

FLIGHT



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WAITER WHITT
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Paul Robeson



FLIGHT

Also by
WALTER WHITE

THE FIRE IN THE FLINT

SINCLAIR LEWIS writes:

*"The Fire in the Flint
is splendidly courageous,
rather terrifying and of
the highest significance."*

WALTER WHITE

FLIGHT



NEW YORK & LONDON
ALFRED · A · KNOPF
MCMXXVI

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**PUBLISHED, APRIL, 1926
SECOND PRINTING, JULY, 1926**

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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**For my daughter
JANE**

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CHAPTER I

THE long train rumbled and swayed, whistle blowing intermittently, screeching discordantly, past smoky factory and office buildings, through rows of one-storied, two- or three-room cottages, outside which on hard packed clay earth played here tow-headed white children or there black or brown or yellow ones. It plunged suddenly into cavernous darkness under a bridge, thick acrid smoke pouring into the open windows of the wooden coaches.

"Union Station—Atlanty. All out for Atlanty," bawled a grinning Negro porter as the train rolled into a long, dingy shed with low-hung roof. Eager, laughing Negroes snatched boxes and bundles of varied shapes from the racks over the seats or pulled mates to them from under the seats. Mimi awoke with a start as Jean shook her gently.

"We're there, *petite* Mimi," he told her. Through the throng, peering vainly through the murky air, redolent of stale banana and orange skins and of bodies in need of washing, she made her way to remove the worst of the soot and grime from her face.

"My father'll be here to meet us," Mary told Jean.

Though he disliked Mr. Robertson intensely Jean was happy to receive the news. He felt bewildered, lost, a malady bordering on nausea at the hubbub around him. Methodically he obeyed his wife's commands to gather their bags and parcels. Then with Mimi, refreshed, alert, her weariness dropped from her as she would have discarded a cape, they made their way out of the coach in the van of the surging throng.

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Incisive Mr. Robertson kissed Mary and Mimi brusquely, shook hands with Jean and hustled them through the waiting-room labeled "For Coloured" to the sidewalk where a horse-drawn surrey was waiting.

"No—No," shouted Mr. Robertson as the driver started down the street. "Go around by Pryor Street and from there down Auburn Avenue." To the Daquins he explained: "If he'd gone that way he'd have carried you through Decatur and Ivy Streets—that's the slum district—saloons and houses——" He paused significantly, looking at Mimi. "Pretty bad," he added. "Lowest kind of Negroes."

But Mimi did not hear him nor even the newsboy who ran alongside the cab shouting: "Extry! All about the Japs licking the Rooshians! All about th' big battle!" Because it was *terra incognita* to her she tried to see everything as eagerly as she had watched the land from the car window in the long ride from New Orleans. Spring was in the air. The cab, to the accompaniment of various cluckings, "gid-daps," "go-long-theres" of the ancient driver, joggled and bounced over the Belgian block pavement. Mimi sniffed the air eagerly, anticipatorily.

The carriage rumbled and jerked through the ghostly confines of shut business houses, turned into Auburn Avenue lined with blowzy boarding-houses, their porches lined with men and women, a loud, staccato, mirthless laugh occasionally floating on the breeze. Soon the scene changed. Black and brown and yellow faces replaced the white, the laughs became more frequent, more rich, more spontaneous. The April evening seemed more filled with the sheer joy of living. To Mimi the sudden change was pleasant, warming, inviting. Jean, sunk dejectedly in the seat beside the driver so that only the top of his black, crumpled felt hat showed above the high seat, was too engrossed in delightfully painful nostalgia for his New Orleans to notice anything. Mary and her father

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were eagerly discussing the change in the lives of the Daquins, which to them both seemed so altogether admirable and desirable there was no questioning of its wisdom.

"Got to rush right back to Chicago Thursday—election this fall and two or three important deals—had to see you get started off right——" floated in Mr. Robertson's crisp tones to Jean.

"You *were* a darling to come all the way to Atlanta," gushed Mary.

"Nothing at all—nothing at all," declared her father. He pronounced it "nothing a-tall."

"Wanted to see you get introduced in the right circles, too. Gene thinks his Creole crowd's stuck-up and exclusive—these Atlanta Negroes'll show him a trick or two for fair. Got to get in right—or you'll never get in."

Jean, who squirmed every time Mr. Robertson familiarly called him "Gene," found his old hostility to Mr. Robertson, his voice, his ideas, his coarseness, rising higher than ever before. His gratitude to him in the train began to vanish. He wished fervently his father-in-law had remained in Chicago. He hated his high-handed method of interfering in his and Mary's and Mimi's most private affairs.

Money—money—money—how much is it worth?—how much can I make out of it?—these were the first, last and intermediate stages of Mr. Robertson's every thought, every statement, every action. I'll go through with it, thought Jean, but I'll never let my soul be turned into a money-grubber's. The resolution, even though he knew it couldn't possibly be carried out completely in this new world he was entering, nevertheless gave Jean some comfort. . . .

Mrs. Plummer waddled down the hall, pushed open the screen door, and slapped with the corner of her gingham apron at the insects which buzzed inside. "These nasty bugs'll be the death of me yet," she complained to her com-

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panion, Mrs. Sophronisba King, lean, acidulous, suspicious of all humans and their motives save her own. Mrs. King was as curveless as a young sapling as she went around the room giving quick little jabs at the furniture with an oiled cloth, pursuing relentlessly bits of dust which had settled upon the chairs and table and mantelpiece since late afternoon.

"Heard the news about that Lizzie Stone?" she asked Mrs. Plummer. "You ain't?" she demanded incredulously when Mrs. Plummer shamefacedly admitted she had not. The possession of a juicy morsel which had not yet come to her friend's ears caused Mrs. King's skinny frame to swell with prideful importance. "Why, honey, it's all over town!"

"She always seemed to me such a nice, Christian girl—so quiet and respectable——"

"Mis' Plummer, them's the very ones who'll fool you nine times out of ten—they go to church and they's sweet as pie in the daytime—but slipping and sliding into all sorts of devilment."

Mrs. Plummer's ears seemed to stretch out from her head in her eagerness to learn the derelictions of Lizzie Stone. "Tell me what she's done. You know my heart's bad and the doctor told me I couldn't stand much excitement," she pleaded.

"You know Jerry Reed—he's head of the Royal United Order of Heavenly Reapers?"

"'Cose I do—ain't I a member of the Ladies Auxil'ry?"

"You know, Mis' Plummer, I ain't one of these no-count women who runs around town meddlin' in other folks's business—I stays at home and tends to my own bus'ness."

"'Cose you don't, Mis' King—ev'rybody knows you don't gossip. But what's Lizzie and Jerry Reed been doing?"

"I'll tell you, Mis' Plummer, though I ain't vouching for

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the truth of it 'cause I wasn't there to see it with my own eyes—but they tell me they saw Lizzie getting in Jerry Reed's automobile down on Auburn Avenue late last Tuesday night—and he had all the curtains up."

"You don't say! A body'd think she'd have mo' sense than to do her dirt so bold like! I always heard that Jerry Reed wouldn't have a girl work for him unless he could get fresh with her. The nerve of her—she was at church last Sunday, struttin' round just as brazen as any fancy woman!"

"Lord, Mis' Plummer, I don't know what's gettin' into these coloured folks—they gettin' mo' like white folks ev'ry day. Comes from workin' in white folks' houses and in these here hotels—seein' all their dirt and thinkin' they got to do the same things white folks does."

"That's the God's truth! And say, Mis' King, did you know these new folks is Cath'lics? Well, they is—their name's 'Day-Quinn' or 'Day-kin' or something Frenchy like that. He's goin' to work down to the Lincoln Mutual Life Insurance Company—that's the company got them swell offices down Auburn Avenue."

"Cath'lics, is they? Any time I hear tell of coloured folks bein' anything 'cept Baptists or Methodists I know some white man's been tamperin' with their religion. That's what Booker T. said once and he sho' did know what he was talkin' 'bout."

"That's the God's truth! Wonder where these folks goin' to church? They tell me down in N'Awleens where there's so many furriners most anybody can go where they please long's they ain't black. But they better not try it in Georgia."

"Is you got a picture, Mis' Plummer, of any coloured folks no matter what kinda religion they got stickin' their heads in that 'Sacred Heart' church out Peachtree Street? White folks talk about Jesus but the only Jesus they thinkin' 'bout's

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got a white skin. An' the only heaven they want's one got a sign on it ten foot high, 'No Niggers Allowed in Here.'

"Lord, 'Mis' King, there they come. An' me settin' here talkin'. I bet them 'taters done boiled to death!"

Mrs. Plummer rocked briskly in the chair wherein she had rested her weary frame. The needed momentum gained, she heaved her bulky person to her feet and disappeared in the general direction of the kitchen as through the open door Mr. Robertson's hearty voice came: "Well, folks, here we are!" . . .

Mimi and Jean and Mary climbed down from the surret and entered the house. Mrs. Plummer, her potatoes looked after with incredible speed considering her size, greeted them as though she were welcoming them into her own home.

