

Introduction

World War I was alternately referred to as “the war to end all wars” and “the Great War,” a defining event in modernity whose mechanized and military brutality supposedly promised what President Woodrow Wilson called a “new freedom.” Beginning in Austria-Hungary in 1914 and ending in 1918, the conflict altered the lives of 70 million people worldwide, including 60 million Europeans. In four years, nine million people had been killed, victims of the first war of modern technology in which poison gas and machine guns made obsolete the old rules of military engagement and strategy. Airplanes lifted reconnaissance and skirmishes among the clouds. Trenches produced stalemates and quagmires on land. At war’s end, the Treaty of Versailles was meant to ensure that a war of such blood and attrition would never again return. A League of Nations formed to uphold world trade, collective security, and self-determination. Optimism of this sort fared no better than it did in 1914. The United States refused to join the League, an aggrieved Germany harbored resentment, and Europe stood mired in postwar struggles and neglected the anticolonial demands of Africa and Asia. The global economic depression of the 1930s accelerated a worldwide drift toward isolationism and protectionism at best, Fascism and ultranationalism at worst. Within 20 years of Wilson’s triumphant tour of Europe, the continent dissolved again into catastrophic conflict.

In spite of the strengthening of nationalism and isolationism, massive transnational movement of capital, people, and information distinguished the 21-year hiatus between World Wars. Social stratification, standardization, and industrialization also increased during this period. The US was undergoing great change. World War I led to stimulated demand for US manufactured goods and raw materials, created an economic boom, and further oriented US society toward urban (rather than rural) centers. For the first time in the country’s history, more Americans lived in a city (defined in 1920 as an area with 2,500 people or more) than in the countryside. In contrast to 1890, when 64% of Americans still lived in rural areas and 43% of the labor force comprised farmers, by 1920, 56% of Americans now lived in cities, and only 27% worked in agriculture. These trends would continue through the 1930s.

Massive immigration from southern and eastern Europe drove the rise in urban population. The war forced Jewish, Italian, and Slavic refugees to flee their homes for the comparatively greater economic opportunity and political stability of the United States. Between 1890 and 1920, one-third of US population increase was attributable to these “new immigrants,” whose supposed inability to assimilate made them the target of a white, native-born, American backlash. The Ku Klux Klan re-emerged in the 1920s to add the dogma of “100% Americanism” to its longstanding hatred of African Americans. This new Klan rhetoric of white Protestant American purity found wider appeal than their traditional platform of lynching, cross-burning, and terrorizing former slaves. By 1925, the

Klan controlled local governments in Michigan and Oregon, and boasted over 200,000 members nationwide, enough to host a parade through Washington, DC, in 1924. That same year, Congress passed the National Origins Act, which used quotas to limit immigration from southern and eastern Europe, Russia, and East Asia.

If modernity produced racial nationalism alongside increased industrialization, it also described a system of mass production – termed Fordism – that generated a higher per capita income for industrial workers than the world had ever seen. The term is coined from the surname of Henry Ford, the first creator of massive manufacturing plants to run on precisely managed assembly lines and increase output and efficiency, yet lower prices and expand labor. When Ford perfected the assembly line at his new Highland Park plant in Michigan, in 1915, only 93 minutes were required to build a Model T, which rolled off the line every three minutes on the way to selling half a million cars. Real wages for workers rose by 25%, while the price of the Model T quartered, to \$240 in the 1920s. Even those who could not afford a Model T could purchase one with little money down through installment plans, an instrument that gave unprecedented access to middle-class amenities. Manufacturing output increased by 200% between 1900 and 1930 (compared to a 50% increase in agricultural output for the same period), even as 70% of all manufacturing relied on electric power by 1929. The meteoric rise of the auto industry and Fordism reveals how the proliferation of goods radically reshaped American life. Abundant production required networks of distribution and technologies of

advertising to facilitate a new culture of mass consumption. The black market also boomed, as the 1919 Volstead Act inaugurated over a decade of prohibition of alcohol and ensured untold riches for organized crime.

Modern American literature alternately attacked tradition and transformed it, challenging the conventions of storytelling and language. The literary scene of the 1920s was dominated by modernism, a self-consciously revolutionary movement that enjoyed **vexed** and **ambivalent** relations to American popular culture and European high culture alike. Exhibiting much of this ambivalence, T.S. Eliot's long poem *The Waste Land* (1922) draws on both canonical and biblical texts, excerpts popular songs, and experiments with enjambment and rhyme schemes to demonstrate personal negotiation between tradition and modernity. Modernist writers and artists worked to break free of **ossified** conventions and narrative forms, to find new languages for apprehending and representing reality. Making literature and language new was the order of the day, whether that impulse took form in Gertrude Stein's language games, James Joyce's reworking of the *Odyssey*, or Ernest Hemingway's pursuit of "one true sentence." Likewise conflicted was the relationship of American modernists to the United States. Many (such as Stein, Hemingway, and Eliot) became expatriates, forsaking American provincialism for European cosmopolitanism, particularly the cafés of Paris. Others, such as William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, or John Dos Passos, believed passionately in developing modern art with a uniquely American identity. As "regional" authors like William Faulkner or

intellectuals, socialists, and Communists across the country, including 249 deportations in 1919 and the execution of Italian anarchists Ferdinando Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti in 1927. But during the 1930s American membership in the Communist Party expanded. Communist magazines like *New Masses* and *The Liberator* had been publishing African American writers since the 1920s. Marxist themes and explorations had come to characterize the writings of Richard Wright, Arna Bontemps, and Langston Hughes. Few of these writers actually joined the Communist Party, but Marxist institutions such as the John Reed Club and Chicago's South Side Writers' Group produced, supported, and influenced their work.

The radical emergence of Richard Wright, who published, in 1937, an essay, "Blueprint for Negro Writing," seeking to reconcile racial nationalism with Marxism, represented social realism's eclipse of the New Negro Renaissance. Works of political militancy embraced African American folk tradition in conjunction with the Marxist call for proletarian revolution. Yet even the most militant writers benefited from federal support for literature and art. President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal created the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) through the Works Progress Administration, which hired unemployed writers to develop a *Guide to America* series. Evidence shows that African American authors were not always likely to gain FWP support. (Of the 4,500 writers hired for the project in 1937, only 106 were African American.) Nonetheless, the program provided the necessary financial support for writers like Zora Neale Hurston, who wrote three novels while working for the FWP in

Florida.

As Europe lurched toward World War II in the late 1930s, African American literature was at a crossroads between a modernism grounded in the aesthetic freedom of the 1920s and a politically militant modernism that sought to advance racial equality, justice, and individual dignity. For African Americans like Hurston and Sterling Brown, the era concluded with a new assessment of their literary achievements, rooted in the modernist concern for authenticity and tradition – particularly for the formal and thematic role that folklore played in African American personal and political expression, yet also for the way that African American literature, in mediating this role, could therefore make a valuable contribution to American literature in the broadest sense.

dining-car waiter on the Pennsylvania Railroad. During these years, he became well connected in the leftist New York literary scene, and grew increasingly radical in politics. He developed strong friendships with Max and Crystal Eastman, the editors of the *The Liberator*, and also Greenwich Village figures such as E.A. Robinson and Waldo Frank, who helped McKay's breakthrough as a poet in the States when he published "The Harlem Dancer" and "Invocation" in a 1917 issue of the avant-garde magazine *The Seven Arts*.

In 1919 McKay left Harlem for England, where he continued to make connections that were both literarily and politically incendiary. McKay was introduced to Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw, while I.A. Richards, an especially august English literary critic, wrote the preface for his third volume of poetry, *Spring in New Hampshire* (1920). At the same time, McKay immersed himself in the writing of Karl Marx, frequented an International Socialist Club, and regularly contributed to Sylvia Pankhurst's *Workers' Dreadnoughts*, the newspaper of the Communist Party. This politically charged atmosphere resonates in the contrast between the bucolic *Spring in New Hampshire* and the racially inflected poems in *Harlem Shadows* (1922). The latter volume was an unquestioned triumph, almost singlehandedly serving notice of the imminent New Negro Renaissance. One of its central poems was "If We Must Die," an example of McKay's tendency to wed explosive subject matter to traditional poetic forms, which would later become a World War II rallying cry after Winston Churchill recited it in an anti-Nazi speech.

Relatively flush with cash from *Harlem Shadows* and

thoroughly disenchanted with the state of racial discourse and black nationalism in America, McKay set out, in 1923, for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to attend the Fourth Congress of the Communist International. He would later describe the contradictory feelings attendant on this trip in his 1937 autobiography *A Long Way from Home*. During the trip he was an instant celebrity, his opinion eagerly courted. Indeed, the Soviet press published a collection of his essays, under the title *Negroes in America* (1923), in which McKay gave a Marxist interpretation of African Americans' material and political condition. Yet, at the same time, he was distressed by the ideological strictures that the Soviet authorities imposed on art and speech. He left later in the year for France, where he would spend the rest of the 1920s.

