

Appendix

First two chapters from Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eye Were Watching God*¹

1

Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men.

Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly.

So the beginning of this was a woman and she had come back from burying the dead. Not the dead of sick and ailing with friends at the pillow and the feet. She had come back from the sodden and the bloated; the sudden dead, their eyes flung wide open in judgment.

The people all saw her come because it was sundown. The sun was gone, but he had left his footprints in the sky. It was the time for sitting on porches beside the road. It was the time to hear things and talk. These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and lesser things. They passed nations through their mouths. They sat in judgment.

Seeing the woman as she was made them remember the envy they had stored up from other times. So they chewed up the back parts of their minds and swallowed with relish. They made burning statements with questions, and killing tools out of laughs. It was mass cruelty. A mood come alive. Words walking without masters; walking altogether like harmony in a song.

"What she doin' coming back here in dem overhalls? Can't she find no dress to put on?—Where's dat blue satin dress she left here in?—Where all dat money her husband took and died and left her?—What dat ole forty year ole 'oman doin' wid her hair swingin' down her back lak some young gal?—Where she left dat young lad of a boy she went off here wid?—Thought she was going to marry?—Where he left her?—What he done wid all her money?—Betcha he off wid some gal so young she ain't even got no hairs—why she don't stay in her class?—"

When she got to where they were she turned her face on the bander log and spoke. They scrambled a noisy "good evenin' " and left their mouths setting open and their ears full of hope.

¹ This text corresponds with the 2018 publication: Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York: Virago Press, 2018) 1-23.

Her speech was pleasant enough, but she kept walking straight on to her gate. The porch couldn't talk for looking.

The men noticed her firm buttocks like she had grapefruits in her hip pockets; the great rope of black hair swinging to her waist and unraveling in the wind like a plume; then her pugnacious breasts trying to bore holes in her shirt. They, the men, were saving with the mind what they lost with the eye. The women took the faded shirt and muddy overalls and laid them away for remembrance. It was a weapon against her strength and if it turned out of no significance, still it was a hope that she might fall to their level some day.

But nobody moved, nobody spoke, nobody even thought to swallow spit until after her gate slammed behind her. Pearl Stone opened her mouth and laughed real hard because she didn't know what else to do. She fell all over Mrs. Sumpkins while she laughed. Mrs. Sumpkins snorted violently and sucked her teeth.

"Humph! Y'all let her worry yuh. You ain't like me. Ah ain't got her to study 'bout. If she ain't got manners enough to stop and let folks know how she been makin' out, let her g'wan!"

"She ain't even worth talkin' after," Lulu Moss drawled through her nose. "She sits high, but she looks low. Dat's what Ah say 'bout dese ole women runnin' after young boys."

Pheoby Watson hitched her rocking chair forward before she spoke. "Well, nobody don't know if it's anything to tell or not. Me, Ah'm her best friend, and Ah don't know."

"Maybe us don't know into things lak you do, but we all know how she went 'way from here and us sho seen her come back. 'Tain't no use in your tryin' to cloak no ole woman lak Janie Starks, Pheoby, friend or no friend."

"At dat she ain't so ole as some of y'all dat's talking."

"She's way past forty to my knowledge, Pheoby."

"No more'n forty at de outside."

"She's 'way too old for a boy like Tea Cake."

"Tea Cake ain't been no boy for some time. He's round thirty his ownself."

"Don't keer what it was, she could stop and say a few words with us. She act like we done done something to her," Pearl Stone complained. "She de one been doin' wrong."

"You mean, you mad 'cause she didn't stop and tell us all her business. Anyhow, what you ever know her to do so bad as y'all make out? The worst thing Ah ever knowed her to do was taking a few years offa her age and dat ain't never harmed nobody. Y'all makes me tired. De way you talkin' you'd think de folks in dis town didn't do nothin' in de bed 'cept praise de Lawd. You have to 'scuse me, 'cause Ah'm bound to go take her some supper." Pheoby stood up sharply.