"Come right in! Come right in! I know you must be as tired as all-out-doors. My name's Mrs. Plummer—I live right down the street and Mr. Robertson got me to sorter fix things up—" she poured forth.

"Mrs. King! Mrs. King!" she called. Mrs. King hastened from the kitchen, wiping her mouth on the back of her hand as she came, scanning the arrivals from head to foot in one swift, critical—very critical—glance.

"This is Mrs. King," introduced Mrs. Plummer grandly. "She was nice enough to help too."

Mrs. King nodded in rapid succession to the three, adding one for Mr. Robertson though she had seen him only an hour before. He had employed only Mrs. Plummer to clean up the house and arrange everything but it had not been a difficult matter to persuade Mrs. King to assist—it gave both women ample opportunity to examine at their leisure each piece of furniture and to speculate on its probable cost.

Without taking off her hat, Mme. Daquin (Mrs. Plummer called her Mrs. Day-queen) rushed from room to room of the two-storied house. On the first floor there was a living-

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room, "the parlour," to the left as one entered the door, back of that the dining-room and then the kitchen. To the right were steps leading to the floor above, behind them a small room to be used instead of the more formal parlour and dining-room which apparently were opened only when company came. Above stairs were two fairly large bedrooms above the parlour and dining-room, while a small bathroom, its woodwork painted a yellowish white, and a third and smaller bedroom opened on the other side of the narrow hall.

"This big front room will be mine," decided Mme. Daquin, half to Mrs. Plummer and Mrs. King, who had accompanied her on the tour of discovery and appraisal, and half to herself, "Jean will sleep in the next room, while Mimi gets the little room off the hall."

"That po' little skinny man downstairs with the funny moustache don't seem to have much to say in this house," whispered Mis' King to her companion as they followed Mme. Daquin. "'Tain't hard to see who wears the pants in this family."

Like beagles they followed every word, every expression. Their scanty store of information about the new-comers would be sufficient, when amplified during their mutual discussions on the morrow, as foundation of the extensive tales they would bear to eager ears in the neighbourhood.

Downstairs Mimi sat in the parlour, wearied, but interested in sizing up her new home. She was perched in a huge chair, of brilliantly polished oak, the seat and back of plum-coloured damask. The chandelier was of intricately twisted bands of metal painted a dull gold which formed weird and awesome designs on the ceiling in the reflections from the flickering gas lights. Underneath it there sat an oak table with elaborately, fantastically carved legs, covered with a faded tapestry centre-piece. On it rested a fat family album of red

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plush, a diamond-shaped mirror in the centre. Near it rested an odd-shaped instrument that Mimi longed to examine but which she contemplated from afar for fear of incurring a frown from Mr. Robertson, who was advising or, rather, ordering Jean regarding the steps he must take to "get on" in his new position. The object was of dark polished wood, a long rod serving as a sort of backbone. At the end was a glass partly enclosed with a little wooden fence, on the rod below was a handle. At the other end was a slotted rack. Near this odd object rested a pile of cards. Gently raising herself by her elbows pressed against the arms of the chair, Mimi could see a brightly coloured picture of a mountain scene on the topmost card. She made a mental resolution to explore this mystery at the earliest possible time.

" . . . And to-morrow morning right after breakfast you'll go with me to the office, Gene, where I'll introduce you to Hunter—he's the president of the Lincoln—Watkins, Jones and the rest of the crowd. They're a live bunch—that is, live for this town but pretty small potatoes up in Chicago, and they've got a gold mine insuring all the coloured folks here in the South. I want you to stick to the job—no monkey business or I'm through, you hear me?—and you'll make so much money you'll wonder how you ever managed to stick in that dead old hole of New Orleans."

Mr. Robertson's words came to Mimi sharply as his voice rose. He took a fat cigar from his pocket, bit the end from it and tossed the severed bit through the open window. She disliked this bossy old man intensely. She looked at Jean, wondering that he so calmly submitted to the dictatorial attitude of the man who, though his father-in-law, was not many years his senior. But Jean heard his words only vaguely, if he heard them at all. He sat beside his wife's father on the couch that matched the chair on which Mimi perched and gazed through the window, the thin white curtains opening and

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closing as a faint breeze stirred them. Somewhere outside, a voice, throaty but rich, plaintively sang of his woes and his "blues":

"I'm jes' as misabul as I can be,
I'm unhappy even if I am free,
I'm feelin' down, I'm feelin' blue;
I wander round, don't know what to do.
I'm go'na lay mah haid on de railroad line,
Let de B. & O. come and pacify mah min'."

The voice died away in the distance but the poignant, nostalgic longing of the unseen singer remained. Jean and Mimi, used to the Creole dilution of the Negro songs, sat straining their ears to catch every note of this barbaric, melancholy wail as it died in the distance, a strange thrill filling them. The swiftly moving tragedy of the song, dying off abruptly as though the singer was too full for further words, stirred them both to the exclusion of all else. Again a voice was heard, this time a woman's:

"These men I love, honey,
Sho' do make me tiahed,
These men I love, honey,
Sho' do make me tiahed.
They got a han'fulla gimme
An' a mouth fulla much oblige."

A loud laugh greeted the end of her song.

"Hey dere, Babe, what'cha doin'?" called the first voice, and in response to the reply: "Nothin' much. Come on in!" the two voices mingled in indistinct words, punctuated frequently with laughter, gay, rich and in unison.

"Gene, are you listening to what I'm telling you?" snapped Mr. Robertson, and Jean came back to realities with a start.

"Certainly! Certainly!" Jean hastened to assure him.

Mr. Robertson eyed him suspiciously and then, as the look of apparent interest on Jean's face seemed to satisfy him, he

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continued his instructions. No sooner had he begun again, however, before Jean's mind began to wander once more. He hoped fervently the singers would again begin but the warm night wrapped them in its vast silence.

Mimi welcomed her step-mother, who came briskly down the stairs followed at a respectful distance by her two companions.

"Everything's just lovely and I don't know really how to thank you, papa," she bubbled. "Mimi, you'd better run upstairs and get your face and hands washed. Mrs. Plummer tells me she's fixed supper for us and we don't want it to get cold. Jean, you and papa'd better do the same thing and don't take all night getting back."

Napoleon, Cæsar, Alexander never spoke to common soldiers more brusquely nor with greater assurance that their commands would be obeyed. Nor did it occur to Mimi or Jean to protest—both were too much under the domination of this person who would never be familiar to either of them.

CHAPTER II

DURING the meal Mme. Daquin and her father talked animatedly of the new life of the Daquins, for which the two of them were so largely responsible. But the thoughts which ran through the heads of Jean Daquin and Mimi dealt with the past and especially with the rapid changes which a few weeks had wrought. Though neither of them knew precisely what the other was thinking, their minds were going over the events which had taken place since that morning which had been the beginning of the new order of things. Had some person possessing the powers of wizardry, an adept in the process of thought amalgamation, been present and woven a picture made of the fragments which filled Jean's and Mimi's minds, the product of his labours would have resulted somewhat after this fashion. . . .

It was a sunny morning in New Orleans several weeks past. Jean Daquin tapped gently on the door. No answer came. Again he tapped—tapped—tapped. Again there was silence. Carefully he pushed open the heavy door, which groaned dismally on its ancient hinges. From within there came the rhythmic inhaling of breath of a sound sleeper. Jean tiptoed to the deep casemented window and drew aside the heavy curtains of dusty wine-coloured velvet.

Warm, intoxicating Louisiana sunshine tumbled into the room as though a giant hand had loosed a celestial sluiceway. With the yellow flood poured the sensuous blend of odours—of wild honeysuckle, of Cherokee rose in full bloom, of hyacinth, of oleander. Jean stood at the window, his arms

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raised clutching the draperies, and took deep draughts of the air heady as old wine. The trees and flowers sparkled in the sunshine, covered with glittering beads of water from the recently ended shower.

His tiny garden enclosed with the crumbling brick wall had never seemed so beautiful. He picked out one by one the flowers he had planted and tended—the oleander-bush by the house, which, a generation before, had quartered the slave house servants. It was in bloom now, the ground beneath it covered over with salver-shaped white petals. There near it was the bed of pansies—Bernard Dieux, sleeping the long sleep in old St. Louis cemetery this year and a half had given him the cuttings. Over to the left was the Cherokee rose in whose shade he had spent many happy hours, reading a part of the time, more often just sitting and dreaming. Many a day he had sat there or in the cool quietness of the decaying servant house, two-storied, of brick laid between heavy posts, *briqueté entre poteaux*. Its walls were slowly crumbling these late years and its bricks were covered with greenish mould but the old house was sturdily standing up, despite its years, against all the furies of rain and sun that beat upon it. There Jean had sat in the rickety chair and sucked into his nostrils the faint fragrance of his orange-trees that grew just inside and along the old wall. He loved to rest his eyes grown weary with the printed page on their blackish green foliage that provided so perfect a background for their tiny fruit—little globules of deep yellow gold. But he loved these best when they were shedding their flowers—“a steam of rich distilled perfumes,” Bernard, who was given to quotation of poetry, used to say of the orange-trees.

