

"Some coffee?" Miss Emma asked me.

"No, ma'am. Martin said you wanted to see me."

"Sit down, Grant," she said.

I could tell by the way she said it and by the looks and quietness of my aunt and the Reverend Mose that things had not gone well at the jail. I pulled out a chair and sat down facing Miss Emma. My aunt and Reverend Mose sat opposite each other.

"You didn't tell me the truth the other day, did you?" Miss Emma said.

She was a big woman with a big fleshy face, and she tightened her lips as she looked across the table at me.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Miss Emma."

"When you come back from seeing him?"

"Sure, I told you the truth," I said.

"No," she said, and shook her head. Her lips were pressed tight again as she looked across the table at me. "He didn't like the food. He didn't ask about me."

"He did last Friday."

"No," she said. "'Cause I had to hit him today."

Her hands were clasped together as she lowered her head. Reverend Mose reached out and touched one of her arms as he said, "Sister Emma. <sup>Sister Emma</sup> My aunt reached over and touched the other arm and looked at me. That look said that things had not gone very well in Bayonne.



*a couple days later,*

At home later ~~that evening~~, Miss Eloise visited my aunt, and from my room I could hear my aunt telling Miss Eloise what had happened.

They had arrived at the courthouse the usual time, about one, maybe five after. They had gone into the sheriff's office where the chief deputy sat behind the desk. Guidry was not there today. The chief deputy told the young deputy to check the food and search Reverend Mose. The chief deputy called the minister, "Reb'n" instead of "Reverend". His feet were propped upon the desk all the time that Miss Emma, my aunt, and Reverend Mose were in the office.

But the young deputy was nice. He had only casually gone through the food and the clothing, because he knew all the time that he would not find anything. He had even spoken in a pleasant manner while he searched the basket. And he barely patted Reverend Mose's pockets at all. While going down the hall to the jail cell he had even walked side by side with Reverend Mose instead of walking a step or two in front. And when they reached the landing halfway up to the cells he had pretended that he was a little out of breath just because he knew that Miss Emma needed her rest.

According to my aunt, the convicts stretched their hands out between the cell bars and asked for money. Miss Emma told them she didn't have any money, but there was plenty food there, and they could have some after Jefferson had eaten.



My aunt didn't give them anything or promised them anything, she kept a good distance from the cell so they wouldn't grab her. Reverend Mose didn't give them anything either, but he promised to pray for them.

Jefferson was asleep or pretended to be asleep. The deputy rattled the big keys against the jail cell and called his name before opening the cell door. After they had gone inside, the deputy locked the cell again and told them that he would be back within the hour or if they wanted to leave before then, they should just call, and one of the trustees would come for him.

Jefferson lay on the bunk with his back to them, and there was no place for them to sit. But Miss Emma managed to squeeze herself onto a small part of the bunk, leaving most of herself off, according to my aunt, while she touched Jefferson's shoulders and quietly called his name. My aunt and the Reverend Mose stood back watching, the Reverend holding his hat with both hands.

Finally Jefferson turned to look at them--no, not at them, but in that direction. Maybe not even seeing anything--not them, not the wall--nothing. Miss Emma continued to speak his name quietly as she patted him.

"Reverend Mose and Miss Lou both come to see how you fairing."

But he didn't show any recognition, my aunt said. Not even showing that there were other people in the cell or if he had heard Miss Emma at all. Just blankly, my aunt said. Just blankly.



"Brought you something," Miss Emma said. "Some food, and another shirt. A pretty shirt."

He didn't show any sign of hearing or knowing, my aunt told Miss Eloise. Reverend Mose went closer to the bunk and said, "Young man, I ~~PRAY FOR YOU EVERY NIGHT~~. And I knlw the Lord hears me, and is with you. Put all your faith in him, and he will bring you through."

My aunt said that this touched something in him. She said he looked ~~fig~~ up at the minister, rolled his eyes up at ~~him~~ the way an animal, a dog might do if you had just woke him up from a rest, and he didn't feel like getting up and ~~big~~ging you--and he just rolled his eyes to let you know that he had heard. She said what hit her ~~were~~<sup>was</sup> the color of his eyes, reddish-white. Big and reddish-white.

"Come on, eat something for me," Miss Emma said. "I brought all the best things you like."

He was still looking up at the minister, my aunt said. Then he slowly looked at his ~~grand~~<sup>god</sup>mother. He didn't move his head, or if he did, it was just a little. It was his eyes mostly, my aunt said, that moved.

"You brought corn?" his voice said. Not him, my aunt said, just the voice. He didn't show a thing when he said it, she said.

"Corn?" Miss Emma said.

He didn't answer.



"Corn?" Miss Emma asked him again. "Roast nyers? Corn?"

He looked at her, but he didn't ansere. And his eyes were just blank, just blank, my aunt said.

"This ain't roast nyers season, Jefferson," Miss Emma said. "That's in the Spring. In the early Summer. Roast nyers all over now. This is November."