“Don’t mind us,” Lulu smiled, “just go right ahead, us can mind yo’ house for you till you git back. Mah supper is done. You bettah go see how she feel. You kin let de rest of us know.”

“Lawd,” Pearl agreed, “Ah done scorched-up dat lil meat and bread too long to talk about. Ah kin stay ‘way from home long as Ah please. Mah husband ain’t fussy.”

“Oh, er, Pheoby, if youse ready to go, Ah could walk over dere wid you,” Mrs. Sumpkins volunteered. “It’s sort of duskin’ down dark. De booger man might ketch yuh.”

“Naw, Ah thank yuh. Nothin’ couldn’t ketch me dese few steps Ah’m goin’. Anyhow mah husband tell me say no first class booger would have me. If she got anything to tell yuh, you’ll hear it.”

Pheoby hurried on off with a covered bowl in her hands. She left the porch pelting her back with unasked questions. They hoped the answers were cruel and strange. When she arrived at the place, Pheoby Watson didn’t go in by the front gate and down the palm walk to the front door. She walked around the fence corner and went in the intimate gate with her heaping plate of mulatto rice. Janie must be round that side.

She found her sitting on the steps of the back porch with the lamps all filled and the chimneys cleaned.

“Hello, Janie, how you comin’?”

“Aw, pretty good, Ah’m tryin’ to soak some uh de tiredness and de dirt outa mah feet.” She laughed a little.

“Ah see you is. Gal, you sho looks *good*. You looks like youse yo’ own daughter.” They both laughed. “Even wid dem overhalls on, you shows yo’ womanhood.”

“G’wan! G’wan! You must think Ah brought yuh somethin’. When Ah ain’t brought home a thing but mahself.”

“Dat’s a gracious plenty. Yo’ friends wouldn’t want nothin’ better.”

“Ah takes dat flattery offa you, Pheoby, ‘cause Ah know it’s from de heart.” Janie extended her hand. “Good Lawd, Pheoby! ain’t you never goin’ tuh gimme dat lil rations you brought me? Ah ain’t had a thing on mah stomach today exceptin’ mah hand.” They both laughed easily. “Give it here and have a seat.”

“Ah knowed you’d be hongry. No time to be huntin’ stove wood after dark. Mah mulatto rice ain’t so good dis time. Not enough bacon grease, but Ah reckon it’ll kill hongry.”

“Ah’ll tell you in a minute,” Janie said, lifting the cover. “Gal, it’s *too* good! you switches a mean fanny round in a kitchen.”

“Aw, dat ain’t much to eat, Janie. But Ah’m liable to have something sho nuff good tomorrow, ‘cause you done come.”

Janie ate heartily and said nothing. The varicolored cloud dust that the sun had stirred up in the sky was settling by slow degrees.

“Here, Pheoby, take yo’ ole plate. Ah ain’t got a bit of use for a empty dish. Dat grub sho come in handy.”

Pheoby laughed at her friend’s rough joke. “Youse just as crazy as you ver was.”

“Hand me dat wash-rag on dat chair by you, honey. Lemme scrub mah feet.” She took the cloth and rubbed vigorously. Laughter came to her from the big road.

“Well, Ah see Mouth-Almighty is still sittin’ in de same place. And Ah reckon they got me up in they mouth now.”

“Yes indeed. You know if you pass some people and don’t speak tuh suit ‘em dey got tuh go way back in yo’ life and see whut you ever done. They know mo’ ‘bout yuh than you do yo’ self. An envious heart makes a treacherous ear. They done ‘heard’ ‘bout you just what they hope done happened.”

“If God don’t think no mo’ ‘bout ‘em then Ah do, they’s a lost ball in de high grass.”

“Ah hears what they say ‘cause they just will collect round mah porch ‘cause it’s on de big road. Mah husband git so sick of ‘em sometime he makes ‘em all git for home.”