In France, McKay wrote *Home to Harlem* (1928), the first novel by an African American to become a best-seller, perhaps in no small part due to widespread curiosity concerning the "Harlem scene" at the time. The novel contrasted two characters, the hedonistic Jake and the cerebral Ray, a Haitian intellectual. It strongly offended W.E.B. Du Bois's particular sense of decorum, creating a tension not unlike the one between McKay and other elder New Negro Renaissance luminaries, such as Alain Locke. McKay referred to Locke's 1925 edited collection *The New Negro* as "a remarkable chocolate soufflé of art and politics." The sequel to *Home to Harlem*, *Banjo: A Story without a Plot* (1929), which followed Ray's travels among sailors and drifters in Marseilles, did not fare well at all in sales. Neither did *Gingertown* (1932), McKay's collection of short stories; nor did *Banana Bottom*

(1933), a novel many consider to be his finest. In 1934, impoverished and in ill health, McKay returned to Harlem.

Until the recent discovery of *Amiable with Big Teeth*, *Banana Bottom* appeared to be McKay's last major work of fiction. His known late writings were either autobiographical (*A Long Way from Home*, *My Green Hills of Jamaica*) or sociological (*Harlem: Negro Metropolis*, released in 1940). Increasingly disillusioned with the political causes of his earlier years, McKay became interested in Roman Catholicism at the prompting of his friend Ellen Terry, a Catholic writer. He converted to Catholicism in 1944 and moved to Chicago, where he taught classes for the Catholic Youth Organization. He died in 1948, and his body was returned to Harlem for burial.

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Whe’ fe Do?

From Songs of Jamaica

Life will continue so for aye,
Some people sad, some people gay,
Some mockin’ life while udders pray;
But we mus’ fashion-out we way
An’ sabe a mite fe rainy day –
All we can do.

We needn’ fold we han’ an’ cry,
Nor vex we heart wid groan and sigh;
De best we can do is fe try
To fight de déspair drawin’ nigh:
Den we might conquer by an’ by –
Dat we might do.

We hab to batter in de sun,
An’ dat isn’t a little fun,
For Lard! ’tis hellish how it bu’n:
Still dere’s de big wul’ to live do’n –
So whe’ fe do?

We nigger hab a tas’ fe do,
To conquer prejudice dat due
To obeah, an’ t’ings not a few
Dat keep we progress back fe true –
But whe’ fe do?

We’ve got to wuk wid might an’ main,
To use we han’ an’ use we brain,
To toil an’ worry, ’cheme an’ ’train
Fe t’ings that bring more loss dan gain;
To stan’ de sun an’ bear de rain,
An’ suck we bellyful o’ pain
Widouten cry nor yet complain –
For dat caan’do.

And though de wul’ is full o’wrong,
Dat caan’ prevent we sing we song
All de day as we wuk along –
Whe’ else fe do?

We happy in de hospital;
We happy when de rain deh fall;
We happy though de baby bawl
Fe food dat we no hab at all;
We happy when Deat’ angel call
Fe full we cup of joy wid gall:
Our fait’ in this life is not small –

De best to do.

An' da's de way we ought to live,
For pain an' such we shouldn' grieve,
But tek de best dat Nature give –
Da's whe' fe do.

God mek de wul' fe black an' white;
We'll wuk on in de glad sunlight,
Keep toilin' on wid all our might,
An' sleep in peace when it is night:
We must strive on to gain de height,
Aldough it may not be in sight;
An' yet perhaps de blessed right
Will never conquer in de fight –
Still, whe' fe do?

We'll try an' live as any man,
An' fight de wul' de best we can,
E'en though it hard fe understan'
Whe' we mus' do.

For da's de way o' dis ya wul';
It's snap an' bite, an' haul an' pull,
An' we all get we bellyful –
But whe' fe do?

Cudjoe Fresh from de Lecture

From Songs of Jamaica

'Top one minute, Cous' Jarge, an' sit do'n 'pon de
grass,
An' mek a tell you 'bout de news I hear at las',
How de buccra te-day tek time an' bégín teach
All of us dat was deh in a clear open speech.

You miss somet'ing fe true, but a wi' mek you know,
As much as how a can, how de business a go:
Him tell us 'bout we self, an' mek we fresh again,
An' talk about de wul' from commencement to en'.

Me look 'pon me black 'kin, an' so me head grow
big,
Aldough me heaby han' dem hab fe plug an' dig;
For ebery single man, no car' about dem rank,
Him bring us ebery one an' put 'pon de same plank.

Say, parson do de same? Yes, in a diffren' way,
For parson tell us how de whole o' we are clay;
An' lookin' close at t'ings, we hab to pray quite hard
Fe swaller wha' him say an' don't t'ink bad o' Gahd.

But dis man tell us 'traight 'bout how de whole t'ing
came,
An' show us widout doubt how Gahd was not fe
blame;
How change cause ebery t'ing fe mix up 'pon de
eart',
An' dat most hardship come t'rough accident o'
birt'.



Him show us all a sort o' funny 'keleton,
Wid names I won't remember under dis ya sun;
Animals queer to deat', dem bone, teet', an' head-
skull,
All dem so dat did live in a de ole-time wul'.

No 'cos say we get cuss mek fe we 'kin come so,
But fe all t'ings come 'quare, same so it was to go:
Seems our lan' must ha' been a bery low-do'n place,
Mek it tek such long time in tu'ning out a race.

Yes, from monkey we spring: I believe ebery wud;
It long time better dan fgo say we come from mud:
No need me keep back part, me hab not'in' fe gain;
It's ebery man dat born – de buccra mek it plain.

It really strange how some o' de lan' dem advance;
Man power in some ways is nummo soso chance;
But suppose eberyting could tu'n right upside
down,
Den p'raps we'd be on top an' givin' some one houn'.

Yes, Cous' Jarge, slabery hot fe dem dat gone befo':
We gettin' better times, for those days we no know;
But I t'ink it do good, tek we from Africa
An' lan' us in a blessed place as dis a ya.

Talk 'bouten Africa, we would be deh till now,
Maybe same half-naked – all day drike buccra cow,
An' tearin' t'rough de bush wid all de monkey dem,
Wile an' uncibilise', an' neber comin' tame.

I lef' quite 'way from wha' we be'n deh talk about,

Yet still a couldn' help – de wuds come to me mout';
Just like how yeas' get strong an' sometimes fly de
cark,
Same way me feelings grow, so I was boun' fe talk.

Yet both horse partly runnin' in de selfsame gallop,
For it is nearly so de way de buccra pull up:
Him say, how de wul' stan', dat right will neber be,
But wrong will eber gwon till dis wul' en' fe we.

1912¹

America

From Harlem Shadows

Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,
And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,
Stealing my breath of life, I will confess
I love this cultured hell that tests my youth!
Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,
Giving me strength erect against her hate.
Her bigness sweeps my being like a flood.
Yet as a rebel fronts a king in state,
I stand within her walls with not a shred
Of terror, malice, not a word of jeer.
Darkly I gaze into the days ahead,
And see her might and granite wonders there,
Beneath the touch of Time's unerring hand,
Like priceless treasures sinking in the sand.

The Tropics in New York

From Harlem Shadows

Bananas ripe and green, and ginger-root
Cocoa in pods and alligator pears,
And tangerines and mangoes and grape fruit,
Fit for the highest prize at parish fairs,

Set in the window, bringing memories
Of fruit-trees laden by low-singing rills,
And dewy dawns, and mystical blue skies
In benediction over nun-like hills.

My eyes drew dim, and I could no more gaze;
A wave of longing through my body swept,
And, hungry for the old, familiar ways,
I turned aside and bowed my head and wept.

Harlem Shadows

From Harlem Shadows

I hear the halting footsteps of a lass
In Negro Harlem when the night lets fall
Its veil. I see the shapes of girls who pass
To bend and barter at desire's call.
Ah, little dark girls who in slippered feet

Go prowling through the night from street to street!

Through the long night until the silver break
Of day the little gray feet know no rest;
Through the lone night until the last snow-flake
Has dropped from heaven upon the earth's
white breast,
The dusky, half-clad girls of tired feet
Are trudging, thinly shod, from street to street.

Ah, stern harsh world, that in the wretched way
Of poverty, dishonor and disgrace,
Has pushed the timid little feet of clay,
The sacred brown feet of my fallen race!
Ah, heart of me, the weary, weary feet
In Harlem wandering from street to street.

