, trim, sleek animals, the pride of Prince's stable.

"Mistah Jim he don't—" began Jim-Ed.

"Efn you wants to keep yo' job, you better do as Ah says!" Carrie silenced him.

He hunched his shoulders resignedly and soon had the carriage and horses ready.

"Wimmin sho is quare crittahs!" he commented as

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Carrie and the blacks disappeared through the stable door. "Ain't never seed her act like dat befo'!"

"Huh! What you care?" rejoined his companion, "She ain't yo's, is she?"

III

Prince came to shortly after Carrie left him. His anger had flown and knowledge of his foolishness weighed upon him.

"Carrie!" he called.

Hearing movements in the room above, he stumbled into the hall. Blanche and Martha were coming downstairs. At sight of her father, Blanche dropped a large bundle she carried and it rolled to Prince's feet, scattering dresses, shoes, and other apparel.

"What you doin'?" demanded Prince.

"Mamma told me to get all our clothes together," answered the girl timidly.

"What fo'? Where's yo' mamma?"

"I don't know."

Galloping hoofbeats drew Prince's attention to the street. He saw Carrie get out of the buggy and tie the blacks to the horse-head hitching-post. Then she rushed into the house, almost colliding with Prince.

"What you fixin' to do wid dat team?" he greeted her.

Carrie breathed her relief at seeing him alive but her face hardened.

"Ah'm goin' away—that's what Ah'm fixin' to do!"

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"You ain't no sich-a-lie! You's mah wife an' Ah ain't gwine let you!"

"Ah ain't askin' you to let me. Ah ain't askin' fo' nothin' no mo' from you!"

"You cain't take dem hosses!" cried Prince. "Ah'll have de sheriff attah you!"

"Ah'm yo' wife, ain't Ah? What's yo's is mine! Git them clothes, Blanche!"

Prince changed his tactics.

"You cain't go an' leave me like dis, honey! You knows Ah loves you."

"Don't you talk to me 'bout love, man!" Carrie burst out. "Ah'm leavin'! An' them hosses an' that carriage Ah counts as pay fo' eighteen years' hard work—an' fo' you not ownin' yo' own chile—an' fo' you a-comin' home from another woman! Ah'm leavin', an' efn you tries to stop me Ah'll kill you! You hear me? Ah'll kill you!"

With the bundle in one arm and little Martha under the other, Carrie stormed out of the door and down to the carriage. Blanche followed.

Attracted by the shouting, a knot of curious neighbors had collected, most of them women. Carrie turned on them with a laugh.

"There he is!" she cried, pointing to Prince, who leaned weakly on the porch railing. "There he is. You kin all have 'im now—the biggest man in town!" She cracked the whip and the carriage lurched down the street in a spreading sheet of dust. And the laugh hung insanely on the hot air.

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Chapter Twelve

I

IT WAS the same Jake Tillery, except that on this warm Sunday afternoon in August he was a very frightened man. The beads of perspiration on his forehead were not alone the product of muscular exertion. If the truth were told, this nattily dressed, middle-aged man—who looked younger—was trying to put as much distance as was possible between himself and something. That was why, every so often, he snatched a look over his left shoulder in the direction of the clump of woods bordering the white shell road that led southward from the thriving town of Eastland. After he had rounded a bend about two hundred yards from the woods, and there was no sign of pursuit, he collapsed in the meager shade of a scrubby little mulberry tree.

While he wiped his face and nursed bruised lips which seemed recently to have come in violent contact with some hard object, he hurled invectives at unnamed in-

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dividuals. Then, having relieved himself to his satisfaction on that score, he turned the stream of vituperation upon himself. He was a thus-and-so and a thus-and-so forever.

"You must is gittin' ole an' clumsy," he muttered, "lettin' a country buck ketch you wid three dices! Keep on—you gwine have to work yet!" He emphasized the "work" with abhorrence, and at the same time surveyed his well-kept hands, the palms of which were smooth and tender. "Reckon you better gone to Her'ford an' ketch dat boat to Balt'more—guess de coppers done fo'got you now. Wish somebody'd come 'long wid a buggy so's Ah kin git past dat meetin'-ground. Dat man sho want to cut me bad!"

He could not have done better had he rubbed Aladdin's lamp, for in answer to his wish, a cloud of dust swirled around the next bend in the road, headed in the direction from which he had just come. Soon, two dust-laden, black horses, drawing a carriage, trotted up to where he stood waving his arms.

"Lady, kin you-all give me a lift to town?" he inquired, politely, of the road-weary Carrie. She looked at him distrustfully, then bade him get in. As he clambered up beside her, each recognized the other.

"Jake!" exclaimed Carrie, recoiling instinctively.

Jake stared open-mouthed.

"Fo' de Lawd's sake, Carrie! Whar you bin all dese years?"

Her first notion had been to drive him away. But sur-

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prisingly enough, Carrie felt no fear of this man now. So she started the horses on their way.

"Ah bin livin' down to Shrewsbury way wid mah husband an' family. How's A'nt Sue?"

Jake coughed slightly before answering. "Oh, she's all right—Ah guess."

"Where is she?"

"She's in Jessup's cut." Jake stated this much in the manner that he would state a wager in a crap game.

"Jessup's cut . . . ?" puzzled Carrie.

"Yeah—you know—de penitentiary. De coppers is gittin' meddly on 'count o' de new commissioner o' police. He done started to clean up things. So when dey comes to close our house, Ah skipped. But dey caught Sue."

They were passing the woods now and could see the gathering of horse-drawn vehicles on the edge of the clearing. The sound of fervid singing reached them.