“Jean! Why don’t you come down?” a strident, querulous voice from below stirred him. Jean hastily quitted the window and shuffled over to the huge and elaborately carved bed.

“Mimi! Mimi! Wake up! Your mother’s in an awful

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humour this morning! Get up quickly before she comes and gets us both!"

The sleeper stirred, turned over and recommenced her steady breathing. The rays of the sunlight touched her hair as her head rolled to one side. In the shadow it had seemed brown. Before Jean's eyes it underwent a miraculous transformation as the tiny rays of light picked out the coppery brilliance that here was auburn, and there shaded off into a deeper reddish colour. It was like spun gold dipped in flaming cochineal. The curls in tangled disarray framed the oval, cream-coloured face. Half full lips were slightly parted, even teeth gleaming from the red frame. Mimi lay stretched on the bed, the bed-clothes pushed towards its foot, her slender body covered only with the thin night-dress. Small soft breasts rose and fell gently, the promise of approaching womanhood revealed in the curves of her rapidly maturing body.

Jean looked at his daughter, his eyes half filled with joy at her warm beauty, half with troubled anxiety. He had seen too much of life to be unaware of what his child's delicate and fragile beauty might bring to her. At times he had almost wished she were less attractive—when he walked with her along the streets he watched with envious, jealous eyes the glances Mimi, though not yet fourteen, drew instinctively from the men, young and old. He was proud of her, of course—many girls of eighteen or nineteen were not half so well formed. Yet, he feared for her and, more often than not, his apprehension swept over and wiped out his joy in her comeliness.

"Holy Mother, keep me alive—not for life alone, sweet as it is for me, but that I may be with her to guide her steps and protect her!" he often prayed as Mimi knelt beside him at mass, innocent of the anxiety bordering on agony which filled the breast of her father.

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"Jean! Must I come up for you?" came again the voice from below, anger sharpening its usual petulance.

"Mimi! Get up, *chérie!* At once, or we'll both be raked over the coals!" Jean pleaded.

Mimi stirred again, opened her eyes, sat up and smiled.

"Here's your coffee—I'm afraid it's cold but drink it quickly and slip on your clothes. Your mother's all out of sorts this morning and we'll both catch it if you keep breakfast waiting much longer."

"Let her fuss, papa. It's too pretty a morning to bother with maman. She'll quarrel anyhow," smiled Mimi as she took the cup of black coffee and stirred it slowly. "Ugh—it's all cold—I don't want it!" she grimaced as she pushed the cup away. "You go down, papa, and I'll be ready in a few minutes."

Jean took the cup but made no motion of leaving.

"Mimi, we're going to move away from New Orleans——"

"Move away? Where? Why? Leave this old house?" the questions tumbled out of her mouth, her eyes now wide-awake with surprise.

"It's your mother—she's had her way at last—we're going to move to a more 'progressive' town where folks get ahead faster——" His words, despite conscious effort to sound matter-of-fact, were tinged with a bit of irony, with a fragment of bitterness and pain. "Your mother——"

"Stop calling her my mother!" Mimi half angrily demanded, all the cheerfulness gone from her voice and face. "She's only a step-mother!"

"All right! All right!" Jean hastily agreed. "I can't tell you all of it now—but I can't stand this nagging any longer. I've got to have peace even if I have to go to the North Pole to get it——"

"Why do you yield so easily to her? Why don't you tell her right out you won't go and she must stop fussing at you

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all the time? If I were you I certainly wouldn't let her run all over me!" Mimi declared as she slipped out of the bed and began to dress.

"Mimi!" Jean chided; the hurt her words caused were evident in his voice.

"Forgive me, papa. I wouldn't hurt you for anything." Mimi caught him as he started to the door, tray in hand, and kissed him warmly. Even as he forgave her, he was troubled at the moist softness of her lips.

"After breakfast we'll go for a walk down to the Basin. I'll tell you all about it then and a lot of other things I've been planning to tell you for a long time. Don't be long now!" he cautioned as he left the room.

Mimi smiled as she heard his carpet slippers pat-pat-patting down the hall. Poor, gentle, lovable old Jean. He would never learn the combination to the intricately devised safe called Life, Mimi thought for the thousandth time. Fumbling in his aimless way, living in a world of his own filled with ghostly figures of silken clad ladies and velvet garmented gentlemen—Mandevilles, Marignys, de Pontalbas and Gayarres—he would never understand nor master bustle and hurry and pep of the newer years.

She did not consciously think these things as she dressed hurriedly, yet Mimi sensed that Jean was living in a day that had passed and would never return. Though her step-mother irritated her almost to frenzy, Mimi was aware of the fact that Mme. Daquin was better armed for present-day life than either Jean or herself. She who was Mary Robertson of Chicago, American for many generations, was unencumbered with the hoary traditions which kept Jean with his pride of Creole ancestry content with his dreams, caring little whether his house was better furnished than those of his neighbours and friends, worrying not at all and wholly free from envy if his bank balance was more or less than the man's next door.

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Mimi often wondered what course their lives might have taken had her mother lived. And even as she wondered she knew the answer—Jean and her mother and she would have lived on and on and on in the old house on Dumaine Street until Jean and Margot had died and Mimi had married some Creole whose ideas about life had dovetailed with those of the Daquin family. Growing poorer and poorer year by year, the sleepy cycle of uneventful days would have continued, as untouched by the outside world as the bayous that bordered the rushing, ever changing Mississippi.

Into these quiet backwaters Mary Robertson had swept. Her coming had been like the digging of a channel that linked the sluggish bayou with the pell-mell hurtling stream nearby. Mimi's mother died when she was nine. His beloved Margot gone, Jean had floundered about, terrified by loneliness, panic-stricken when he found himself the sole keeper and guardian and nurse of a perturbingly active child of nine. He felt as though some malevolent power had inveigled him into a boat, rowed him far from shore and then deftly removed the bottom of the craft. He felt himself splashing, treading water, frantically feeling for solid earth beneath his feet and finding none.

Margot with quiet efficiency had guided him, consoled him, upheld him. With gentle self-effacement she had suggested solutions to the problems which arose in his little sick-and-accident insurance company, woefully lacking as it was in modern business methods, but which furnished sufficient revenue to satisfy their simple needs. So cleverly had she managed these hints, he never knew until after her death how she had planted the seed of these ideas in his head, watched them grow until they met the little crises which arose and then flattered his gentle and simple soul by telling him how cleverly *he* had solved the perplexities of the moment.

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Jean had often told Mimi how Mary Robertson had come to New Orleans on a visit at Mardi Gras time two years after Margot had died and just when he had become most lonely and afraid. His grief had dulled his senses so completely that for more than a year after his wife had died Jean had lived in a state that bordered on coma. When he grieved most was at night and then he sought forgetfulness in wine. Night after night he sat down after dinner, a wicker-covered demijohn by the side of his chair. On the table in front of him rested two objects—a faded photograph of Margot in her wedding gown and an ample-proportioned wine-glass of mottled green.

Mimi used to steal into the room in her night-dress and crouch in the shadows back of the door and watch him, fascinated by his varying moods. One thing only was constant—as soon as his glass was emptied Jean reached down, hooked the first two fingers of his right hand in the handle of the gallon container. Steadying it with his thumb, he raised the demijohn up and over with a flip until its bowl rested on his biceps. Pouring his glass full, Jean lowered the jar to the floor again. The process was repeated at regular intervals. In time Jean's head would sink lower and lower until it rested on the table, his arms his only pillow. Mimi would then cover his shoulders with the damask cover from the couch and creep back to her own bed.

Mary Robertson did not herself know why she had been attracted by Jean Daquin. She knew that, in part, she had been drawn by his gentle manner, so different from the blustering, raw, at times tiresome aggressiveness of her own Chicago. Even to herself she sternly denied that this had caused her interest in Jean to grow. Her father had used his earnings as a physician to speculate in real estate. Through shrewd and clever means he had accumulated considerable wealth in

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Chicago's fast-growing Negro settlement on the south side, and this wealth had given him great political power among his people.

Mary Robertson had no recollection of a time when she did not hear from morning to night endless discussions of money and of politics. If her father was not talking of the sums he had made or expected to make from this piece of property or through that election, he usually was conjecturing as to the wisdom or folly of associating with this man or that one, of joining one fraternal order or the other one, of doing this thing or the other, all these speculations revolving around the one desideratum—will it pay?

Jean Daquin, improvident, oblivious of material advantage or disadvantage of any act of his, had opened to her eyes a new world filled with romance, with colour, with beauty. This, combined with the stories told her of his grief over Margot, had appealed to her feminine love of the unstable, the exotic, the unusual. Unconsciously she associated with Jean the exciting revelry of Mardi Gras, and found herself in love with him.