“Sam is right too. They just wearin’ out yo’ sittin’ chairs.”

“Yeah, Sam say most of ‘em goes to church so they’ll be sure to rise in Judgment. Dat’s de day dat every secret is s’posed to be made known. They wants to be there and hear it *all*.”

“Sam is too crazy! You can’t stop laughin’ when youse round him.”

“Uuh hunh. He says he aims to be there hissself so he can find out who stole his corn-cob pipe.”

“Pheoby, dat Sam of your’n just won’t quit! Crazy thing!”

“Most of dese zigaboos is so het up over yo’ business till they liable to hurry theyself to Judgment to find out about you if they don’t soon know. You better make haste and tell ‘em ‘bout you and Tea Cake gittin’ married, and if he taken all yo’ money and went off wid some young gal, and where at he is now and where at is all yo’ clothes dat you got to come back here in overhalls.”

“Ah don’t mean to bother wid tellin’ ‘em nothin’, Pheoby. ‘Tain’t worth de trouble. You can tell ‘em what Ah say if you wants to. Dat’s just de same as me ‘cause mah tongue is in mah friend’s mouf.”

“If you so desire Ah’ll tell ‘em what you tell me to tell ‘em.”

“To start off wid, people like dem wastes up too much time puttin’ they mouf on things they don’t know nothin’ about. Now they got to look into me loving Tea Cake and see whether it

was done right or not! They don't know if life is a mess of corn-meal dumplings, and if love is a bed-quilt!"

"So long as they get a name to gnaw on they don't care whose it is, and what about, 'specially if they can make it sound like evil."

"If they wants to see and know, why they don't come kiss and be kissed? Ah could then sit down and tell 'em things. Ah been a delegate to de big 'ssociation of life. Yessuh! De Grand Lodge, de big convention of livin' is just where Ah been dis year and a half y'all ain't seen me."

They sat there in the fresh young darkness close together. Pheoby eager to feel and do through Janie, but hating to show her zest for fear it might be thought mere curiosity. Janie full of that oldest human longing—selfrevelation. Pheoby held her tongue for a long time, but she couldn't help moving her feet. So Janie spoke.

"They don't need to worry about me and my overhalls long as Ah still got nine hundred dollars in de bank. Tea Cake got me into wearing 'em— following behind him. Tea Cake ain't wasted up no money of mine, and he ain't left me for no young gal, neither. He give me every consolation in de world. He'd tell 'em so too, if he was here. If he wasn't gone."

Pheoby dilated all over with eagerness, "Tea Cake gone?"

"Yeah, Pheoby, Tea Cake is gone. And dat's de only reason you see me back here—cause Ah ain't got nothing to make me happy no more where Ah was at. Down in the Everglades there, down on the muck."

"It's hard for me to understand what you mean, de way you tell it. And then again Ah'm hard of understandin' at times."

"Naw, 'tain't nothin' lak you might think. So 'tain't no use in me telling you somethin' unless Ah give you de understandin' to go 'long wid it. Unless you see de fur, a mink skin ain't no different from a coon hide. Looka heah, Pheoby, is Sam waitin' on you for his supper?"

"It's all ready and waitin'. If he ain't got sense enough to eat it, dat's his hard luck."

"Well then, we can set right where we is and talk. Ah got the house all opened up to let dis breeze get a little catchin'.

"Pheoby, we been kissin'-friends for twenty years, so Ah depend on you for a good thought. And Ah'm talking to you from dat standpoint."

Time makes everything old so the kissing, young darkness became a monstropolous old thing while Janie talked.

Janie saw her life like a great tree in leaf with the things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Dawn and doom was in the branches.

“Ah know exactly what Ah got to tell yuh, but it’s hard to know where to start at.