The White City

From Harlem Shadows

I will not toy with it nor bend an inch.
Deep in the secret chambers of my heart
I muse my life-long hate, and without flinch
I bear it nobly as I live my part.
My being would be a skeleton, a shell,
If this dark Passion that fills my every mood,
And makes my heaven in the white world's hell,
Did not forever feed me vital blood.
I see the mighty city through a mist –
The strident trains that speed the goaded mass,
The poles and spires and towers vapor-kissed,

The fortified port through which the great ships
pass,
The tides, the wharves, the dens I contemplate,
Are sweet like wanton loves because I hate.

Africa

From Harlem Shadows

The sun sought thy dim bed and brought forth light,
The sciences were sucklings at thy breast;
When all the world was young in pregnant night
Thy slaves toiled at thy monumental best.
Thou ancient treasure-land, thou modern prize,
New peoples marvel at thy pyramids!
The years roll on, thy sphinx of riddle eyes
Watches the mad world with immobile lids.
The Hebrews humbled them at Pharaoh's name.
Cradle of Power! Yet all things were in vain!
Honor and Glory, Arrogance and Fame!
They went. The darkness swallowed thee again.
Thou art the harlot, now thy time is done,
Of all the mighty nations of the sun.

The Tired Worker

From Harlem Shadows

O whisper, O my soul! The afternoon
Is waning into evening, whisper soft!

Peace, O my rebel-heart! for soon the moon
From out its misty veil will swing aloft!
Be patient, weary body, soon the night
Will wrap thee gently in her sable sheet,
And with a leaden sigh thou wilt invite
To rest thy tired hands and aching feet.
The wretched day was theirs, the night is mine;
Come tender sleep, and fold me to thy breast.
But what steals out the gray clouds red like wine?
O dawn! O dreaded dawn! O let me rest
Weary my veins, my brain, my life! Have pity!
No! Once again the harsh, the ugly city.

If We Must Die

From Harlem Shadows

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursèd lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die, 5
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

1922

Extracts from Banjo: A Story without a Plot

First Part¹

Chapter 1

The Ditch

Heaving along from side to side, like a sailor on the unsteady deck of a ship, Lincoln Agrippa Daily, familiarly known as Banjo, patrolled the magnificent length of the great breakwater of Marseilles, a banjo in his hand.

"It sure is some moh mahvelous job," he noted mentally; "most wonderful bank in the ocean I evah did see."

It was afternoon. Banjo had walked the long distance of the breakwater and was returning to the Joliette end. He wore a cheap pair of slippers, suitable to the climate, a kind much used by the very poor of Provence. They were an ugly drab-brown color, which, however, was mitigated by the crimson socks and the yellow scarf with its elaborate pattern of black, yellow, and red at both ends, that was knotted around his neck and hung down the front of his blue-jean shirt.

Suddenly he stood still in his tracks as out of the bottom of one of the many freight cars along the quay he saw black bodies dropping. Banjo knew box cars. He had hoboed in America. But never had he come across a box car with a hole in the bottom. Had those black boys made it? He went down on the quay to see.

The fellows were brushing the hay off their clothes. There were four of them.

"Hello, there!" said Banjo.

"Hello, money!" replied the tallest of the four, who was just Banjo's build.

"Good night, money. What I want to know is ef you-all made that theah hole in the bottom a that box car? I nevah yet seen no hole in the bottom of a box car, and I've rode some rails back home in the States."

"P'raps not. They's things ovah heah diffarant from things ovah theah and they's things ovah theah diffarant from things ovah heah. Now the way things am setting with me, this heah hole-in-the-bottom box car is just *the* thing for us."

"You done deliver you'self of a mouthful that sure sounds perfect," responded Banjo.

"I always does. Got to use mah judgment all the time with these fellahs heah. And you? What you making foh you'self down here on the breakwater?"

"Ain't making a thing, but I know I'd sure love to make a meal."

"A meal! You broke already?"

"Broke already? Yes I is, but what do you know about it?" asked Banjo, sharply.

"Nothing in particular, ole spoht, cep'n' that I bummed you two times when you was strutting with

that ofay broad and that Ise Malty Avis, the best drummer on the beach. Mah buddies heah bummed you, too, so if youse really broke and hungry as you say, which can be true, 'causen you' lips am as pale as the belly of a fish, just you come right along and eat ovah theah." He pointed to a ramshackle bistro-restaurant on the quay. "We got a little money between us. The bumming was good last night."

"This is going some, indeed. I gave you a raise yestidday and youse feeding me today," said Banjo as they all walked toward the bistro. "I don't even remember none a you fellahs."

"Cause you was too swell dressed up and strutting fine with that broad to see anybody else," said the smallest of the group.

They were all hungry. The boys had been sleeping, and woke up with an appetite. Before them the woman of the bistro set five plates of vegetable soup, a long loaf of bread, followed by braised beef and plenty of white beans. Malty called for five bottles of red wine.

Banjo got acquainted over the mess. The shining black big-boned lad who bore such a contented expression on his plump jolly face and announced himself as Malty Avis, was the leader and inspirer of the group. His full name was Buchanan Malt Avis. He was a West Indian. His mother had been a cook for a British missionary and from the labels of his case goods, for which she had had a fondness, she had taken his Christian names. The villagers dropped Buchanan and took Malt, which they made Malty.

Malty's working life began as a small sailor boy on fishing-boats in the Caribbean. When he became a big boy he was taken by a cargo boat on his first real

voyage to New Orleans. From there he had started in as a real seaman and had never returned home.

Sitting on Malty's right, the chestnut-skinned fellow with drab-brown curly hair was called Ginger, a tribute, evidently, to the general impression of his make-up. Whether you thought of ginger as a tuber in reddish tropical soil, or as a preserved root, or as the Jamaica liquid, it reminded you oddly of him. Of all the English-speaking Negro boys, Ginger held the long-term record of existence on the beach. He had lost his seaman's papers. He had been in prison for vagabondage and served with a writ of expulsion. But he had destroyed the writ and swiped the papers of another seaman.

Opposite Ginger was Dengel, also tall, but thin. He was a Senegalese who spoke a little English and preferred the company of Malty and his pals to that of his countrymen.

Beside Dengel was the small, wiry, dull-black boy who had sardonically reminded Banjo of his recent high-flying. He was always aggressive of attitude. The fellows said that he was bughouse and he delighted in the name of Bugsy that they gave him.

They were all on the beach, and there were many others besides them – white men, brown men, black men. Finns, Poles, Italians, Slavs, Maltese, Indians, Negroids, African Negroes, West Indian Negroes – deportées from America for violation of the United States immigration laws – afraid and ashamed to go back to their own lands, all dumped down in the great Provençal port, bumming a day's work, a meal, a drink, existing from hand to mouth, anyhow any way, between box car, tramp ship, bistro, and bordel.

"But you ain't broke, man," Malty said, pointing to the banjo, "when you got that theah bit a business. Ain't a one of us here that totes around anything that can bring a little money outa this burg a peddlers."

Banjo caressed his instrument. "I nevah part with this, buddy. It is moh than a gal, moh than a pal; it's mahself."

"You don't have to go hungry round here, either, ef you c'n play a li'l bit," drawled Ginger. "You c'n pick up enough change foh you'self even as much to buy us all a li'l red wine to wet our whistle when the stuff is scarce down the docks – jest by playing around in them bars in Joliette and uptown around the Bum Square."

"We'll see what this burg can stand," said Banjo. "It ain't one or two times, but plenty, that mah steady here did make me a raise when I was right down and out. Oncet away back in Montreal, after I done lost every cent to mah name on the racetracks, I went into one swell spohting-place and cleaned up twenty-five dollars playing. But the best of all was the bird uvva time I had in San Francisco with three buddies who hed a guitar and a ukulele and a tambourine between them. My stars! I was living in clovah for six months."

"You'll make yours here, too," said Malty. "Although this heah burg is lousy with pifformers, doing their stuff in the cafés, it ain't often you come across one that can turn out a note to tickle a chord in you' apparatus. Play us a piece. Let us hear how you sound."

"Not now," said Banjo. "Better tonight in some café. Maybe they won't like it here."

"Sure they will. You c'n do any ole thing at any ole time in this country."

"That ain't a damn sight true," Bugsy jumped sharply in. "But you can play all the time," he said to Banjo. "People will sure come and listen and the boss will get rid a some moh of his rotten wine."

"This wine ain't so bad —" Ginger began.

"It sure is," insisted Bugsy, whose palate had never grown agreeable to *vin rouge ordinaire*. He drank with the boys, as drinking played a big part in their group life, but he preferred syrups to wine, and he was the soberest among them.

"The wine outa them barrels we bung out on the docks is much better," he declared.

"Why, sure it's better, you black blubberhead," exclaimed Ginger. "Tha's the real best stuff we make down there. Pure and strong, with no water in it. That's why we get soft on it quicker than when we drink in a café. In all them little cafés the stuff is doctored. That's the profit way."