Jean, floundering in the abyss of sorrow, was, in his more sober moments, beginning to develop a new fear when he met Mary Robertson—an apprehension regarding Mimi.

"I'm a poor excuse for a father, *chérie*," he told her a score of times a day despite her sincere protestations that he was the best father any girl ever had. "Here I am, drinking every night until I'm beastly drunk and forgetting Margot would want me to brace up for your sake. I'm no good at all—you'd be better off if I were dead, too."

Here he would pause for the denial of his words which Mimi never failed to furnish. He would listen comfortably while she pointed out his virtues as a paterfamilias—and an hour later would be as unconvinced as ever. Mary deter-

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mined she would capture Jean, distaste for her life in Chicago growing daily as she stayed on in New Orleans long after she had originally intended to leave. She was beguiled by the romance and languorous charm of the Creole quarter where she, for the first time, could forget the petty meanness and prejudice she felt as a Negro elsewhere in America. Mary Robertson swiftly but without Jean's realizing it led him to propose to her. ✓

To him, blundering along like a pilotless balloon, blown unresistingly this way or that by every passing breeze, she seemed the embodiment of all the virtues he himself lacked. Energetic, purposeful, dynamic, she supplied a driving force which smoothed out numerous little difficulties which to him had seemed insurmountable. Under her influence he walked with her in the evenings, methodically answering the soft "Good-nights" which floated down to them from shadowed balconies or from doorways, instead of sitting at home drinking his usual half-gallon of double port. His mind clearer from alcohol, he brought some semblance of order to his insurance business, which had suffered greatly during his year of neglect.

He resisted sturdily and successfully her slightly less than tactful suggestions that more modern business methods be installed.

"No, Mary, I don't want a big business—then I'd be only a slave to it—just a creature run this way or that by the machine I've created. I get my living as things are—and I'm satisfied."

She was too wise to pursue the matter further but his adamant resistance did not prevent her from resolving, silently of course, to bide her time until she had the right and the power to have her way. Her intention was not consciously unkind nor meddling. He's got a gold mine practically

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untouched, she thought, and I'll convince him he can make ten times as much as he does. Jean, meanwhile, thought he had ended the discussion for all time.

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Mimi, christened "Annette Angela Daquin" but thereafter known only as "Mimi," was eleven when Mary Robertson entered Jean Daquin's life. From the beginning Mimi had felt a barrier within herself arising against the overtures of friendship Mary Robertson made. There was no dislike which Mimi felt. Nor was there affection. Had Mimi analyzed her feelings towards this new and alien creature who had come, whirlwind-like, into their placid lives, she would have found indifference or perhaps passive acceptance of the newcomer as one of the vagaries of fate. This calm acceptance was in no small degree caused by Mimi's realization that this new creature furnished a much needed stimulating influence on Jean. For Mimi was wise beyond her eleven years. So Mimi accepted her without audible protest even when Jean hinted Mary Robertson might come and take Margot's place. . . .

So Jean and Mary were married first by Father André at the little Catholic church Jean had always attended, and then by the Rev. George W. Brown of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, to which denomination Mary belonged.

To the marriage there arose storms of protest from the relatives and friends of both Mary and Jean. He was alternately reviled and pitied for marrying an outsider, one who, though respectable and worthy, yet was not of Creole blood. "*Le pauvre Jean,*" they wailed, "grief and drink have weakened his understanding." From Mary's relatives, her father in particular, there came an outburst that overshadowed the protest of Jean's friends as a tornado outsweeps the gentle breeze of a woman's fan. Mr. Robertson rushed to New Orleans, stormed,

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denounced, ridiculed, pleaded, but in vain. Mary met his every mood in kind until, wise from his years of political training, he yielded, remained for the Protestant ceremony, refused to attend the Catholic one, and returned to Chicago, where he boasted to his friends of the "high Creole society" into which his Mary had married.

For a year they were happy. Mary was too clever to attempt revolutionary changes in her new *milieu*, even in the home where the to her slipshod methods of management irked her sorely. Towards Mimi she adopted a conciliatory policy, sensing the girl's latent hostility to her who had taken, in physical ways at least, the place so long filled by the adored Margot.

Mary made few friends among the intimates of Jean and Mimi. They with gentle but unmistakable signs let her know that despite her marriage to Jean she yet was and would ever remain an outsider. Time and time again Jean and Mimi received invitations to dinner, to parties which did not include Mary. The mellow old families, militantly proud of their Creole and Negro ancestry, yielded not an inch to that which went on in the world outside. Deadlines there were which they never permitted crossing. One of these was family. Another was colour. Mary offended in both. She was an outsider. And her skin was deep brown, in sharp contrast to the ivory tint of Jean and Mimi. ✓

For the first year of her marriage Mary was oblivious of these things. She was too intelligent not to notice them but they either amused her or were ignored by her as evidences of narrow-mindedness by those who too long had lived in a world apart. She loved gentle, irresponsible Jean with her whole heart, with a woman's inconsistency, though he offended in almost every particular the canons of efficiency and progress which were a part of her very being. ✓

She was content to spend her time at home, learning to cook

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dishes new to her and dear to Jean, green trout and perch from the bayous, oysters fresh from the reefs, pompano and snappers and red fish from the Gulf, new and exotic vegetables and fruits, gumbo, Jambalaya, and combinations of all sorts of ingredients, generously spiced and seasoned. She gloried in the quaint old house and its furnishings—tenderly she cared for the old eighteenth-century piano of mahogany inlaid with brass, the Empire work table with ornately carved legs of St. Domingo mahogany that Jean's great-grandfather had brought to Louisiana when he fled from the Insurrection of 1791 in San Domingo.

During the year of their marriage Jean had told her the story of the refugee a score of times. Time and again he related the tale of tempestuous days, of ruin facing the sugar-planters of the Delta, of commerce paralysed, of the cessation for twenty-five years of manufacture of marketable sugar. She had heard of the black Dominican refugees, of the Spaniards, Mendez and Solis, and their plants on the outskirts of New Orleans, one a distillery, the other a refinery for making syrup.

The indigo crop a failure, their efforts to granulate sugar a failure, they were faced with ruin, complete and absolute. Then came Etienne de Boré and several black Dominicans, among them Jean's great-grandfather. Days of anxious experimentation. Days of hope. Days of failure. The day of the final test. The exultant cry, "It granulates!" Prosperity beyond the wildest dream. Four—five—seven years. Five million pounds of sugar marketed in one year by de Boré. Always Jean ended the story: "And that was done, my dear, by *my* great-grandfather—a Negro from San Domingo!" For the first year she succeeded in refraining from the comment that always came to her lips when she heard the story. It was: "And what about you, Jean Daquin, exhibiting some of your great-grandfather's initiative?" And it was a long time before

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she could get used to pronouncing his name other than as "Gene Da-Kwinn."

In time, however, Mme. Daquin tired even of the elaborately carved old four-posted mahogany beds, so high that one used a step to climb into them. Even the old silver, the garden, lost their fresh charm as she grew used to them. Like new toys they fascinated her for a while and, with her love for Jean, her mild affection for Mimi and her new duties, her mind was kept free from Jean's backwardness and the continued coolness of Jean's friends towards her. But when this newness wore off she began, at first gently and then with increasing vigour, to point out to him the opportunities for gain he was overlooking. At the same time she began to long for the progressiveness and bustle and eager hurrying of her own Chicago.

Jean at the beginning of her first mild reproaches sought gently to argue with her. He tried to convince her of the charm of the old ways, to prove to her that maximum happiness for them would come not with larger resources that created new anxieties but only in the easy-going undisturbed lethargy of his old life.

"What difference does it make if André or Raoul or Emile have finer carriages than we?—have more money in the bank?—does that mean they are happier than we? No—no—*chère Marie!* Happiness cannot be bought with dollars—look at the Americans north of Canal Street and you'll see I am right. They scramble and fight and scheme to gain a few dollars and when they have them what do they do? They fight and scramble and scheme for more!"

At the outset she let the discussion end there. But soon she began trying to point out that such a philosophy denoted only laziness—even absurdity. Jean, in turn, met her growing irritation with silence accompanied by a satisfied smile such as a parent would bestow on a child's foolish remarks.

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It seemed to say to her: "Silly woman, you are so much in error, it's useless even to discuss the matter with you—you couldn't understand if you tried."

Had Jean sought the manner which most surely would infuriate Mary, he could have found none so efficacious as this. Slowly at first, then with increasing vigour, she argued, pleaded with him, scorned or ridiculed his easy-going ways. She found him adamant and her irritation rapidly changed to excoriation. Morning, noon and night she nagged him. She wrote her father, who had invested heavily in an industrial insurance company operated by Negroes in Atlanta. His judgment vindicated, Mr. Robertson used his influence, and Jean received a flattering offer to associate himself with the Atlanta company. As a belated wedding present Mr. Robertson offered them a home in Atlanta, furnished and ready for immediate occupancy.