“Ah ain’t never seen mah papa. And Ah didn’t know ‘im if Ah did. Mah mama neither. She was gone from round dere long before Ah wuz big enough tuh know. Mah grandma raised me. Mah grandma and de white folks she worked wid. She had a house out in de back-yard and dat’s where Ah wuz born. They was quality white folks up dere in West Florida. Named Washburn. She had four gran’chillun on de place and all of us played together and dat’s how come Ah never called mah Grandma nothin’ but Nanny, ‘cause dat’s what everybody on de place called her. Nanny used to ketch us in our devilment and lick every youngun on de place and Mis’ Washburn did de same. Ah reckon dey never hit us ah lick amiss ‘cause dem three boys and us two girls wuz pretty aggravatin’, Ah speck.

“Ah was wid dem white chillun so much till Ah didn’t know Ah wuzn’t white till Ah was round six years old. Wouldn’t have found it out then, but a man come long takin’ pictures and without askin’ anybody, Shelby, dat was de oldest boy, he told him to take us. Round a week later de man brought de picture for Mis’ Washburn to see and pay him which she did, then give us all a good lickin’.

“So when we looked at de picture and everybody got pointed out there wasn’t nobody left except a real dark little girl with long hair standing by Eleanor. Dat’s where Ah wuz s’posed to be, but Ah couldn’t recognize dat dark chile as me. So Ah ast, ‘where is me? Ah don’t see me.’

“Everybody laughed, even Mr. Washburn. Miss Nellie, de Mama of de chillun who come back home after her husband dead, she pointed to de dark one and said, ‘Dat’s you, Alphabet, don’t you know yo’ ownself?’

“Dey all useter call me Alphabet ‘cause so many people had done named me different names. Ah looked at de picture a long time and seen it was mah dress and mah hair so Ah said:

““Aw, aw! Ah’m colored!”

“Den dey all laughed real hard. But before Ah seen de picture Ah thought Ah wuz just like de rest.

“Us lived dere havin’ fun till de chillun at school got to teasin’ me ‘bout livin’ in de white folks’ back-yard. Dere wuz uh knotty head gal name Mayrella dat useter git mad every time she look at me. Mis’ Washburn useter dress me up in all de clothes her gran’chillun didn’t need no mo’ which still wuz better’n whut de rest uh de colored chillun had. And then she useter put hair ribbon on mah head fuh me tuh wear. Dat useter rile Mayrella uh lot. So she would pick

at me all de time and put some others up tuh do de same. They'd push me 'way from de ring plays and make out they couldn't play wid nobody dat lived on premises. Den they'd tell me not to be takin' on over mah looks 'cause they mama told 'em 'bout de hound dawgs huntin' mah papa all night long. 'Bout Mr. Washburn and de sheriff puttin' de bloodhounds on de trail tuh ketch mah papa for whut he done tuh mah mama. Dey didn't tell about how he wuz seen tryin' tuh git in touch wid mah mama later on so he could marry her. Naw, dey didn't talk dat part of it atall. Dey made it sound real bad so as tuh crumple mah feathers. None of 'em didn't even remember whut his name wuz, but dey all knowed de bloodhound part by heart. Nanny didn't love tuh see me wid mah head hung down, so she figgered it would be mo' better fuh me if us had uh house. She got de land and everything and then Mis' Washburn helped out uh whole heap wid things."

Pheoby's hungry listening helped Janie to tell her story. So she went on thinking back to her young years and explaining them to her friend in soft, easy phrases while all around the house, the night time put on flesh and blackness.

She thought awhile and decided that her conscious life had commenced at Nanny's gate. On a late afternoon Nanny had called her to come inside the house because she had spied Janie letting Johnny Taylor kiss her over the gatepost.

It was a spring afternoon in West Florida. Janie had spent most of the day under a blossoming pear tree in the back-yard. She had been spending every minute that she could steal from her chores under that tree for the last three days. That was to say, ever since the first tiny bloom had opened. It had called her to come and gaze on a mystery. From barren brown stems to glistening leaf-buds; from the leaf-buds to snowy virginity of bloom. It stirred her tremendously. How? Why? It was like a flute song forgotten in another existence and remembered again. What? How? Why? This singing she heard that had nothing to do with her ears. The rose of the world was breathing out smell. It followed her through all her waking moments and caressed her in her sleep. It connected itself with other vaguely felt matters that had struck her outside observation and buried themselves in her flesh. Now they emerged and quested about her consciousness.