Banjo played "Yes, sir, that's my baby." He said it was one of the pieces that were going wild in the States. The boys began humming and swaying. What Bugsy predicted happened. Some dockers who were not working were drawn to the bistro. They seated themselves at a rough long table, across from the boys' by the other side of the door, listened approvingly to the music, drank wine, and spat pools.

Malty ordered more wine. Ginger and Bugsy stood up to each other and performed a strenuous movement of the "Black Bottom," as they had learned it from Negro seamen of the American Export Line. The *patrone* came and stood in the door, very pleased, and exhibited a little English, "Good piece you very well play ..."

Banjo played another piece, then suddenly stopped, stood up and stretched his arms.

"You finish' already?" demanded Malty.

"Sure; it was just a little exhibition of my accomplishment foh your particular benefit."

"Youse as good a musician as a real artist."

"I is an artist."

The workmen regarded Banjo admiringly, drained their glasses, and sauntered off.

"Imagine those cheapskates coming here jest to listen to mah playing and not even offering a man a drink," Banjo sneered. "Why, ef I was in Hamburg or Genoa they woulda sure drowned me in liquor."

"The Froggies am all tight that way," said Malty. "They're a funny people. If you'd a taken up a collection every jack man a them woulda gived you a copper, thinking that you make you' living that way —"

"Hell with their coppers," said Banjo. "I expected them to stand a round just for expreciation only of a good thing."

"As for that, they ain't the treating kind a good fellahs that you and I am used to on the other side," said Malty ...

From the bistro on the breakwater, the boys rocked slowly along up to Joliette. Ginger had a favorite drinking-place on the Rue Forbin, a dingy tramps' den. They stopped there, drinking until twilight. Ginger and Dengel became so staggeringly soft that they decided to go back to the box car and sleep.

Malty said to Banjo and Bugsy, "Let's take our tail up to the Bum Square."

The Place Victor Gelu of the Vieux Port was called by

the boys on the beach the "Bum Square" because it was there they gathered at night to bum or panhandle seamen and voyagers who passed through to visit the Quartier Réservé. The Quartier Réservé they called "the Ditch" with the same rough affection with which they likened their ship to an easy woman by calling it the "broad."

Avoiding the populous Rue de la République, Malty, Banjo, and Bugsy followed the little-frequented Boulevard de la Major, passing by the shadow of the big cathedral and the gate of the Central Police Building, to reach the Bum Square. They took two more rounds of red wine on the way, the last in a little café in the Place de Lenche before they descended to the Ditch.

Malty had a dinner engagement with a mulatto seaman from a boat of the American Export Line, whom he was to meet in the Bum Square. The wine had worked so hard on their appetites that all three were hungry again. Malty looked in all the cafés of the square, but did not find his man. A big blond fellow, his clothes starched with dirt, was standing in the shadow of a palm, looking sharply out for customers. Malty asked him if he had seen his mulatto.

"He went up that way with a tart," replied the blond, pointing toward the Canebière.

"Let's go and eat, anyway," Malty said to Banjo and Bugsy. "I got some money yet."

"Latnah musta gived you an extry raise; she is always handing you something," said Bugsy.

"I ain't seen her for ovah three days," replied Malty.

"Oh, you got a sweet mamma helping you on the side?" Banjo asked, laughing.

"Not mine, boh," replied Malty. "Is jest a li'l woman bumming like us on the beach. I don't know whether she is Arabian or Persian or Indian. She knows all landwidges. I stopped a p-i² from treating her rough one day, and evah since she pals out with our gang, nevah passing us without speaking, no matter ef she even got a officer on the string, and always giving us English and American cigarettes and a little change when she got 'em. It's easy for her, you see, to penetrate any place on a ship, when we can't, 'cause she's a skirt with some legs all right, and her face ain't nothing that would scare you."

"And none a you fellahs can't make her?" cried Banjo. "Why you-all ain't the goods?"

"It ain't that, you strutting cock, but she treats us all like pals and don't leave no ways open for that. Ain't it better to have her as a pal than to lose out ovah a li'l crazy craving that a few sous can settle up here?"

They went up one of the humid, somber alleys, thick with little eating-dens of all the Mediterranean peoples, Greek, Jugo-Slav,³ Neapolitan Arab, Corsican, and Armenian, Czech and Russian.

When they had finished eating, Malty suggested that they might go up to the gayer part of the Ditch. Buggy said he would go to the cinema to see Hoot Gibson in a Wild West picture. But Banjo accepted the invitation with alacrity. Every chord in him responded to the loose, bistro-love-life of the Ditch.

Banjo was a great vagabond of lowly life. He was a child of the Cotton Belt, but he had wandered all over America. His life was a dream of vagabondage that he was perpetually pursuing and realizing in odd ways,

always incomplete but never unsatisfactory. He had worked at all the easily-picked-up jobs – longshoreman, porter, factory worker, farm hand, seaman.

He was in Canada when the Great War began and he enlisted in the Canadian army. That gave him a glimpse of London and Paris. He had seen a little of Europe before, having touched some of the big commercial ports when he was a husky fireman. But he had never arrived at the sailor's great port, Marseilles. Twice he had been to Genoa and once to Barcelona. Only those who know the high place that Marseilles holds in the imagination of seamen can get the feeling of his disappointment. All through his seafaring days Banjo had dreamed dreams of the seaman's dream port. And at last, because the opportunity that he had long hoped for did not come to take him there, he made it.

Banjo had been returned to Canada after the general demobilization. From there he crossed to the States, where he worked at several jobs. Seized by the old restlessness for a sea change while he was working in an industrial plant, he hit upon the unique plan of getting himself deported.

Some of his fellow workmen who had entered the United States illegally had been held for deportation, and they were all lamenting that fact. Banjo, with his unquenchable desire to be always going, must have thought them very poor snivelers. They had all been thunderstruck when he calmly announced that he was not an American. Everything about him – accent, attitude, and movement – shouted Dixie. But Banjo had insisted that his parentage was really foreign. He had served in the Canadian army. ... His declaration had to be accepted by his bosses.

Banjo was a personality among the immigration officers. They liked his presence, his voice, his language of rich Aframericanisms. They admired, too, the way he had chosen to go off wandering again. (It was nothing less than a deliberate joke to them, for Banjo could never convince any American, especially a Southern-knowing one, that he was not Aframerican.) It was singular enough to stir their imagination, so long insensible to the old ways of ship desertion and stowing away. The officials teased Banjo, asking him what he would ever do in Europe when he spoke no other language than straight Yankee. However, their manner betrayed their feeling of confidence that Banjo would make his way anywhere. He was given a chance to earn some money across and they saw him go regretfully and hopefully, when he signed up on the tramp that would eventually land him at Marseilles.

Banjo's tramp was a casual one. So much so that it was four months and nineteen days after sailing down through the Panama Canal to New Zealand and Australia, cruising cargo around the island continent and up along the coast of Africa, before his dirty overworked "broad" reached the port of Marseilles.

Banjo had no plan, no set purpose, no single object in coming to Marseilles. It was the port that seamen talked about – the marvelous, dangerous, attractive, big, wide-open port. And he wanted only to get there.

Banjo was paid off in francs, and after changing a deck of dollars that he had saved in America, he possessed twelve thousand five hundred and twenty-five francs and some sous. He was spotted and beset by touting guides, white, brown, black, all of them ready to show and sell him everything for a trifle. He got rid of

them all.

Banjo bought a new suit of clothes, fancy shoes, and a vivid *cache-col*.⁴ He had good American clothes, but he wanted to strut in Provençal style.

Instinctively he drifted to the Ditch, and as naturally he found a girl there. She found a room for both of them. Banjo's soul thrilled to the place – the whole life of it that milled around the ponderous, somber building of the Mairie, standing on the Quai du Port, where fish and vegetables and girls and youthful touts, cats, mongrels, and a thousand second-hand things were all mingled together in a churning agglomeration of stench and sliminess.

His wonderful Marseilles! Even more wonderful to him than he had been told. Unstintingly Banjo gave of himself and his means to his girl and the life around him. And when he was all spent she left him.

Now he was very light of everything: light of pocket, light of clothing (having relieved himself at the hock shop), light of head, feeling and seeing everything lightly.

It was Banjo's way to take every new place and every new thing for the first time in a hot crazy-drunk manner. He was a type that was never sober, even when he was not drinking. And now the first delirious fever days of Marseilles were rehearsing themselves, wheeling round and round in his head. The crooked streets of dim lights the gray damp houses bunched together and their rowdy signs of many colors. The mongrel-faced guides of shiny, beady eyes, patiently persuasive; the old hags at the portals, like skeletons presiding over an orgy, with skeleton smile and skeleton charm inviting in

quavering accents those who hesitated to enter. Oh, his head was a circus where everything went circling round and round.