Then the real struggle began. Mary might not have succeeded even though easy-going Jean was becoming almost frantic at her eternal nagging. He yet loved her and she gave him no cause for divorce, even if such a way out of his dilemma had ever occurred to him, that would have been approved by the Catholic Church.

Two things began to make him weaken. The first of these and of slighter influence was that Mary's darkness of skin prevented him from eating at the old restaurants, Antoine's, Delatoire's, Mme. Begue's. He and Margot and Mimi had often gone there in the old days and without trouble though the proprietors and waiters and the regular patrons knew of his Negro blood. He and Mary had gone once or twice until slight but unmistakable hints had been given him that he was welcome but his wife—"We are most sorry but our American guests, on whose continued patronage we are largely dependent, object to *une femme de couleur*."

There were stormy, very stormy scenes. Jean, his white

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hair and waxed moustache and goatee bristling, his face an apoplectic crimson, refused to listen to the profuse apologies, strode, shoulders back, head high in the air, from the places, vowing "never again to darken your doors, sir!" This vow he kept and the old places knew him no more.

Of greater moment, even, were the changes in the Creole quarter. The old families were dying off, poverty was forcing others to sell their homes. One by one the old houses were razed by boisterous, unfeeling house-wreckers and in their places were going up cheap, viciously plain and garishly ornate apartment houses. One by one the old places disappeared. Graceful lines of sloping roofs were replaced by harshly severe brick or wooden eaves, leaded glass dim with years was ruthlessly removed for plain sashes turned out by thousands by unimaginative factory hands, newel posts of carved brass and delicate balustrades of ancient mahogany were thrown away and in their stead came cheap pine ones, all carved alike.

The new houses were filled by new people, as cheap and noisy and brazen as their homes. Tenants of six months thought themselves old residents and, compared to their neighbours, they were. But to Jean and his diminishing acquaintances of an older day, they were noisily vulgar aliens and barbarians. Strident, unpleasant voices rose in ever increasing numbers and volume so that no longer could one enjoy the stroll of an evening through the once quiet streets.

"It can't be worse even in Atlanta," said Jean to Mimi sorrowfully one day. "I can't stand to see the changes any longer—it's too much like watching at the bedside of a dearly loved one who rapidly wastes away from a loathsome disease."

Then did Mimi know they would some day soon leave New Orleans never to return. The prospect at times frightened

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her—at times, with the venturesomeness of eager youth, she looked forward to new faces, new scenes, new experiences. . . .

“Good morning, Mme. Daquin,” was Mimi’s greeting to her step-mother as she entered the dining-room and slipped into her place at the table.

“Morning? It’s nearer afternoon,” acidulously replied Mme. Daquin. Jean winced and looked appealingly at Mimi.

“You’re as shiftless and slow as your father,” continued Mary. “You know we’ll be busy as can be with packing all this junk your father insists we take to Atlanta——”

“Junk?” Mimi inquired with suspicious sweetness.

“That’s what I said and that’s what I mean. Junk! J-u-n-k! I’m going to get rid of some of this worn-out fantastic stuff and get me some nice fresh oak. Mahogany’s too gloomy and funeral-like.”

“I suppose you’d like to throw away that bed you sleep in—over two hundred years old and brought from France—and get a nice, shiny brass one?”

“That’s exactly what I’m going to do——”

“You’ll do nothing——” burst out Mimi, but at a sign from Jean she stopped talking. The meal was finished in silence. Mary, her broad face, deep brown of colour and framed with black hair that curled attractively, set in unrelieved displeasure, grimly ate without speaking until Jean rose to leave the table.

“You’ll find on the table in the hall the telegram to Atlanta telling them you’ll be there ready for work on the first. Wait until I finish,” she demanded when Jean started to speak. “To-day is the sixteenth—that gives us less than two weeks in which to pack and move. Papa writes me he has sent his cheque for the house he’s giving us and it’s all ready for us to move into——”

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"But what about this house?" Jean broke in, panic in his voice at the unexpected imminence of quitting his beloved New Orleans for ever.

"I've seen to that, too," Mary answered methodically but, withal, a note in her voice of pride in her own far-sightedness and efficiency. "Laroux, the real-estate man on Canal Street, telephoned me yesterday he's found a buyer—a company that plans to build an apartment house here—and Laroux tells me he'll be ready to close the deal by the end of the week."

"Sell *this* house, papa!" broke in Mimi. "No—no! We can't let them tear *our* house down!"

"Yes, sell *this* house," affirmed Mary before Jean could reply. "I can't for the life of me see why you are so crazy about these draughty, moth-eaten old places. If I had the money I'd tear all of them down, build nice, modern places and make ten—twenty times the money off of them."

Before Jean could speak Mary swept conqueringly from the room. Mimi slipped her hand into Jean's and squeezed it comfortingly, the pair of them too full for speech.

Ignoring the dreaded telegram, Jean and Mimi left the cool shadows of the house for the cheery brightness of sun-swept Dumaine Street. Oblivious of passers-by, answering salutations and the greetings of friends methodically, they walked slowly through the streets, down the Esplanade, on and on until they found themselves at the gates of St. Louis cemetery. Yet in silence they wandered through the confused, close-packed *vieux carré* of the dead, past tombs piled one upon the other, their walls lined with row upon row of ghostly store-houses, "the ovens" like those of a baker-shop, each large enough only to hold a coffin. Crumbling bricks, covered with vines within which scampered in the dazzling, warming sunlight lizards of green or of gold. Here and there the *Ci-git* and the *Ici Repos* and the names, birth and death dates of

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those buried within had been eaten away by countless storms of rain and sunlight until none could tell who had been buried there.

"It's just as well," thought Jean. "If there are those, relative or friend, who yet remain alive, they know which tomb holds their friends. And if there are none left—what difference does it make? Silly curiosity-seekers who ramble through a place like this as they would a penny arcade during Mardi Gras seeking new thrills—what do their wishes count?"

Their reveries were unbroken until they heard a noise behind them. From beyond a pile of "ovens" a silver crucifix flashed in the sunlight, raised high above the tombs. Soon the cortège appeared, winding its slow way through the tortuous maze of irregularly built tombs, the "Chant for the Dead" rolling out on the still air in lugubrious and chilling melody, rising or dropping as the tombs opened or closed in about the procession. Here and there, where the turning of a passage was too narrow to permit the carrying of the casket at its usual height, Jean and Mimi saw it raised high on a level with the crucifix. They stood hand in hand until the chanting died down in the distance.

"Mimi, that's how I feel to-day," said Jean softly. "Leaving New Orleans, the old houses, the old friends—it makes me feel as though it were I in that coffin——"

"Papa, why don't you put your foot down?" burst out Mimi; "tell Mme. Daquin you just won't go—let her go on back to Chicago if she dosen't like it—and you and I stay here and be happy?"

"It's too late now, *petite* Mimi," he answered. "My word's been given—they're tearing down so many of the old houses—my old friends are dying off, one by one——"

"But you're not old! You're only fifty-two, yet you talk as though you were a hundred——"

"Sometimes I feel a hundred—a thousand. Oh, well, I've

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made my decision and I'll stick to it. It wasn't about that I wanted to talk with you. It's related to it but—but it isn't easy to talk about——” he broke off.

They walked slowly in silence as she waited for him to speak. An inexpressible tenderness filled her for this gentle old man—he seemed very old to her to-day. The growing surliness and quarrelsomeness of her step-mother, the alien who would never fit into the scheme of things as she and Jean knew it, infuriated her for the pain it was causing her dear Jean. She felt within her a steadily growing bitterness against Mary and her petty shopkeeper attitude, her scorn for traditions so dear to Jean and herself. As she had dressed, the notion of leaving New Orleans (she had never been more than a few miles beyond the city's limits) had appealed to her, offering as it did new experiences, new scenes, new people, naturally attractive to a girl of fourteen. Her mind had dwelt more on the favourable aspects of the change than on the severance of old and dear ties of tradition and friendship, of quitting familiar scenes, with all the instinctive optimism and disregard of consequences of youth.

But now she felt, on seeing Jean's reluctance to go, as though she were in some subtle manner guilty of disloyalty to Jean. Suddenly contrite, her eyes filled with tears and she clung to Jean in passionate repudiation of her joy at leaving. She realized Jean was speaking—had been talking to her for some minutes. “. . . And yet it ought not to be hard for me. Neither Margot nor I have ever consciously sought to keep from you the fact that the Negro blood in you set you aside, here in America, as one apart, though we have tried to shield you as much as we could from the embarrassments that blood can bring you.”

“Oh, is that all that was troubling you, papa Jean?” laughed Mimi.

“You can afford to laugh here in Creole New Orleans,”

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Jean cautioned. "But away from here it's a different matter. Here in the place we know I want to tell you of some of the stock from which we Daquins come. It's a record we're proud of—we've helped build this Louisiana of ours—much of what we did's been forgotten but it's there, just the same. I'm telling you, for when you run up against hard situations later on in life—and we all do—the knowledge of what's back of you will give you strength and courage."