The big reddish eyes just looked at her. Not mocking, my aunt said. No pity, nothing, just looking.

"Corn for a hog," he said.

"Corn for a hog? A hog, Jefferson?" Because she had already forgot, my aunt told Miss Eloise. She had already foorgot that it was a hog they had compared him to at the trial.

Then it hit her. Quick.

"You ain't no hog," she said.

But he kept on looking at her, blankly, like an animal.

"You ain't no h<sup>o</sup>g," Miss Emma said.

"Tho something," he said.

"I' <sup>v</sup> never tho you nothing, Jefferson," Miss Emma said.

"You tho a bone to a dog. Slop to a hog."

"That's all I'm is," he said. He turned away from her.

"I didn't ask to be born."

"Jefferson?" Miss Emma said. "Jefferson?"

He wouldn't answer her.

"Jefferson?" Miss Emma said. "You hear me calling you, Jefferson?"



He wouldn't answer. And she used all her great bulk to pull him over.

"You ain't no hog, you hear me? You ain't no hog."

"That's all I'm is," he said. "Just fattening up to--"  
She slapped him.

Then she fell upon him and cried, my aunt told Miss Eloise. Just cried and cried, my aunt said. My aunt and the minister went to the bunk and tried to pull her away. But she was still slumped over him when the deputy came back to let them go.

At the table, now, Miss Emma looked at my aunt.

"What I done done, Lou?" she asked. "What I done done? What I done done to man and God to deserve this? What I done done, Lou?"

My aunt saw that she was going to cry again, and she got up and patted her on the shoulders. "Em-ma," she said. "Em-ma. The Lord is merciful."

"What I done done?" she was shaksing her head and crying now. "What I done done?"

"Be patient," my aunt said, patting her on the shoulder. "The Lord is merciful."

"What I done done?" she cried. "hat I done done?"

The minister reached out his hand to pat her on the arm. But I did nothing but sit there. I felt like running. I felt like, not getting into my car, not calling Vivvian on the phone, just felt like running. I wanted to run and run and run.



I wanted to run until I was exhausted and fall down in a cold field and dig dirt with my bare hands and lay my face upon the cold earth and just lay there.

*Love & fleshly*

Miss Emma looked up at me, the tears rolling down her face.

"Go back," she said.

"Why me?"

"'Cause somebody go'n do something for me 'fore I die."

"Why me?" I said. "He did ~~in~~ the same thing to me. He said he was a hog to me, too. Why me?"

"You the teacher," my aunt said.

"Somebody go'n do something for me 'fore I die," Miss Emma said. "I mean it. I mean it. Somebody go'n do something for me 'fore I die."

I started to get up.

"And where you think you going?" my aunt said.

"I don't know," I said. "But I'll go ~~now~~ <sup>any</sup> if I stay here, that's for sure."

"You going back up there," my aunt said.

"What for?" I said. I was standing, facing her. "What for? He treated me the same way he treated her. He wants me to feel guilty just as he wants her to feel guilty, well, I'm not feeling guilty. I didn't put him there. I do everything I can to keep people like him from going there. He's not going to make me feel guilty."

*"I want"*

"You going back," she said, patting Miss Emma.



"I'm tired, Tante Lou," I told her. "Do you hear me? I'm tired."

"You think you tireder than she is? You think you tireder than me?"

I looked at her. I looked at her closely. I wanted to take her face with my hands and explain to her. ~~But I held back.~~

"Listen to me, Tante Lou, I'm tired," I said, <sup>with a look on her face.</sup> "I'm very tired. I want to live my own life. I want to be free. Because I know there is freedom. I want this freedom. I have a right to this freedom. Do you understand what I'm saying, Tante Lou? I'm tired of this place. I'm tired of these old cabins, this road, these fields. I want to go where there are lights. I want to go where there is singing and dancing and laughing. I don't hear that here. I need that. And I intend to have that. Do you know what I'm talking about? I don't like being here. I wasn't born to be a teacher. I have tried it, and I'm not good at it. Do you hear what I'm saying? <sup>Yun? Lou?</sup>"

"You going back up there," she said. She hadn't heard a word. <sup>set him in that chair and kill him</sup> ~~"They go'n kill him in that chair--and you going back up there."~~

"I can easily throw a suitcase into the back of that car," I said.

"You going back up there," she said.

"Am I?"

"You going back -up there," she said.



~~I~~ quit. There was no point going on. You don't continue beating your head against a ~~stone~~<sup>brick</sup> wall. You don't keep running up a hill that has no peak. You stop, you rest, you try to get your mind together.

"All right," I said. "All right. I'll go back. But from now on he dances by my ~~own~~ music. I play the fiddle, and he does the dancing. If he wants to play the hog, that's all right with me. If he wants Guidry to keep me out of there, that's better yet."

"He can't hep it," Miss Emma said.

"He better hep it," I ~~said~~<sup>said</sup>. "I'm not about to feel guilty for his being <sup>up</sup> there."

I gathered up my books and papers and left them.