Banjo had never before been to that bistro where Malty was taking him. It had a player-piano and a place in the rear for dancing. It was a rendezvous for most of the English-speaking beach boys. If they were spending a night in the Vieux Port, they went there (after panhandling the Bum Square) for sausage sandwiches and red wine. And when all their appetites were appeased, they flopped together in a room upstairs.

The mulatto cook from the Export Line boat was there, sitting between a girl and an indefinite Negroid type of fellow. There were two bottles of wine and a bottle of beer before them. The cook called Malty and Banjo to his table and ordered more wine. There were many girls from the Ditch and young touts dancing. One of the girls asked Banjo to play. Another made the mulatto dance with her. Banjo played "Yes, sir, that's my baby." But as soon as he paused, a girl started the player-piano. The banjo was not loud enough for that close, noisy little market. Everybody was dancing.

Banjo put the instrument aside. It wasn't adequate for the occasion. It would need an orchestra to fix them right, he thought, good-humoredly. I wouldn't mind starting one going in this burg. Gee! That's the idea. Tha's jest what Ise gwine to do. The American ducky is the performing fool of the world today. He's demanded everywhere. If I c'n only git some a these heah panhandling fellahs together, we'll show them some real nigger music. Then I'd be setting pretty in this heah sweet dump without worrying ovah mah wants. That's the stuff for a live nigger like me to put ovah, and no

cheap playing from café to café and a handing out mah hat for a lousy sou.

He was so exhilarated with the thought of what he would do that he felt like dancing. At that moment the girl of his first Marseilles days came in with a young runt of a tout. Banjo looked up at her, smiling expectantly. She was still going round in his head with the rest of the Ditch. She had left him, of course, but he had accepted that as inevitable when he could no longer afford her. Yet, he had mused, she might have been a little extravagant and bestowed on him one spontaneous caress over all that was bought. She had not. Because she only knew one way – the way of the Ditch. She did not know the way of a brown girl back home who could say with sweet exaggeration: "Daddy, we two will go home and spread joy and not wake up till next week sometime and want nothing but loving."

Ah no! Nothing so fancifully real. Nevertheless, she was the first playmate of his dream port.

The girl, seeing Banjo, turned her eyes casually away and went to sit where she could concentrate her charms on the mulatto. Banjo had no further interest for her. He had spent all his money and, like all the beach boys, would never have more for a wild fling as long as he remained in port. It was the mulatto that had brought her there. For as soon as a new arrival enters any of the dens of the Ditch, the girls are made aware of it by the touts, who are always on the lookout. Banjo was vexed. Hell! She might have been more cordial, he thought. The player-piano was rattling out "Fleur d'Amour." He would ask her to dance. Maybe her attitude was only an insolent little exhibition of cattishness. He went over to her and asked, "Danser?"

"No," she said, disdainfully, and turned away. He touched her shoulder playfully.

"*Laissez-moi tranquille, imbecile.*" She spat nastily on the floor.

A rush of anger seized Banjo. "You pink sow!" he cried. His eyes caught the glint of the gold watch he had given to her, and wrenching it from her wrist, he smashed it on the red-tiled floor and stamped his heel upon it in a rage. The girl screamed agonizingly, wringing her hands, her wide eyes staring tragically at the remains of her watch. The little tout who had come in with her leaped over at Banjo. "What is it? What is it?" he cried, and hunching up his body and thrusting his head up and out like a comic actor, he began working his open hands up and down in Banjo's face, without touching him. Banjo looked down upon the boy contemptuously and seized his left wrist, intending to twist it and push him outside, for he could not think of fighting with such an undersized antagonist. But in a flash the boy drew a knife across his wrist and, released, dashed through the door.

Banjo wrapped the cut in his handkerchief, but it was soon soaked with blood. It was late. The pharmacies were closed. The *patrone* of the bistro said that there were pharmacies open all night. Malty took Banjo to hunt for one.

As they were passing through the Bum Square a woman's voice called Malty. They stopped and she came up to them. She was a little olive-toned woman of an indefinable age, clean-faced, not young and far from old, with an amorous charm round her mouth. It was Latnah.

"Ain't gone to bed yet?" Malty said to her. "Ise got a

case here." He exhibited Banjo's hand.

"It plenty bleed," she said. She looked at Banjo and said, "I see you before around here."

Banjo grinned. "Maybe I seen you, too."

"I no think. Pharmacie no open now," she answered Malty's question. Then she said to Banjo: "Come with me. I see your hand. Tomorrow see you, Malty. Good night." She took Banjo away, while Malty's eyes followed them in a wistful, bewildered gaze.

She took Banjo back in the direction from which he had come, but by way of the Quai du Port. After a few minutes' walk they turned into one of the somber side streets. They went into a house a little southwest of the Ditch. Her room was on the top floor, a quaint, tiny thing, the only one up there, and opened right on the stairs. There was a little shutter-window, the size of a *Saturday Evening Post*, that gave a view of the Vieux Port, where the lights of the boats were twinkling. A bright, inexpensive Oriental shawl covered the cot-bed. On the table was a washbowl, two little jars of cosmetics, and packets of different brands of cigarettes.

There was no water in the room, and Latnah went down two flights of stairs to get a jugful. When she returned she washed Banjo's wound, then, getting a bottle of liquid from a basket against the foot of the cot, she anointed and bandaged it.

Banjo liked the woman's gentle fussing over him. He thanked her when she had finished. "*Rien du tout*," she replied. There was a little silence between them, slightly embarrassing but piquant.

Then Banjo said: "I wonder whereat I can find Malty now? I didn't have a room yet for tonight"

“You sleep here,” she said, simply.

He undressed while she found something to do – empty the washbowl, wipe the table – and when at last he caught a glimpse of her between her deshabelle and the covers he murmured softly to himself: “Don’t care how I falls, may be evah so long a drop, but it’s always on mah feets.”

Chapter 2

The Breakwater

The quarter of the old port exuded a nauseating odor of mass life congested, confused, moving round and round in a miserable suffocating circle. Yet everything there seemed to belong and fit naturally in place. Bistros and love shops and girls and touts and vagabonds and the troops of dogs and cats – all seemed to contribute so essentially and colorfully to that vague thing called atmosphere. No other setting could be more appropriate for the men on the beach. It was as if all the derelicts of all the seas had drifted up here to sprawl out the days in the sun.

The men on the beach spent the day between the breakwater and the docks, and the night between the Bum Square and the Ditch. Most of the whites, especially the blond ones of northern countries, seemed to have gone down hopelessly under the strength of hard liquor, as if nothing mattered for them now but that. They were stinking-dirty, and lousy, without any apparent desire to clean themselves. With the black

boys it was different. It was as if they were just taking a holiday. They were always in holiday spirit, and if they did not appear to be specially created for that circle, they did not spoil the picture, but rather brought to it a rich and careless tone that increased its interest. They drank wine to make them lively and not sodden, washed their bodies and their clothes on the breakwater, and sometimes spent a panhandled ten-franc note to buy a second-hand pair of pants.

Banjo had become a permanent lodger at Latnah’s. His wound was not serious, but it was painful and had given him a light fever. Latnah told him that when his wrist was well enough for him to play, she would go with him to perform in some of the bars of the quarter and take up a collection.

In the daytime Latnah went off by herself to her business, and sometimes the nature of it detained her overnight and she did not get back to her room. Banjo spent most of his time with Malty’s gang. He was not altogether one of them, but rather a kind of honorary member, having inspired respect by his sudden conquest of Latnah and by being an American.

An American seaman (white or black) on the beach is always treated with a subtle difference by his beach fellows. He has a higher face value than the rest. His passport is worth a good price and is eagerly sought for by passport fabricators. And he has the assurance that, when he gets tired of beaching, his consulate will help him back to the fabulous land of wealth and opportunity.

Banjo dreamed constantly of forming an orchestra, and the boys listened incredulously when he talked about it. He had many ideas of beginning. If he could

get two others besides himself he could arrange with the proprietor of some café to let them play at his place. That might bring in enough extra trade to pay them something. Or he might make one of the love shops of the Ditch unique and famous with a black orchestra.

One day he became very expansive about his schemes under the influence of wine-drinking on the docks. This was the great sport of the boys. They would steal a march on the watchmen or police, bung out one of the big casks, and suck up the wine through rubber tubes until they were sweetly soft.

Besides Banjo there were Malty, Ginger, and Buggy. After they had finished with the wine, they raided a huge heap of peanuts, filled up their pockets, and straggled across the suspension bridge to lie in the sun on the breakwater.

"I could sure make one a them dumps look like a real spohting-place," said Banjo, "with a few of us niggers piffforming in theah. Lawdy! but the chances there is in a wide-open cat town like this! But everybody is so hoggish after the sous they ain't got no imagination left to see big money in a big thing —"

"It wasn't a big thing that dat was put ovah on you, eh?" sniggered Buggy.