Mimi said nothing. Jean went on.

"We Daquins trace our history a long ways back—back to the early days of the convent Louis XV founded here in 1727—the Ursalines—to teach the Negro and Indian girls. You know of beloved Madeline Hachard—she who was a postulant in the Ursuline Convent in Rouen—Rouen beloved of Flaubert and Maupassant. Her letters home tell of their perilous voyage to Louisiana in 1728, of shipwreck and shortages of food and water, of sickness and discomfort. Soon after Madeline Hachard—who called herself "Hachard de St. Stanislas" after she took the veil—and the others opened the doors of their convent, there was need of wives for the young men of character and means. Girls of good family were sent to the colony—*les filles a la cassette* they were called. From these matings sprang many of the great families of Louisiana—and to one of them you and I owe our being. From her who nearly two hundred years ago took the long and perilous voyage there comes down to us a path—at times clear and distinct—at times faded and shadowy—from that path innumerable branches shoot like the limbs of that ancient oak over there."

Jean's words had begun to weave a mysterious spell over Mimi. She looked at the tree to which Jean pointed—vaguely disappointed that instead of its leaves she did not see families, faces with laughing eyes and alluring mysteriousness. Jean had never talked to her like this before—she felt a thrill-

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ing pride that he spoke to her as to one of mature years and understanding.

"You've many relatives, Mimi, of whom you can justly be proud—and some of whom the less said, the better. Like two great rivers from the same mother source, plunging, roaring, or gently purling they flow—parallel much of the way, touching at others, then springing apart to seek their way through diverse lands. We of the so-called coloured branch—many of our ancestry of the proud *gens de couleur libre*—we too have had a large share in making Louisiana what it is to-day."

"Tell me about some of them, Jean," demanded Mimi eagerly. "Tell me of the ones of whom you're proud—tell me of those you're not so proud of."

The sun was high in the sky and beating down upon them with vigour before Jean had finished his story. Mimi was too absorbed to notice the heat or to note the passing of the hours. Jean, with the mellowness acquired only through an unhurried life, had great pride in his ability as a *raconteur*—when he fancied he detected a waning interest on Mimi's face as he delved into the more abstract historical part of his tale, he quickly injected anecdotes, dramatic episodes, colourful vignettes. When Mimi seemed wearied of too great stress on the part Negroes had played as soldiers or labourers or if she appeared surfeited with tales of too great virtue and exemplary constructiveness on the part of those who were her forebears, Jean would, almost shyly and imperceptibly, relate a tale of derring do by one who lived at Baratavia with that great pirate and freebooter—Jean Lafitte. Mimi felt a delicious tingle titillating her body as Jean told of that other Jean—he of the swart skin, midnight-black hair and eyes, beard shaven clean from the front of his face. She was glad—very glad one of her line had known this intrepid, carefree adventurer who, a marine

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Robin Hood, had plundered and smuggled and risked death a thousand times as though he were passing the time of day on the street corner.

She, too, was fascinated by Jean's picture of the coming into being of the Creole.

"The white Louisianian will tell you the Creole is white with ancestry of French or Spanish or West Indian extraction. There may be some of that kind—but I'm not sure—but most Creoles are a little bit of everything and from that very mixture comes the delightful colourfulness which is their greatest charm. To them the cardinal sin is avarice or stinginess. Dalliance at love—too great devotion to the cup—poverty—all these are minor faults to be forgiven and forgotten. We are not a nation of shopkeepers, thank God, even though you and I, Mimi, are about to desert to the enemy."

Many other stories he told her there. He told of that Governor Perier who armed Negroes in 1729 and sent them to fight that fear-inspiring tribe of Indians, the Chonchas, with whom the black slaves were becoming too friendly, and how, with an ease that should have frightened Perier, these blacks wiped out the Indian enemy. Proudly Jean told how this example and others gave impetus to the later freeing of the slaves which had come largely through their own efforts—the revolt of the slaves led by the Chickasaws and Banbaras and other stirring uprisings—gentle, kindly Jean—who would not have crushed an ant—exultantly told of carnage, of slaughter, of death.

He took great pride in telling Mimi of Jeannot, stalwart slave offered freedom by Kerlerrec if he would become the public executioner, a job no white man would take. Mimi lived again the agony of Jeannot, now dead some one hundred and fifty years, who in horror and anguish cried out: "What! Cut off the heads of people who have never done me any harm?" She could almost see him pleading, even

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weeping, to be allowed to remain in bondage rather than become the public killer. No escape possible, the governor was adamant, he rose and said: "Very well, wait a moment." Mimi shuddered as Jean told of Jeannot leaving the room, running to his cabin, seizing a hatchet in his left hand, laying his right hand on a block and chopping it off. She rejoiced that he, on exhibiting the bloody stump, created such emotion he was given his freedom anyhow.

Of Negro troops under Andrew Jackson in the famous battle of New Orleans, of the ability and courage of that Major Jean Daquin, San Domingan, quadroon whose Negro blood historians later forgot, he told her proudly. But it was sadly that he pictured the barriers, the Black Codes, the rising tide of hatred and bitterness that began to rise against the coloured Creoles and Americans. To Jean in his gentleness and love of peace these stories of dark days during and after the Civil War were horrible and painful but in his honesty he told of them while Mimi's breath came quickly as he unfolded the scenes like sharply etched prints before her wondering eyes.

"It's afternoon—Mary will be furious," Jean at last exclaimed, almost with dismay.

They hurried to the gates and home.

"All this is behind you, Mimi," Jean ended as they neared the house. "Remember it—take comfort in it when you're depressed.—You're a beautiful child—you'll be a more beautiful woman," he added. "You've warm blood in your veins—the warmth of old, old wine. Here you'd be safe but away from New Orleans—I don't know—I don't know. I hope all will be well with us."

CHAPTER III

UNDER the efficient management of Mme. Daquin, it was not long before they became adjusted physically to their new surroundings in Atlanta.

"I wish you'd stop calling me 'Madam Daquin,'" she querulously demanded one day of Mimi. "I don't want people here being reminded constantly we're outsiders or think we're trying to put on airs. Call me 'Mrs. Daquin' or 'mamma,' or, if you insist on being high-toned, call me 'mother.'"

Mimi vigorously protested, to herself and Jean, against either of the latter terms and compromised on "Mrs. Daquin."

Soon after their arrival they received formal calls. These came usually in the afternoon and were more or less elaborate ceremonials. Mrs. Hunter, willowy spouse of the president of the Lincoln Mutual Life Insurance Company, came with her husband the Sunday after they reached Atlanta. She was cordial—very cordial. Mimi wondered why Mrs. Hunter felt it necessary to implant a slightly moist kiss upon her lips, though she permitted herself to be fondled by the effusive one without audible or visible protest. She submitted and that was all.

"What a darling little girl you have, Mrs. Daquin!" she exclaimed. "And what's her name?" On being told she went on: "Mimi? How very cute. Just like a stage name or opera."

"That's where it does come from. *La Bohème*. Do you know the opera?" Mimi assured her.

"No, I can't say I do—no, I don't believe I know *that* one," Mrs. Hunter, somewhat embarrassed, answered. She

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did not feel altogether sure that Mimi wasn't trying either to poke fun at her or test her learning.

"My real name's Annette Angela Daquin—but no one ever calls me that. They only call me Mimi," innocently replied Mimi.

Yet not sure of herself, Mrs. Hunter felt it necessary that she justify herself before this queer infant.

"We don't get much chance here to see good plays or hear such music as comes this way. The only play I've seen was 'Ben Hur' and Mr. Hunter has never forgiven me for climbing up the back stairs to the peanut gallery at the Grand Opera House where the coloured people sit. That was grand, though, and almost worth the quarrel I had with Mr. Hunter about going."

And Mrs. Hunter beamed at her husband in a benign fashion. Her duty done in commenting on Mimi's cuteness and beauty, Mrs. Hunter turned her attention to Mrs. Daquin and subjects near to housewifely hearts. They wondered if there would be a late spring—"it's been years since it's been so cool in April as it is now," affirmed Mrs. Hunter—they talked of the rising price of cloth and food and shoes—the art of cookery—"you must teach me some of those spicy dishes they tell me you have in New Orleans"—of local social life in Atlanta and how it compared with that in Louisiana.

Mimi listened alternately to the two and to the more restrained conversation of Jean and Mr. Hunter. The latter speculated, somewhat idly, as to the probable chances of Japan's defeating Russia, Mr. Hunter told Jean of business prospects in the fall if cotton sold well. Her attention was caught, momentarily, by Mr. Hunter, who was deploring the general shiftlessness of the younger people in general and his own son in particular.

"I've always maintained that hard work's what boys and girls need. When I was a youngster my daddy put me in the

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fields at six o'clock in the morning and I stayed there until six or seven o'clock at night. But these young ones coming along nowadays have got funny ideas. Take my own boy, for example. He's pretty nearly seventeen and for the life of me, I can't make him out. Always talking about doing something big but never knows from one day to the other what line he's going to do big things in. I tell Molly," he confided, leaning closer to Jean and lowering his voice, "it's all her fault. She coddles him too much——"

"Now, William, you aren't going into that here," chided his wife, who had overheard him. "Carl's nothing but a child as yet and he and Mildred are all we've got. He'll come round all right."

