

We followed him down a long, dark corridor, passing offices with open doors, and bathrooms for white ladies and white men. It said it on the door, White Ladies ~~Only~~, White Men ~~Only~~. At the end of the corridor we had to go up a set of stairs. The stairs were made of steel. There were about six steps, ^hten a landing, then a sharp turn, and another six steps. Then we were on the floor where the prisoners were quartered. The white prisoners were also on this floor, but they were separated by a large room so the two races could not see each other. There were six or eight cells for black prisoners, with two bunks to each cell. Half of the cells were empty, the others had one or two prisoners in them. The prisoners reached their hands out between the bars and asked for cigarettes or money. Miss Emma stopped to talk to them. She told them she didn't have any money, but she had brought some food for Jefferson, and if there was anything left, she would give it to them. They asked me for money, and I gave them the fifty cents that I had.

There was an empty cell between Jefferson's and the rest of the prisoners. He was in the cell at the end of the cell block. He was lying on the bunk when we came up. The deputy unlocked the cell door for us, and Miss Emma and I went in. He told us that he would have to lock us in, and that he would return in forty-five minutes. Miss Emma thanked him, and he locked the door and left. Jefferson was lying on his bunk, looking up at the ceiling. He didn't look at us once.

"How you feel, Jefferson?" Miss Emma asked him.

He didn't answer, he stared up at the ceiling. The cell was roughly six by ten, give or take a few inches either way. In the cell was a metal bunk covered by a thin mattress and a woolen Army blanket; a toilet without seat or toilet paper; a face bowl, brownish from residue and grime; a small metal shelf upon which was a pan, a tin cup and a table spoon. A single light bulb hung over the center of the cell, and at the far end of the cell was a barred window which looked out onto a sycamore tree behind the courthouse. I could see the sunlight on some of the upper leaves. But the window was too high to see any other buildings or the ground.

"I come to see you and brung you something," Miss Emma said.

We were standing, ^{becaul} There was no place to sit.

"You been all right?" she asked him again.

He lay there looking up at the ceiling. His hair had grown out since the trial, but I was sure he had not combed it once. I told myself that I would bring him a comb next time I came.

"I brought Professor Wiggins," Miss Emma said. "I brought you some fried chicken, some good old yams, and I brought you some tea cakes, too."

He looked up at the ceiling.

"Ain't you go'n ask me to sit down, Jefferson?"

He looked up at the ceiling, but he wasn't seeing the ceiling.

Miss Emma set the handbag of clothes and the basket of food on the floor and sat down on the bunk beside him. I should say that she sat as much of herself on the bunk as she could. About half, I would say. She passed her hand over his forehead and over his hair.

"Ain't you go'n speak to me, Jefferson?" she asked.

He remained quiet. She passed her hand over his face and over his hair.

"You want just talk to me? You want Professor Wiggins to leave?"

He didn't answer.

"You want me to go, and *you just talk to* ~~just you and~~ Professor Wiggins [?] *"* ~~can stay?"~~

He still did not answer her.

She looked up at me. She was ready to cry. And I wished I was somewhere else.

"Hand me that basket," she said.

I passed her the basket, and she took out a piece of chicken wrapped in brown paper. She unwrapped the drumbstick and held it before Jefferson.

"Look what I brought you," she said. "I knowed how much you like my fried chicken. Brought you some yams and some teacakes, too. Ain't you go'n try some of it?"

"It doan matter," I heard him say. He was looking up at the ceiling.

"What doan matter?"

He didn't answer.

"What doan matter, Jefferson?"

"Nothing doan matter," he said, looking up at the ceiling but not seeing ~~at~~ *the ceiling*.

"It matter to me, Jefferson," she said. "You matter to me."

He looked up at the ceiling, not seeing it.

"Jefferson?"

"Chicken, dirt, it doan matter," he said.

"Yeah, it do, Jefferson. Yeah, it do. Dirt?"

"All the same," he said. "It doan matter."

"My chicken?" she said. "I'm tasting it right now."

She tasted it. "You always liked my chicken. Every Sunday."

He was quiet.

"You like a yam?" she asked him.

He didn't answer her.

"You want a tea cake? You don't have to eat no chicken if you don't want. You don't have to eat no old yam, neither. But I know how much you like my tea cakes. I didn't bring no clabber, but--Jefferson?"

"When they go'n do it? Tomorrow?"

"Do what, Jefferson?"

He was quiet, looking up at the ceiling, but not seeing it.

"What, Jefferson?"

He turned toward her. No, his body didn't turn, just his head turned a little. His eyes did most the turning. He looked at her a long moment, as though he did not know who she was, or what she was doing there. Then he looked at me. You know what I'm talking about, don't you? his eyes said. They were big brown eyes, the white was too reddish. You know, don't you? his eyes said again. I looked back at him. My eyes would not dare answer him. But his eyes knew that my eyes knew.

"You with 'em?" he asked me.

"With who?" I said.

His eyes mocked me. They were big brown eyes, and the white was too reddish, and he had been thinking too much these past few weeks, and the eyes mocked me.

"You the one?" he asked me.

"The one for what?" I said.

His big brown, reddish-white eyes mocked me.

"Go'n jeck ~~the~~^{that} switch?" *he said, looking at me.*

"What switch?" Miss Emma said.

He was looking at me, not at her. His eyes told me that I knew what switch he was talking about.

"That's Professor Wiggins, your teacher--what switch?" she asked.

He turned his head and began staring up at the ceiling again.

The deputy came back and stood just outside the cell. Miss Emma still sat on the bunk. But now Jefferson had turned his back to her and was facing the grey concrete wall. Miss Emma passed her hand over his hair again, then she pushed herself up from the bunk.

"I'm leaving, Jefferson," she said. "I'll come back soon."

The deputy opened the cell door to let us out.

"Can I leave the food?" Miss Emma asked him.

"Sure," the deputy said.

"If he doan eat it all, can you give it to the rest of them children?"

"Sure," the deputy said.

He locked the cell door.

"I'm leaving, Jefferson," Miss Emma said, looking back into the cell.

He faced the grey concrete wall and didn't answer her.

"Oh, Lord, Jesus," she cried. "Oh, Lord, Jesus, stand by, stand by."

The deputy and I exchanged glances. With his eyes and a nod he told me to put my arms round her to help her. Which I did.