"Big you' crack," retorted Banjo. "That theah wasn't nothing at all. Ain't nobody don't put anything ovah on me that I didn't want in a bad way to put ovah mahself. I like the looks of a chicken-house, and I ain't nevah had no time foh the business end ovit. But when I see how these heah poah ole disabled hens am making a hash of a good thing with a gang a cheap no-'count p-i's, I just imagine what a high-yaller queen of a place could do ovah heah turned loose in this sweet clovah. Oh, boy,

with a bunch a pinks and yallers and chocolates in between, what a show she could showem!"

"It's a tall lot easier talking than doing," said Buggy. "Theyse some things jest right as they is and ain't nevah was made foh making better or worsen. Now supposing you was given a present of it, what would you make outa one a them joints in Boody Lane?"

Boody Lane was the beach boys' name for the Rue de la Bouterie, the gut of the Ditch.

"Well, that's a forthrightly question and downrightly hard to answer," said Banjo. "For I wasn't inclosing them in mah catalogory, becausen they ain't real places, brother; them's just stick-in-the-mud holes. Anyway, if one was gived to me I'd try everything doing excep'n' lighting it afire."

At this they all laughed. "Don't light it afire" was the new catch phrase among the beach boys and they passed it on to every new seaman that was introduced to the Ditch. When the new man, curious, asked the meaning, they replied, laughing mysteriously, "Because it is six months."

The phrase was the key to the story of an American brown boy who went on shore leave and would not keep company with any of his comrades. At the Vieux Port he was besieged by the black beach boys, but he refused to give them anything and told them that they ought to be ashamed to let down their race by scavenging on the beach. When he started to go up into the Ditch the boys warned him that it was dangerous to go alone. He went alone, replying that he did not want the advice or company of bums.

He went proud and straight into one of the stick-in-the-mud places of Boody Lane. And before he could get

out, his pocketbook with his roll of dollars was missing. He accused the girl by signs. She replied by signs and insults that he had not brought the pocketbook there. She mentioned "police" and left the box. He thought she had gone to get the police to help him find his money. But he waited and waited, and when she did not return, realizing that he had been tricked, he struck a match and set the bed on fire. That not only brought him the police, but also the fire brigade and six months in prison where he was now cooling himself.

Ginger said: "I ain't no innovation sort of a fellah. When I make a new beach all I want is to make mah way and not make no changes. Just make mah way somehow while everything is going on without me studying them or them studying me."

He was lying flat on his back on one of the huge stone blocks of the breakwater. The waves were lapping softly around it. He had no shirt on and, unfastening the pin at the collar of his old blue coat, he flung it back and exposed his brown belly to the sun. His trousers waist was pulled down below his navel. "Oh, Gawd, the sun is sweet!" he yawned and, pulling his cap over his eyes, went to sleep. The others also stretched themselves and slept.

Along the great length of the breakwater other careless vagabonds were basking on the blocks. The day was cooling off and the sun shed down a warm, shimmering glow where the light fell full on the water. Over by l'Estaque, where they were extending the port, a P. L. M. coal ship stood black upon the blue surface. The factories loomed on the long slope like a rusty-black mass of shapes strung together, and over them the bluish-gray hills were bathed in a fine, delicate

mist, and further beyond an immense phalanx of gray rocks, the inexhaustible source of the cement industry, ran sharply down into the sea.

Sundown found the boys in the Place de la Joliette. In one of the cafés they found a seaman from Zanzibar among some Maltese, from whom they took him away.

"Wese just in time for you," Malty declared. "What youse looking for is us. Fellahs who speak the same as you speak and not them as you kain't trust who mix up the speech with a mess of Arabese. Them's a sort of bastard Arabs, them Maltese, and none of us likes them, much less trusts them."

The new man was very pleased to fall in with fellows as friendly as Banjo and Malty. He was on a coal boat from South Shields and had a few pounds on him. He was generous and stood drinks in several cafés. From the Place de la Joliette, they took the quiet way of the Boulevard de la Major to reach the Ditch. It was the best way for the beach boys. Some of them had not the proper papers to get by the police and tried to evade them always. By way of the main Rue de la République they were more likely to be stopped, questioned, searched, and taken to the police station. Sometimes they were told that their papers were not in order, but they were only locked up for a night and let out the next morning. Some of them complained of being beaten by the police. Ginger thought the police were getting more brutal and strict, quite different from what they were like when he first landed on the beach. Then they could bung out a cask of wine in any daring old way and drink without being bothered. Now it was different. It was not very long since two fellows from the group had got two months each for wine-stealing. Happily for

them, Malty, Ginger, and Bugsy all had passable papers.

On the way to the Ditch they stopped in different bistros to empty in each a bottle of red wine. These fellows, who were used to rum in the West Indies, gin and corn liquor in the States, and whisky in England, took to the red wine of France like ducks to water. They never had that terribly vicious gin or whisky drunk. They seemed to have lost all desire for hard liquor. When they were drunk it was always a sweetly-soft good-natured wine drunk.

They had a big feed in one of the Chinese restaurants of the Rue Torte. The new man insisted on paying for it all. After dinner they went to a little café on the Quai du Port for coffee-and-rum. The newcomer took a mouth organ from his pocket and began playing. This stimulated Banjo, who said, "I guess mah hand c'n do its stuff again," and so he went up to Latnah's room and got his banjo.

They went playing from little bistro to bistro in the small streets between the fish market and the Bum Square. They were joined by others – a couple of Senegalese and some British West Africans – and soon the company was more than a dozen. They were picturesquely conspicuous as they loitered along, talking in a confused lingo of English, French, and native African. And in the cafés the bottles of beer and wine that they ordered and drank indiscriminately increased as their number increased. Customers were attracted by the music, and the girls, too, who were envious and used all their wiles to get away the newly arrived seaman from the beach boys ...

"Hot damn!" cried Banjo. "What a town this heah is

to spread joy in!"

"And you sure did spread yours all at once," retorted Bugsy. "Burn it up in one throw and finish, you did."

"Muzzle you' mouf, nigger," replied Banjo. "The joy stuff a life ain't nevah finished for this heah strutter. When I turn mahself loose for a big wild joyful jazz a life, you can bet you' sweet life I ain't gwine nevah regretting it. Ise got moh joy stuff in mah whistle than you're got in you' whole meager-dawg body."

"And I wouldn't want to know," said Bugsy.

At midnight they were playing in one of the cafés of the Bum Square, when an oldish man came in wearing faded green trousers, a yellowy black-bordered jacket, with a wreath of flowers around his neck and began to dance. He manipulated a stick with such dexterity that it seemed as if his wrist was moving round like a wheel, and he jigged and hopped from side to side with amazing agility while Banjo and the seaman played.

When they stopped, the garlanded dancer said he would bet anybody a bottle of *vin blanc supérieur* that he could stand on his head on a table. A youngster in proletarian blue made a sign against his head and said of the old fellow, "*Il est fada*." And the old man did indeed look a little mad in his strange costume and graying hair, and it seemed unlikely that his bones could support him in the feat that he proclaimed he could perform. But nobody took up the bet.

Somebody translated what was what to the new seaman, who said, carelessly, "May as well bet and have a little fun outa him."

"*Très bien*," said the old man. He made several attempts at getting headdown upon the table and failed

funnily, like professional acrobats in their first trials on the stage, and the café resounded with peals of laughter and quickly filled up. Suddenly the old fellow cried: “*Ça y est!*” and spread his hands out, balancing himself straight up on his head on the table. In a moment he jumped down and, twisting his stick and executing some steps, went round with his hat and took up a collection before the crowd diminished. The beach boys threw in their share of sous and the seaman promptly paid for the bottle of white wine. The old man took it and left the café, followed by a woman.

Latnah, passing through the Bum Square and seeing Banjo playing, had entered the café just when the old man stopped dancing and asked who would take up his bet. The good collection he took up and the bottle of wine in addition awakened all her instincts of acquisitiveness and envious rivalry. She turned on Banjo.

“All that money man take and gone is you’ money. You play and he take money. You too proud to ask money and you no have nothing. You feel rich, maybe.”

“Leave me be, woman,” said Banjo.

“And you make friend pay wine for man. Man make nothing but bluff. You colored make the white fool you all time —”

“I didn’t tell him to bet nothing. But even then, what is a little lousy bet? Gawd bless mah soul! The money I done bet in *my* life and all foh big stakes on them race tracks in Montreal. What do you-all know about life and big stakes?” Banjo waved his hand in a tipsy sweep as if he saw the old world of race-track bettors before him.

“This no Montreal; this Marseilles,” replied Latnah,

“and you very fool to play for nothing. You need money, you bitch-commer —”

“Now quit you’ noise. Ise going with you, but I ain’t gwine let you ride me. Get me? No woman nevah ride me yet and you ain’t gwine to ride me, neither.”