She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dustbearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage! She had

been summoned to behold a revelation. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid.

After a while she got up from where she was and went over the little garden field entire. She was seeking confirmation of the voice and vision, and everywhere she found and acknowledged answers. A personal answer for all other creations except herself. She felt an answer seeking her, but where? When? How? She found herself at the kitchen door and stumbled inside. In the air of the room were flies tumbling and singing, marrying and giving in marriage. When she reached the narrow hallway she was reminded that her grandmother was home with a sick headache. She was lying across the bed asleep so Janie tipped on out of the front door. Oh to be a pear tree—any tree in bloom! With kissing bees singing of the beginning of the world! She was sixteen. She had glossy leaves and bursting buds and she wanted to struggle with life but it seemed to elude her. Where were the singing bees for her? Nothing on the place nor in her grandma's house answered her. She searched as much of the world as she could from the top of the front steps and then went on down to the front gate and leaned over to gaze up and down the road. Looking, waiting, breathing short with impatience. Waiting for the world to be made. Through pollinated air she saw a glorious being coming up the road. In her former blindness she had known him as shiftless Johnny Taylor, tall and lean. That was before the golden dust of pollen had beglamored his rags and her eyes.

In the last stages of Nanny's sleep, she dreamed of voices. Voices far-off but persistent, and gradually coming nearer. Janie's voice. Janie talking in whispery snatches with a male voice she couldn't quite place. That brought her wide awake. She bolted upright and peered out of the window and saw Johnny Taylor lacerating her Janie with a kiss.

“Janie!”

The old woman's voice was so lacking in command and reproof, so full of crumbling dissolution,—that Janie half believed that Nanny had not seen her. So she extended herself outside of her dream and went inside of the house. That was the end of her childhood.

Nanny's head and face looked like the standing roots of some old tree that had been torn away by storm. Foundation of ancient power that no longer mattered. The cooling palma christi leaves that Janie had bound about her grandma's head with a white rag had wilted down and become part and parcel of the woman. Her eyes didn't bore and pierce. They diffused and melted Janie, the room and the world into one comprehension.

“Janie, youse uh ‘oman, now, so—”

“Naw, Nanny, naw Ah ain't no real ‘oman yet.”

The thought was too new and heavy for Janie. She fought it away.

Nanny closed her eyes and nodded a slow, weary affirmation many times before she gave it voice.

“Yeah, Janie, youse got yo’ womanhood on yuh. So Ah mout ez well tell yuh whut Ah been savin’ up for uh spell. Ah wants to see you married right away.”

“Me, married? Naw, Nanny, no ma’am! Whut Ah know ‘bout uh husband?”

“Whut Ah seen just now is plenty for me, honey, Ah don’t want no trashy nigger, no breath-and-britches, lak Johnny Taylor usin’ yo’ body to wipe his foots on.”

Nanny’s words made Janie’s kiss across the gatepost seem like a manure pile after a rain.

“Look at me, Janie. Don’t set dere wid yo’ head hung down. Look at yo’ ole grandma!” Her voice began snagging on the prongs of her feelings. “Ah don’t want to be talkin’ to you lak dis. Fact is Ah done been on mah knees to mah Maker many’s de time askin’ please—for Him not to make de burden too heavy for me to bear.”

“Nanny, Ah just—Ah didn’t mean nothin’ bad.”

“Dat’s what makes me skeered. You don’t mean no harm. You don’t even know where harm is at. Ah’m ole now. Ah can’t be always guidin’ yo’ feet from harm and danger. Ah wants to see you married right away.”