Back and forth the discussion raged, Mr. Hunter appealing to Jean for confirmation of his contentions, Mrs. Hunter relying on Mrs. Daquin for aid and succour. On only one point could they agree and that was Carl's essential difference from other children. Not until Mrs. Daquin, in her desire to help Mrs. Hunter and thereby gain her favour, introduced the matter of religion did Carl Hunter's name cease being bandied back and forth like a tennis ball between his parents.

Mrs. Hunter, tired of the argument over her son, swooped down upon the new topic with avidity. It was wholly a verbal swoop. It was difficult to imagine one of Mrs. Hunter's proportions and dignity swooping in any other manner.

"I knew there was something I intended asking you and I almost forgot it. What church're you planning to attend?"

"Well—er—that's a problem we haven't met yet," Mrs. Daquin, somewhat flustered, replied. "You see, in Chicago I was a Baptist—and you know the Baptist saying, 'Baptist born and Baptist bred, be a Baptist till I'm dead,'" she somewhat incorrectly quoted. "But my husband and his daughter, they're Catholics——"

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"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Hunter, her eyebrows making a rapid ascent until they seemed to mingle with the hairs that straggled down from beneath her elaborate *coiffure*. Mrs. Hunter's ears were not so keen as Mrs. Plummer's—the news regarding the religious beliefs of the Daquins had not reached her. Now she uttered the exclamation as though Mrs. Daquin had said: "My husband and his daughter have leprosy!" or "They suffer from epileptic fits."

Mrs. Daquin unmistakably caught the implication—she flushed and twisted the handkerchief in her hands and laughed a silly, titterish and mirthless laugh. Mrs. Hunter turned and surveyed Jean and Mimi as though they were specimens of some new flora or fauna of a weird and unfamiliar species. Her inspection lasted but a minute but it was long enough to make Mimi squirm uncomfortably and she felt vaguely as though she had been caught in the act of doing some loathsome and criminal thing.

They did not pursue the subject. Mrs. Hunter rose soon afterwards, her husband following her lead.

"My dear, on Tuesday of next week I'm entertaining my club, the Fleur-de-Lis—Mr. Hunter calls it 'the eating brigade' but that's because he's jealous, we don't let any men attend our affairs except once a year. You must come, for there you'll meet the right people—it's fatal to get mixed up with the wrong crowd," she smilingly warned.

Mrs. Daquin eagerly accepted the invitation, too eagerly Mimi thought. As she bade the Hunters a formal good-bye, she was thinking to herself: "Why can't she accept the attentions of Mrs. Hunter as though she were used to decent society instead of fawning all over herself?"

After the Hunters had left, there was a silence which was unbroken until they sat at supper. Mrs. Daquin several times looked inquiringly at Jean as though she were about to speak but each time desisted. Mimi noticed the words

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shut off as they were about to be said but knew the flood would not be long in coming. She was right.

"What are you and Mimi going to do about attending church, Jean?" began Mrs. Daquin. "There's no coloured Catholic church here—and you saw from Mrs. Hunter's manner that—er—well, we aren't going to get along as well here as we might if——" The abrupt ending of her uncompleted sentence and the eloquent silence which followed it were sufficient.

"You mean you think we should give up our religion to make money and get into 'society'?" queried Jean in astonishment, his last word tinged ever so slightly with irony.

"Well, I don't mean exactly that," his wife answered. "But you can't attend a white Catholic church here and I just thought you might—well, you might refrain from mentioning you're a Catholic, for you can see from the way Mrs. Hunter acted it puts you in a different—er—it makes you different from the others," she ended lamely.

"What if it does make us different?" Jean demanded, almost belligerently. "Coloured people here, from what I've seen, are always talking about 'prejudice' and they're just about as full of prejudice against Catholics, Jews and black Negroes as white people themselves. You can do what you want, Mary, but Mimi and I will stick to our own religion. And I'm sure we can attend some Catholic church here, so that's an end to that."

There was no mistaking the tone. Being a wise woman, Mrs. Daquin dropped the subject. Afterwards, Mimi hugged Jean in the hallway.

"You were gorgeous, papa Jean. That's one time you bearded the lioness. And if you did it oftener—there'd be fewer times you'd have to do it." Jean grinned at her happily, proud of her approval.

CHAPTER IV

“I MEANT to tell you on Sunday,” telephoned Mrs. Hunter the latter part of the week, “to bring your lovely little girl with you to my party next Tuesday. Mrs. Adams is bringing her girl, Hilda, and the two of them can play together.”

And so it was that Mimi, dressed in her best dress, a pale yellow confection of lawn, set out with Mrs. Daquin for Mrs. Hunter's house and the Fleur-de-Lis Club meeting. Mrs. Daquin, too, dressed carefully and elaborately. She spent an hour arranging her hair in the style of the day, brushed back from the forehead high over a “rat” that made her head appear as though soldiers had thrown up breastworks, carefully smoothed over. From behind this amazing rampart peeped coyly a lacy hat perched perilously on the back of the head. Mrs. Daquin's modified leg-o'-mutton sleeves, her tightly fitting waist with high neck supported by whalebone stays, her long skirt flaring wide and with a train were all of the latest design, as were the half-mittens of black lace from which Mrs. Daquin's fingers, short and round, emerged shyly like little fat sausages. She knew her sex—she would be on inspection and much depended on the first impression. She was determined that that first glance should establish her as one of the elect.

Mrs. Hunter had said “four o'clock sharp.” Mrs. Daquin and Mimi therefore arrived at the Hunter domicile, a huge pile of towers and turrets and bulging bay windows adorned at the most unlikely and unlooked-for places with startling

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varieties of woodwork, at twenty minutes of five. Mrs. Daquin knew the value of a dramatic entrance, of the desirability of being just late enough to have permitted everybody else's arrival prior to her own.

She was not wrong. In the warm April afternoon the door and windows were open. As they ascended the steps there floated out to them the hum of well-bred voices, pitched at just the right angle. Mrs. Hunter rushed to greet them—and from the sudden stilling of the animated conversation Mimi knew the talk had been about her step-mother and herself. They were conducted around the large living-room and presented to each of the carefully dressed women who sat in a circle whose circumference was only a little less than that of the room. "Pleased to meet you's" "Happy to form your acquaintance's," "My compliments" and "How do you do's" greeted Mrs. Daquin; "What a pretty little girl's," and "How cute's" were Mimi's portion.

The ordeal ended, Mrs. Daquin subsided into a chair near Mrs. Hunter's standing approximately at the point where they had started on their circumnavigation of the room. The buzzing conversation began again. Mimi listened to the exchange of recipes and ideas, discussions of the best manner in which jams and jellies and rolls should be prepared, gentle arguments as to the relative desirability of this store or that one.

Mimi looked around the room for Hilda Adams but there were no younger people except herself. She began to feel out of place, to wish she were at home with her sewing or at her piano. Knowing there was no escape she began to examine the women around her. She remembered few of their names but that did not worry her. She noticed that none of the women present were darker than a light brown, their complexions varying from that shade to one indistinguishable from white. Just as this fact came to her she caught a snatch of

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conversation from a group near her that linked itself startlingly with her own observation.

A slender, very slender, woman with lips which she pressed together closely whenever she began or ended a sentence was talking.

“. . . it seems Mrs. Adams has been going to the Grand Opera House and buying seats in the orchestra, ‘passing’ for white, and seeing all the plays that’ve been coming here. Well, the other day, as she was going in, some coloured person saw her and went and told the manager. She tried to bluff it out but it didn’t work—they made her get out.”

“Serves her right,” sweetly commented one of the informative one’s companions, satisfaction in her tone. “Going where she isn’t wanted. She always did think she knew more than the rest of us. They tell me she and Hilda wash their own clothes after dark and hang them up in the yard when nobody can see them—and then get up before daybreak to take them in— Oh! how do you do, Mrs. Adams?—I didn’t see you come in. And how sweet you look! That’s a beautiful new dress you’ve on,” she broke off as the subject of their conversation came up.

Mimi wondered how so miraculous a change could come over the group which now chatted easily and cordially, very cordially, with her who had been ejected from the local theatre and who laundered her clothes after nightfall. She felt a deep warmth within her for this woman who, because she wanted so avidly the entertainment, the touch with the world of ideas, the stimulus that came from the plays which came to Atlanta, and which her race barred her from seeing respectably, made her run the risk of discovery. And to the same degree that she felt a yearning to touch, to smile at Mrs. Adams and thereby let her know that she sympathized with her, did Mimi detest with a burning intensity the pettiness and envy of her detractors.