He stood up, resting the banjo on a table.

“And it not me doing the riding, I’m sure,” said Latnah.

“Come on, fellahs; let’s get outa this. Let’s take our hump away from here,” said Banjo.

Chapter 3

Malty Turned Down

Banjo had taken Latnah as she came, easily. It seemed the natural thing to him to fall on his feet, that Latnah should take the place of the other girl to help him now that he needed help. Whatever happened, happened. Life for him was just one different thing of a sort following the other.

Malty was more emotional and amorously gentle than Banjo. He was big, strong, and jolly-natured, and everybody pronounced him a good fellow. He had made it easy for the gang to accept Latnah, when she came to them different from the girls of the Ditch. But there was just the shadow of a change in the manner of the gang toward her since she had taken up steadily with Banjo.

“Some of us nevah know when wese got a good thing,” said Malty to Banjo as they sat up on the breakwater, waiting to be signaled to lunch on a ship. “I think youse

the kind a man that don't appreciate a fust-rate thing because he done got it too easy."

"Ise a gone-fool nigger with any honey-sweet mamma," replied Banjo, "but I ain't gwina bury mah head under no woman's skirt and let her cackle ovah me."

"All that bellyaching about a skirt," retorted Malt. "We was all made and bohn under it."

Banjo laughed and said: "Easy come, easy go. Tha's the life-living way. We got met up easy and she's taking it easy, and Ise taking it easy, too."

A black seaman came on deck and signaled them. They hurried down from the breakwater and up the gangway.

Latnah was the first woman that Malt and his pals had ever met actually on the beach. Malt first became aware of her one day on the deck of a ship from which he and Bussy and Ginger had been driven by a Negro steward.

"G'way from here, you lazy no-'count bums," the steward had said. "I wouldn't even give you-all a bone to chew on. Instead a gwine along back to work, you lay down on the beach a bumming mens who am trying to make a raspactable living. You think if you-all lay down sweet and lazy in you' skin while we others am wrastling with salt water, wese gwine to fatten you moh in you' laziness? G'way from this heah white man's broad nigger bums."

The boys were very hungry. For some days they had been eating off a coal boat with a very friendly crew. But it had left the moorings and anchored out in the bay, and now they could not get to it. Irritated, but

rather amused by the steward's onslaught, they shuffled off from the ship a little down the quay. But Malt happened to look behind him and see Latnah waving. He went back with his pals and they found a mess of good food waiting for them. Latnah had spoken in their behalf, and one of the mates had told the chief steward to feed them.

The boys saw her often after that. They met her at irregular intervals in the Bum Square and down the docks. One day on the docks she got into a row with one of the women who sold fancy goods on the boats. The woman was trying to tempt one of the mates into buying a fine piece of Chinese silk, but the mate was more tempted by Latnah.

"Go away from me," the mate said. "I don't want a bloody thing you've got."

The woman was angry, but such rebuffs were not strange to her. To carry on her business successfully she had to put up with them. She had seen at once that the officer was interested in Latnah, and in passing she swung her valise against Latnah's side.

"Oh, you stupid woman!" cried Latnah, holding her side.

"You dirty black whore," returned the woman.

"You bigger white whore," retorted Latnah. "I know you sell everything you've got I see you on ship." And Latnah pulled open her eye at the woman and made a face.

Later, when Latnah left the ship, she again met the woman with her man on the dock. The man was a slim tout-like type, and he tried to rough-handle Latnah. But Malt happened along then and bounced the fellow

with his elbow and said, "Now what you trying to do with this woman?" The man muttered something in a language unfamiliar to Maltby and slunk off with his woman. He hadn't understood what Maltby had said, either, but his bounce and menacing tone had been clear enough.

"I glad you come," said Latnah to Maltby. "I thank you plenty, plenty, for if you no come I would been in big risk, I would stick him."

She slipped from her bosom a tiny argent-headed dagger, exquisitely sharp-pointed, and showed it to Maltby. He recoiled with fear and Latnah laughed. A razor or a knife would not have touched him strangely. But a dagger! It was as if Latnah had produced a serpent from her bosom. It was not an instrument familiar to his world, his people, his life. It reminded him of the strange, fierce, fascinating tales he had heard of Oriental strife and daggers dealing swift death.

Suddenly another side of Latnah was revealed to him and she stood out more clearly, different from the strange creature of quick gestures and nimble body who panhandled the boats and brought them gifts of costly cigarettes. She was different from the women of his race. She laughed differently, quietly, subtly. The women of his race could throw laughter like a clap of thunder. And their style, the movement of their hips, was like that of fine, vigorous, four-footed animals. Latnah's was gliding like a serpent. But she stirred up a powerfully sweet and strange desire in him.

She made him remember the Indian coolies that he had known in his West Indian Island when he was a boy. They were imported indentured laborers and worked on the big sugar plantation that bordered on

his seaside village. The novelty of their strangeness never palled on the village. The men with their turbans and the loin-cloths that the villagers called coolie-wrapper. The women weighted down with heavy silver bracelets on arms, neck and ankles, their long glossy hair half hidden by the cloth that the natives called coolie-red. Perhaps they had unconsciously influenced the Negroes to retain their taste for bright color and ornaments that the Protestant missionaries were trying to destroy.

Every 1st of August, the great native holiday, anniversary of the emancipation of the British West Indian slaves in 1834, the Negroes were joined by some Indians in their sports on the playground. The Indians did athletic stunts and sleight-of-hand tricks, such as unwinding yards of ribbon out of their mouths, cleverly making coins disappear and finding them in the pockets of the natives, and fire-eating.

Some of the Indians were regarded as great workers in magic. The Negroes believed that Indian magic was more powerful than their Obeah. Certain Indians had given up the laborious hoeing and digging of plantation work to practice the black art among the natives. And they were much more influential and prosperous than the Negro doctors of Obeah.

The two peoples did not mix in spite of the friendly contact. There were, however, rare instances of Indians who detached themselves from their people and became of the native community by marrying Negro women. But the Indian women remained more conservative. Maltby remembered one striking exception of a beautiful Indian girl. She went to the Sunday-evening class that was conducted by the wife of the Scotch missionary.

And she became a convert to Christianity and was married to the Negro schoolmaster.

He also remembered a little Indian girl who was for some time in his class at grade school. Her skin was velvet, smooth and dark like mahogany. She was the cleverest child in the class, but always silent, unsmiling, and mysterious. He had never forgotten her.

Malty's boyhood memories undoubtedly played a part in his conduct toward Latnah. He could not think of her as he did about the women of the Ditch. He felt as if he had long lost sight of his exotic, almost forgotten schoolmate, to find her become a woman on the cosmopolitan shore of Marseilles.

After her encounter with the peddling woman, Latnah attached herself more closely to the beach boys. Maybe (not being a woman of the Ditch, with a tout to fight for her) she felt insecure and wanted to belong to a group or maybe it was just her woman's instinct to be under the protection of man. She was accepted. With their wide experience and passive philosophy of life, beach boys are adepts at meeting, understanding, and accepting everything.

Latnah was following precisely the same line of living as they. She came as a pal. She was made one of them. Whatever personal art she might use as a woman to increase her chances was her own affair. Their luck also depended primarily on personality. Often they traveled devious and separate routes in pursuit of a "handout," and sometimes had to wander into strange culs-de-sac to obtain it. It did not matter if Latnah was not inclined to be amorous with any of them. Perhaps it was better so. She was more useful to them as a pal. Love was cheap in the Ditch. It cost only the price of a bottle of

red wine among the "leetah" girls, as the beach boys called the girls of Boody Lane, because their short-time value was fixed at about the price of a liter of cheap red wine.

Malty had wanted Latnah for himself. But she had never given him any chance. She remained just one of the gang.

The boys were rather flattered that she stayed with them and shunned the Arab-speaking men, with whom she was identified by language and features. When Banjo arrived at Marseilles, Latnah's place on her own terms among the boys was a settled thing. But when, falling in love with Banjo at first sight, she took him as her lover, they were all surprised and a little piqued. And the latent desire in Malty was stirred afresh.

After their lunch, Banjo and Malty went across the suspension bridge to the docks on the other side. They were joined by Dengel, who approached them rocking rhythmically, now pausing a moment to balance himself in his tracks. He was much blacker than Malty, a shining anthracite. And his face was moist and his large eyes soft with liquor.

Dengel was always in a state of heavenly inebriety; sauntering along in a soft mist of liquor. He was never worried about food. The joy of his being was the wine of the docks. He always knew of some barrel conveniently placed that could be raided without trouble.

"Come drink wine," he said, "if you like sweet wine. We find one barrel, good, good, very sweet."

Banjo and Malty followed him. In a rather obscure position against a freight car they found Ginger and Buggy and three Senegalese armed with rubber tubes and swilling and swaying over a barrel of sweet wine.