“Who Ah’m goin’ tuh marry off-hand lak dat? Ah don’t know nobody.”

“De Lawd will provide. He know Ah done bore de burden in de heat uh de day. Somebody done spoke to me ‘bout you long time ago. Ah ain’t said nothin’ ‘cause dat wasn’t de way Ah placed you. Ah wanted yuh to school out and pick from a higher bush and a sweeter berry. But dat ain’t yo’ idea, Ah see.”

“Nanny, who—who dat been askin’ you for me?”

“Brother Logan Killicks. He’s a good man, too.”

“Naw, Nanny, no ma’am! Is dat whut he been hangin’ round here for? He look like some ole skullhead in de grave yard.”

The older woman sat bolt upright and put her feet to the floor, and thrust back the leaves from her face.

“So you don’t want to marry off decent like, do yuh? You just wants to hug and kiss and feel around with first one man and then another, huh? You wants to make me suck de same sorrow yo’ mama did, eh? Mah ole head ain’t gray enough. Mah back ain’t bowed enough to suit yuh!”

The vision of Logan Killicks was desecrating the pear tree, but Janie didn’t know how to tell Nanny that. She merely hunched over and pouted at the floor.

“Janie.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“You answer me when Ah speak. Don’t you set dere poutin’ wid me after all Ah done went through for you!”

She slapped the girl’s face violently, and forced her head back so that their eyes met in struggle. With her hand uplifted for the second blow she saw the huge tear that welled up from Janie’s heart and stood in each eye. She saw the terrible agony and the lips tightened down to hold back the cry and desisted. Instead she brushed back the heavy hair from Janie’s face and stood there suffering and loving and weeping internally for both of them.

“Come to yo’ Grandma, honey. Set in her lap lak yo’ use tuh. Yo’ Nanny wouldn’t harm a hair uh yo’ head. She don’t want nobody else to do it neither if she kin help it. Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it’s some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don’t know nothin’ but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don’t tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see. Ah been prayin’ fuh it tuh be different wid you. Lawd, Lawd, Lawd!”

For a long time she sat rocking with the girl held tightly to her sunken breast. Janie’s long legs dangled over one arm of the chair and the long braids of her hair swung low on the other side. Nanny half sung, half sobbed a running chant-prayer over the head of the weeping girl.

“Lawd have mercy! It was a long time on de way but Ah reckon it had to come. Oh Jesus! Do, Jesus! Ah done de best Ah could.”

Finally, they both grew calm.

“Janie, how long you been ‘lowin’ Johnny Taylor to kiss you?”

“Only dis one time, Nanny. Ah don’t love him at all. Whut made me do it is—oh, Ah don’t know.”

“Thank yuh, Massa Jesus.”

“Ah ain’t gointuh do it no mo’, Nanny. Please don’t make me marry Mr. Killicks.”

“ ‘Tain’t Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have, baby, it’s protection. Ah ain’t gittin’ ole, honey. Ah’m done ole. One mornin’ soon, now, de angel wid de sword is gointuh stop by here. De day and de hour is hid from me, but it won’t be long. Ah ast de Lawd when you was uh infant in mah arms to let me stay here till you got grown. He done spared me to see de day. Mah daily prayer now is tuh let dese golden moments rolls on a few days longer till Ah see you safe in life.”

“Lemme wait, Nanny, please, jus’ a lil bit mo’.”

“Don’t think Ah don’t feel wid you, Janie, ‘cause Ah do. Ah couldn’t love yuh no more if Ah had uh felt yo’ birth pains mahself. Fact uh de matter, Ah loves yuh a whole heap more’n Ah do yo’ mama, de one Ah did birth. But you got to take in consideration you ain’t no everyday chile like most of ‘em. You ain’t got no papa, you might jus’ as well say no mama, for de good she do yuh. You ain’t got nobody but me. And mah head is ole and tilted towards de grave. Neither can you stand alone by yo’self. De thought uh you bein’ kicked around from pillar tuh post is uh hurtin’ thing. Every tear you drop squeezes a cup uh blood outa mah heart. Ah got tuh try and do for you befo’ mah head is cold.”