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So engrossed had she been in Mrs. Adams, Mimi had not seen Hilda, who stood silent just beyond her mother. Mrs. Adams started to move away to another group and the motion brought Mimi face to face with a girl of her own age with wide, placid black eyes. Hilda and Mimi stood looking at each other, each caught and held fast by some power, neither of them knew what nor even that there was such a power holding them. For a minute—an hour—a century they stood there unable either to move or speak. The spell was broken when Hilda smiled shyly and moved toward Mimi. At that instant Mrs. Adams turned to Mimi.

"You must be Mrs. Daquin's little girl. This is my Hilda——" she began. "Oh, I see you're friends already," she smiled.

"Come on, let's sit over there on the steps and talk," said Hilda simply, taking Mimi's hand.

Through the buzz of conversation, through the games of finch (these gentle ladies got a delicious sense of near-wickedness from this simple game played with pasteboard cards which were *not* playing-cards), even through the stir created by the announcement that refreshments would be served in the dining-room, Mimi and Hilda sat there and talked. They began with questions of each other, about school, about their childhood, revealing little intimacies that subtly wove between them a gossamer band of friendship, fragile and almost invisible, yet with the strength of piano wire. Nor was this union born of spoken words. Much more came to each of them from the other in the little moments of silence, when by accident hand touched hand or smile met smile. Mimi, through all of her fourteen years, had had no confidante other than her father and, despite deepest bonds between father and daughter, there are some secrets too precious to be told even to a father like Jean. Mimi felt tender affection surge through her for this new-found

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friend. She longed to stroke her hair, to kiss Hilda on the cheek, just under her chin, to pour out devotion lavishly, without stint. And she could tell from Hilda's smile, her tiny gestures of tenderness, that her love was returned, and happiness filled her being. . . .

Mrs. Hunter brought them back to realities.

"Oh, there you are, little chickabiddies," she cooed. "Come along, I've fixed a cute little table for you two where you can be to yourselves and where you won't be bothered by us old folks."

Hilda gave Mimi a fleeting, wry smile at the blundering condescension of the dowager-like hostess.

"Looks just like a battleship trying to be cute," whispered Hilda. Mimi rewarded her with a spontaneous but subdued little laugh as they followed Mrs. Hunter into the dining-room.

As they sat at the table near the huge bay window Hilda told Mimi in whispers about the women who chattered and ate at the large table.

"That skinny one over there," pointing to the woman who had been telling of the ejection of Hilda's mother from the theatre, "is Mrs. Watkins. Her husband's a doctor and he was crazy about mamma but she didn't like him like she did daddy. They say," and here Hilda leaned across the table and whispered, "that Dr. Watkins is still in love with mamma and it makes Mrs. Watkins furious. She doesn't like mamma and the main reason, I think, is because mamma is so much better-looking and knows so much more."

Mimi wriggled ecstatically at this revelation. She felt the delicious sense of being a conspirator, as the repository of a secret told only to one very dear and close.

"That one with the gold tooth who laughs all the time is the wife of a school-teacher—her name's Mrs. Tompkins—she's been to New York twice—but it didn't seem to do her any

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good. She laughs as much as ever and hasn't anything new to talk about except the new clothes she's bought and how she and her husband could go to all the shows in New York and sit in any part of the theatre they wanted to."

Mimi, as discreetly as she could, turned and surveyed her of the gold tooth. She was not very impressed—she expected anyone who had twice been to New York to have some distinguishing mark or characteristic which revealed two journeys to Manhattan. Mimi did not know what form this mark should have taken, she only felt that Mrs. Tompkins should have differed in some way from those who had not journeyed so far.

The cataloguing was interrupted by Hilda, who asked suddenly, and to Mimi with an eagerness which she could not at the time fathom, if Mimi had met Carl Hunter.

"Mamma tells me I'm a silly little goose," proceeded Hilda when Mimi told her she had not met their hostess' son, "but Carl's the most thrilling boy in Atlanta. He's seventeen and not a bit like the other boys around here—they're so—so babyish. But Carl's different and mamma says he doesn't get along any too well with his mother and father—his father wants Carl to study insurance and banking and Carl doesn't want to."

"Does he know you're—that you like him so?" asked Mimi.

"Ooh—no!" gasped Hilda. "But he *is* different——" she ended. . . .

That night Mimi told Jean of the things she had seen and heard during the afternoon. To her piquant recital of the things said and done and to the vivid little pictures, each etched so graphically and clearly Jean could see the women and their mannerisms, he listened eagerly.

"And how did Mary seem to like it?" he asked.

"She was right at home! I heard her tell two or three of them she just adored Atlanta—reminded her of her Chicago

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—and so different from that sleepy old New Orleans!” Mimi grimaced. . . .

“I’m happy you’ve found Hilda,” Jean told her. “You need the companionship of young people—when you’re as old as I it won’t be so easy to find somebody whose ideas fit in with your own.”

“How are things going at the office?” asked Mimi, remembering that she in her excitement had almost forgotten him and his affairs.

“About as well as can be expected—better than I thought they would,” he answered. “They’re a fine bunch—very much in earnest—and I suppose I’ll have to admit Mary and her father are right—they do put things over. Mr. Hunter’s the best of the lot—and, well, I suppose in time I’ll get myself fitted into the groove——” he ended lamely.

“You’re whistling in the dark to keep up your courage!” Mimi challenged him. “You’re not happy here and you never will be.”

“Not entirely so, I am afraid, but—well, I’ll be contented after a fashion,” Jean smiled bravely. “I miss the old houses, the old ways. I’d give anything almost to walk once more down to the Basin, to sit in St. Louis cemetery—do you remember the gold and green lizards scampering round, in and out of the vines over the graves, that day we walked and talked there, Mimi? I miss the calmness, the placidity, the smell of the water. Here things are rushing, bustling, matter-of-fact. I feel as if some power has pulled me out of a quiet pool where I was lying on my back floating on the water and thrown me head first into a deadly revolving whirlpool.

“And what are they getting out of all this, these minnows who are squirming and fighting each other?” he demanded with the old gesture of questioning she knew so well. “Here are these coloured people with the gifts from God of laugh-

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ter and song and of creative instincts—do you remember that man who sang as he went past the house our first night in Atlanta?—and what are they doing with it? They are aping the white man—becoming a race of money-grubbers with ledgers and money tills for brains and Shylock hearts.”

“But, papa Jean, they’ve got to do it! They’re living in a world where they must either make money or else perish.”

“No—no—Mimi! You don’t understand what I mean. The whole world’s gone mad over power and wealth. The strongest man wins, not the most decent or the most intelligent or the best. All the old virtues of comradeship and art and literature and philosophy, in short, all the refinements of life, are being swallowed up in this monster, the Machine, we are creating which is slowly but surely making us mere automatons, dancing like marionettes when the machine pulls the strings and bids us prance. I know you’re thinking I sound like a masculine Cassandra—but some day, perhaps long after I’m gone, maybe you’ll think back to this day and agree with me.”

To Mimi most of this was rather baffling—she was glad that Jean obviously did not expect her to answer. It was true that she had been fascinated by the song they had heard, she loved the colourfulness of the life she saw around her and she had noticed that in her few contacts with white people she had felt a certain chill that she was not aware of when with her own people.

“Her own people.” The phrase interested her. In New Orleans she had thought all people were hers—that only individuals mattered. But here there were sharp, unchanging lines which seemed to matter with extraordinary power. This one was white—that one black. Even though the “white” one was swarthy while the “black” one might be as fair as the whitest of the white.

And within the circle of those who were called Negroes she

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found duplications of the lines between the two major groups. She in the few days she had been in Atlanta had heard enough to know there were churches attended in the main only by coloured people who were mulattoes or quadroons, others only by those whose complexions were quite dark. At Mrs. Hunter's the uniform lightness of skin had impressed itself upon her. And when she had sought to make overtures to Mrs. Plummer's girl, Iwilla (Mrs. Plummer had told Mrs. Daquin proudly her daughter had a Biblical name—it was taken from the verse, "I will arise and go unto my Father"), Mrs. Plummer had called her child into the house and Mimi had heard her being scolded: "How many times I got to tell you to leave these yaller children alone? First thing you know, you'll be coming home saying some of them's called you 'black.'"

All this perplexed Mimi. She was too young and inexperienced to know that these people were in large part the victims of a system which made colour and hair texture and race a fetish. Nor did she know how all too frequently opportunity came in a direct ratio to the absence of pigmentation. It was baffling, annoying. And so too were Jean's criticisms of his new environment. Mimi missed the romance of her old home, it is true, but the new scene with all its rawness and lack of beauty intrigued and fascinated her through its vigour and progressiveness. She began to feel a sympathy, at first faint but growing in strength, tinged with pity, for Jean in his unwillingness to adapt himself to newer ways and customs.

Not that she consciously put these into words nor even into tangible thought. She loved Jean too dearly, too wholeheartedly for that, and any criticism of him, real or implied, would have made her miserable for its imputation of disloyalty. No. It was simply that Jean was the follower of an older day, of an age that was passing even in Louisiana, that