

Two  
~~The~~ Letters

Miss Jane lived in the cabin by herself a while before she took up with Joe Pittman. Pittman had been married, but his wife had died and left him with three or four children. Miss Jane and Joe Pittman had known each other a long time before Ned left for Kansas, but Joe Pittman, like everybody else on the place, knowed nothing could come between Miss Jane and Ned. But Ned wasn't out of the State good before Pittman started going to the house.

Now she had to tell Joe Pittman what she had never told anybody else--she couldn't have children. A' old woman on the place had told her that, but she wouldn't believe her--didn't want to believe her--and she went to a doctor in town. The doctor told her when she was a slave she had probably got too many beatings in the wrong place, and this had caused permant damage in her body.

"You got to be careful, even now days, how you whip children," Olive said.

When Joe Pittman asked her to be his wife, she told him what the other woman and the doctor had told her. She looked for Pittman to turn her down, but he said: "Ain't we all been hurt by slavery? If you would just say you would help me raise my other children, I would be satisfied."

"Joe Pittman was a man," Olive said. "That you can say 'bout him."

"Olive, I thought when you left out here, you went home,"  
Grace Turner said.

"Just the toilet," Olive said. "Getting ready to freeze  
out there."

That's how she and Pittman came together. No more than that. They never got married. She didn't believe in church then, and he didn't either. They agreed to live together just like you used to do in slavery. Slaves didn't get married in churches. They jumped over a broom handle and the master pronounced them man and wife. Old Mistress and Young Mistress holding the broom handle up off the floor, and the master telling the slaves to jump. They hold hands and jump. If they were two old people, the young mistress and the old mistress would bend over and hold the broom low to the floor, and the old slaves would step over sprightly. Well, Miss Jane and Pittman didn't think the broom handle was needed; they just agreed to live together long as they wanted each other.

Not long after Miss Jane moved in with Pittman, Pittman told her he wanted to find another place to live. Pittman was sharp with horses, and he was sure he could find a place where he could get more money and be treated better than he was now. Miss Jane agreed with him, but she didn't want leave from there till she had heard from Ned. She didn't want Ned to come back and not find her or write her a letter and she