A sobbing sigh burst out of Janie. The old woman answered her with little soothing pats of the hand.

“You know, honey, us colored folks is branches without roots and that makes things come round in queer ways. You in particular. Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn’t for me to fulfill my dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do. Dat’s one of de hold-backs of slavery. But nothing can’t stop you from wishin’. You can’t beat nobody down so low till you can rob ‘em of they will. Ah didn’t want to be used for a work-ox and a brood-sow and Ah didn’t want mah daughter used dat way neither. It sho wasn’t mah will for things to happen lak they did. Ah even hated de way you was born. But, all de same Ah said thank God, Ah got another chance. Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored women sittin’ on high, but they wasn’t no pulpit for me. Freedom found me wid a baby daughter in mah arms, so Ah said Ah’d take a broom and a cook-pot and throw up a highway through de wilderness for her. She would expound what Ah felt. But somehow she got lost offa de highway and next thing Ah knowed here you was in de world. So whilst Ah was tendin’ you of nights Ah said Ah’d save de text for you. Ah been waitin’ a long time, Janie, but nothin’ Ah been through ain’t too much if you just take a stand on highground lak Ah dreamed.”

Old Nanny sat there rocking Janie like an infant and thinking back and back. Mind-pictures brought feelings, and feelings dragged out dramas from the hollows of her heart.

“Dat mornin’ on de big plantation close to Savannah, a rider come in a gallop tellin’ ‘bout Sherman takin’ Atlanta. Marse Robert’s son had done been kilt at Chickamauga. So he grabbed his gun and straddled his best horse and went off wid de rest of de gray-headed men and young boys to drive de Yankees back into Tennessee.

“They was all cheerin’ and cryin’ and shoutin’ for de men dat was ridin’ off. Ah couldn’t see nothin’ cause yo’ mama wasn’t but a week old, and Ah was flat uh mah back. But pretty soon he let on he forgot somethin’ and run into mah cabin and made me let down mah hair for de last time. He sorta wropped his hand in it, pulled mah big toe, lak he always done, and was

gone after de rest lak lightnin'. Ah heard 'em give one last whoop for him. Then de big house and de quarters got sober and silent.

"It was de cool of de evenin' when Mistis come walkin' in mah door. She throwed de door wide open and stood dere lookin' at me outa her eyes and her face. Look lak she been livin' through uh hundred years in January without one day of spring. She come stood over me in de bed.

" 'Nanny, Ah come to see that baby uh yourn.'

"Ah tried not to feel de breeze off her face, but it got so cold in dere dat Ah was freezin' to death under the kivvers. So Ah couldn't move right away lak Ah aimed to. But Ah knowed Ah had to make haste and do it.

" 'You better git dat kivver offa dat youngun and dat quick!' she clashed at me. 'Look lak you don't know who is Mistis on dis plantation, Madam. But Ah aims to show you.'

"By dat time I had done managed tuh unkivver mah baby enough for her to see de head and face.

" 'Nigger, whut's yo' baby doin' wid gray eyes and yaller hair?' She begin tuh slap mah jaws ever which a'way. Ah never felt the fust ones 'cause Ah wuz too busy gittin' de kivver back over mah chile. But dem last lick burnt me lak fire. Ah had too many feelin's tuh tell which one tuh follow so Ah didn't cry and Ah didn't do nothin' else. But then she kept on astin me how come mah baby look white. She asted me dat maybe twentyfive or thirty times, lak she got tuh sayin' dat and couldn't help herself. So Ah told her, 'Ah don't know nothin' but what Ah'm told tuh do, 'cause Ah ain't nothin' but uh nigger and uh slave.'