"Camp-meetin'?" inquired Carrie. Jake nodded affirmatively and breathed easier as they passed the scene of his late misfortune.

"Whar you gwine? Visitin'?" he asked Carrie.

She shook her head.

"You says you comes from Shrewsbury? An' yo' husband ain't wid you? How come?"

"Ah ain't got no husband," stated Carrie, unemotionally.

"Ain't got . . . What's de matter wid 'im? Dead?"

"Ah left 'im," said Carrie.

"You left . . . Oh . . ." A craftiness spread over

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his yellow, speckled features. He struck out carefully to offer consolation. It worked. For four days Carrie had been meandering blindly about three counties, headed in a northwesterly direction, and she had wanted someone to whom she could talk about her troubles. She had found neither the courage nor the inclination for more than casual conversation with the hospitable tenant-farmers who had given shelter to her and the two girls. Now she poured out the whole story to Jake.

Jake listened, interspersing sympathetic remarks, while his agile mind worked swiftly in an entirely different direction.

"But whar is you goin'?" he questioned, pointedly.

"Ah don't know," she answered. She looked back at the two girls. Martha was asleep in Blanche's arms, worn out from the inaction of a journey which had had in the beginning every appearance of an outing. The child was constantly fretful now, except when she was asleep, and Carrie worried, knowing she was not well. She had to find a place to pass the night.

"Look yere," offered Jake, as the idea he had been pondering took form. "Whyn't you come to Her'ford wid me? Dey say dat's a town what has good pickin's. You an' me kin go there an' git set fo' de winter. Dat's when de oyster-shuckers comes to town. Dey bin tellin' me dem mens spends dey money like water when de season's busy. We kin start a boardin'-house an' make money hand over fist!" His hazel eyes glowed

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at the scheme. "Ah gots some money, an' you kin sell yo' hosses an' carriage. We kin start on dat. Huh?"

Carrie's brows knitted in suspicious doubt. She hadn't forgotten the Jake she had known.

Jake, divining her meaning, added, quickly: "You don't have to worry 'bout me—we'll jes' be partners."

"Ah ain't worried 'bout you," she informed him, a hard quality in her voice. "Ah jes' want you to know that you ain't dealin' wid no fool! Ah done had one man to take 'vantage o' me, but ain't no mo' goin' to! See? Ah'll go in wid you—be yo' partner—until you starts gittin' wrong! An' when you does, we quits! See? Now, where's this town?"

"Turn left in de next road an' keep goin'."

Jake grinned. "She ain't young no mo'," he told himself, "but she sho gots her good looks yit."

II

Herdford, at present, drowses through the years with a medieval air of disdain for civic progress. But this little water-locked hamlet was not always so. If you stop along its one paved street—Front Street, the natives call it—and inquire of any old inhabitant, he will tell you of days when the diminutive Eastern Sho' town was the seat of the county; how it used to be a center of the oyster-packing industry before Milestown, over on the Miles River, and Deerfield and Kent Island usurped the honors. He may also point out, with sorrowful pride, the site of the old military academy, now burned

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down, opposite Sam Newton's general store. The Public Lot, they call it—a grove of maple, hemlock, and walnut trees overlooking the placid ripples of the Avondale River. Dusty chronicles record that once, in Colonial days, Herdford was considered a possible site for the city of Baltimore. Possibly because of disappointment that they were passed by, the lowlands remain rustic, except for the enterprising towns of Eastland, Shrewsbury, and Bainbridge.

Even today Herdford seems to resent that early intervention of Providence which stole from it the right to be the queen city of Old Maryland. Like a jilted and faded old lady with her hope-chest, it sits there between its two rivers, the Avondale and Town Creek, on a peninsula shaped like a boomerang, dreaming, perhaps, of the glory that might have been its own; spurning the industrial opportunities offered it by capitalists who realize the commercial value of its location. "Nope!" says thin-lipped, grizzled Kirkland, from the porch of his green-shuttered, Colonial cottage facing the Methodist church. "No-siree!" drawls Hallock, and his age-molted eyebrows will meet over the shrewd gray eyes of his highland ancestors, and he'll probably mount his ancient bicycle and pedal down to the town pier to see if his crab-steaming box is full. Ole Lady Nanny Crichard will respond in like manner, and others of the landed aristocracy who trace their lineage back to those sturdy Scotch-Irish and English emigrants that first forded Town Creek and settled on this curving spot of land.

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These settlers were a conservative and complacent lot. Along Back Street, that rutted dirt and shell road that faces Town Creek and parallels Front Street (the present avenue of the aristocracy) they built their homes after the style of those they had left on the western shore of the Chesapeake: two-story houses, some flat-roofed, others with roofs severely triangular. Time and the elements have necessitated repairs, but on the whole these buildings remain as they have always been, representing the original architecture of the town. And it is here that the hardy crabbers and oysterers live.

Some of the emigrants were farmers and created during the slave era the fertile fields one sees on either side of the ten-mile pike bending westward from Eastland to Herdford. But it was the combined oyster- and crab-packing industry which ultimately pumped the life's blood through the town's lazy veins. For the products of the rivers offer an all-year occupation.

On the whole, though, Herdford is a sleepy town—quaint, lazy, smugly self-satisfied; scoffing at the forward strides of its neighbors in order to distract attention from its own dullard ways.

III

"Here she is," said Jake.

He pointed over the field at his right toward a winding river on whose shores could be seen the tops of houses partly hidden by trees. The girls looked curiously in the direction of their new home, but Carrie was busy at the moment whipping the horses past a

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