"Instead of pacifyin' her lak Ah thought, look lak she got madder. But Ah reckon she was tired and wore out 'cause she didn't hit me no more. She went to de foot of de bed and wiped her hands on her handksher. 'Ah wouldn't dirty mah hands on yuh. But first thing in de mornin' de overseer will take you to de whippin' post and tie you down on yo' knees and cut de hide offa yo' yaller back. One hundred lashes wid a raw-hide on yo' bare back. Ah'll have you whipped till de blood run down to yo' heels! Ah mean to count de licks mahself. And if it kills you Ah'll stand de loss. Anyhow, as soon as dat brat is a month old Ah'm going to sell it offa dis place.'

"She flounced on off and let her wintertime wid me. Ah knowed mah body wasn't healed, but Ah couldn't consider dat. In de black dark Ah wrapped mah baby de best Ah knowed how and made it to de swamp by de river. Ah knowed de place was full uh moccasins and other bitin' snakes, but Ah was more skeered uh whut was behind me. Ah hide in dere day and night and suckled de baby every time she start to cry, for fear somebody might hear her and Ah'd git

found. Ah ain't sayin' uh friend or two didn't feel mah care. And den de Good Lawd seen to it dat Ah wasn't taken. Ah don't see how come mah milk didn't kill mah chile, wid me so skeered and worried all de time. De noise uh de owls skeered me; de limbs of dem cypress trees took to crawlin' and movin' round after dark, and two three times Ah heered panthers prowlin' round. But nothin' never hurt me 'cause de Lawd knowed how it was.

"Den, one night Ah heard de big guns boomin' lak thunder. It kept up all night long. And de next mornin' Ah could see uh big ship at a distance and a great stirrin' round. So Ah wrapped Leafy up in moss and fixed her good in a tree and picked mah way on down to de landin'. The men was all in blue, and Ah heard people say Sherman was comin' to meet de boats in Savannah, and all of us slaves was free. So Ah run got mah baby and got in quotation wid people and found a place Ah could stay.

"But it was a long time after dat befo' de Big Surrender at Richmond. Den de big bell ring in Atlanta and all de men in gray uniforms had to go to Moultrie, and bury their swords in de ground to show they was never to fight about slavery no mo'. So den we knowed we was free.

"Ah wouldn't marry nobody, though Ah could have uh heap uh times, cause Ah didn't want nobody mistreating mah baby. So Ah got with some good white people and come down here in West Florida to work and make de sun shine on both sides of de street for Leafy.

"Mah Madam help me wid her just lak she been doin' wid you. Ah put her in school when it got so it was a school to put her in. Ah was 'spectin' to make a school teacher outa her.

"But one day she didn't come home at de usual time and Ah waited and waited, but she never come all dat night. Ah took a lantern and went round askin' everybody but nobody ain't seen her. De next mornin' she come crawlin' in on her hands and knees. A sight to see. Dat school teacher had done hid her in de woods all night long, and he had done raped mah baby and run on off just before day.

"She was only seventeen, and somethin' lak dat to happen! Lawd a'mussy! Look lak Ah kin see it all over again. It was a long time before she was well, and by dat time we knowed you was on de way. And after you was born she took to drinkin' likker and stayin' out nights. Couldn't git her to stay here and nowhere else. Lawd knows where she is right now. She ain't dead, 'cause Ah'd know it by mah feelings, but sometimes Ah wish she was at rest.

"And, Janie, maybe it wasn't much, but Ah done de best Ah kin by you. Ah raked and scraped and bought dis lil piece uh land so you wouldn't have to stay in de white folks' yard and tuck yo' head befo' other chillun at school. Dat was all right when you was little. But when you got big enough to understand things, Ah wanted you to look upon yo'self. Ah don't want yo' feathers always crumpled by folks throwin' up things in yo' face. And Ah can't die easy

thinkin' maybe de menfolks white or black is makin' a spit cup outa you: Have some sympathy fuh me. Put me down easy, Janie, Ah'm a cracked plate."