Malty got his tube out of the knapsack that he always toted with him, and Ginger handed Banjo his. Banjo bent over the barrel, spreading his feet away the better to imbibe. He was a long time sucking up the stuff. And when he removed his mouth from the tube, he brought up a long rich and ripe sound from belly to throat, smacked his lips, and droned, "Gawd in glory, ef this baby ain't some sweet boozing!"

"Tell it to Uncle Sam," said Buggy.

"Tell it and shout nevah no moh," added Ginger.

"Nevah no moh is indeed mah middle name," said Banjo, "but brown me ef I'm a telling-it-too-much kind a ducky. I ain't got no head for remembering too much back, nor no tongue for long-suffering delivery. I'm just a right-there, right-here baby, yestiday and today and tomorrow and forevah. All right-there right-here for me now."

"Hallelujah! Lemme crown you. You done said a mou'ful a nigger stuff," said Ginger.

After they had quenched their craving they returned to the far, little-frequented end of the breakwater and lay lazily in the sun. There Latnah, her morning's hustling finished, found them. Her yellow blouse was soiled and she slipped it off and began washing it. That was a sign for the boys to clean up. All except Dengel, the only Senegalese that had crossed over to the breakwater; he was feeling too sweet in his skin for any exertion. The boys stripped to the waist and began to wash their shirts. Buggy went down between two cement blocks and brought up a can he had secreted there with a hunk of white soap. Finished washing, they spread the clothes on the blocks. Soon the vertical burning rays of the sun would suck them dry.

Malty suggested that they should swim. The beach boys often bathed down the docks, making bathing-suits of their drawers. And sometimes, when they had the extreme end of the breakwater to themselves, they went in naked. They did this time, cautioning Dengel to keep watch for them.

Latnah went in too. Malty was the best swimmer. He made strong crawl strokes. He was also an excellent diver. When he was a boy in the West Indies, he used to dive from the high deck railings for the coins that the tourists threw into the water. When he got going about wharf life in the West Indian ports of Kingston, Santiago, Port of Spain, he told stories of winning dollar bills in competition with other boys diving for coins from the bridges of ships. Of how he would struggle under water against another boy while the coin was whirling down away from them. How the cleverest boy would get it or both lose it when they could not stay down under any longer and came up breathless, blowing a multitude of bubbles.

Latnah was a beautiful diver and shot graceful like a serpent through the water. A thrill shivered through Malty's blood. He had never dreamed that her body was so lovely, limber, and sinewy. He dived down under her and playfully caught at her feet. She kicked him in the mouth, and it was like the shock of a kiss wrestled for and stolen, flooding his being with a rush of sweetly-warm sensation.

Latnah swam away and, hoisting herself upon a block, she gamboled about like a gazelle. Malty and Banjo started to swim round to her, bantering and beating up heaps of water, with Malty leading, when Dengel called: "Attention! Police!" His sharp native eye had discerned

two policemen far away up the eastern side of the breakwater, cycling toward them. The swimmers dashed for their clothes.

In a few moments the policemen rode down and, throwing a perfunctory glance at the half-dressed bathers, they circled round and went off again. "*Salauds!*" Dengel said. "Always after *us*, but scared of the real criminals."

For the rest of the afternoon they basked in the sun on the breakwater. With its cooling they returned to the Place de la Joliette, where the group broke up to forage separately for food.

They came together again in the evening in a rendezvous bar of a somber alley, just a little bit out of the heart of the Ditch. Banjo had his instrument and was playing a little saccharine tune that he had brought over from America:

"I wanna go where you go, do what you do,
Love when you love, then I'll be happy ..."

The souvenir of Latnah's foot in his mouth was a warm fever in Malty's flesh. And the red wine that he was drinking turned the fever sweet. It was a big night. The barkeeper, a thin Spanish woman, was busy setting up quart bottles of wine on the tables. Only black drinkers filled the little bar, and their wide-open, humorous, frank white eyes lighted up the place more glowingly than the dirty dim electric flare.

Senegalese, Sudanese, Somalese,⁵ Nigerians, West Indians, Americans, blacks from everywhere, crowded together, talking strange dialects, but, brought together, understanding one another by the language of

wine.

"I'll follow you, sweetheart, and share your little love-nest.
I wanna go where you go ..."

Malty had managed to get next to Latnah, and put his arm round her waist so quietly that it was some moments before she became aware of it. Then she tried to remove his arm and ease away, but he pressed against her thigh.

"Don't," she said. "I no like."

"What's the matter?" murmured Malty, thickly. "Kaint you like a fellah a lil'l bit?"

He pressed closer against her and said, "Gimmie a kiss."

She felt his strong desire. "*Cochon*, no. Go away from me." She dug him sharply in the side with her elbow.

"You' mout' it stink. I wouldn't kiss a slut like you," said Malty, and he got up and gave Latnah a hard push.

She fell off the bench and picked herself up, crying. She was not hurt by the fall, but by Malty's sudden change of attitude. Malty glowered at her boozily. Banjo stopped playing, went up to him, and shook his fist in his face.

"Wha's matter you messing around mah woman?"

"Go chase you'self. I knowed her long before you did, when she was running after me."

"You're a dawggone liar!"

"And youse another!"

"Ef it's a fight youse looking for, come on outside."

Banjo and Malty staggered off. At the door, Malty

stumbled and nearly fell, and Banjo caught his arm and helped him into the street. All the boys crowded to the door and flowed out into the alley, to watch. The antagonists sparred. Malty hiccupped ominously, swayed forward, and, falling into Banjo's arms, they both went down heavily, in a helpless embrace, on the paving-stones.

Second Part⁶

Chapter 16

The "Blue Cinema"

Ray had met a Negro student from Martinique, to whom the greatest glory of the island was that the Empress Josephine was born there. That event placed Martinique above all the other islands of the Antilles in importance.

"I don't see anything in that for *you* to be so proud about," said Ray. "She was not colored."

"Oh no, but she was Créole, and in Martinique we are rather Créole than Negro. We are proud of the Empress in Martinique. Down there the best people are very distinguished and speak a pure French, not anything like this vulgar Marseilles French."

Ray asked him if he had ever heard of René Maran's *Batouala*. He replied that the sale of *Batouala* had been banned in the colony and sniggered approvingly. Ray

wondered about the truth of that; he had never heard any mention of it.

"It was a naughty book, very strong, very strong," said the student, defending the act.

They were in a café on the Canebière. That evening Ray had a rendezvous at the African Bar with another student, an African from the Ivory Coast, and asked the Martiniquan to go with him to be introduced. He refused, saying that he did not want to mix with the Senegalese and that the African Bar was in the *bas-fonds*. He warned Ray about mixing with the Senegalese.

"They are not like us," he said. "The whites would treat Negroes better in this town if it were not for the Senegalese. Before the war and the coming of the Senegalese it was splendid in France for Negroes. We were liked, we were respected, but now —"

"It's just about the same with the white Americans" said Ray. "You must judge civilization by its general attitude toward primitive peoples, and not by the exceptional cases. You can't get away from the Senegalese and other black Africans any more than you can from the fact that our forefathers were slaves. We have the same thing in the States. The Northern Negroes are stand-offish toward the Southern Negroes and toward the West Indians, who are not as advanced as they in civilized superficialities. We educated Negroes are talking a lot about a racial renaissance. And I wonder how we're going to get it. On one side we're up against the world's arrogance — a mighty cold hard white stone thing. On the other the great sweating army — our race. It's the common people, you know, who furnish the bone and sinew and salt of any race or

nation. In the modern race of life we're merely beginners. If this renaissance we're talking about is going to be more than a sporadic and scabby thing, we'll have to get down to our racial roots to create it."

"I believe in a racial renaissance," said the student, "but not in going back to savagery."

"Getting down to our native roots and building up from our own people," said Ray, "is not savagery. It is culture."

"I can't see that," said the student.

"You are like many Negro intellectuals who are bellyaching about race," said Ray. "What's wrong with you all is your education. You get a white man's education and learn to despise your own people. You read biased history of the whites conquering the colored and primitive peoples, and it thrills you just as it does a white boy belonging to a great white nation."

"Then when you come to maturity you realize with a shock that you don't and can't belong to the white race. All your education and achievements cannot put you in the intimate circles of the whites and give you a white man's full opportunity. However advanced, clever, and cultivated you are, you will have the distinguishing adjective of 'colored' before your name. And instead of accepting it proudly and manfully, most of you are soured and bitter about it – especially you mixed-bloods."

"You're a lost crowd, you educated Negroes, and you will only find yourself in the roots of your own people. You can't choose as your models the haughty-minded educated white youths of a society living solid on its imperial conquests. Such pampered youths can afford to despise the sweating white brutes of the lower

orders.

"If you were sincere in your feelings about racial advancement, you would turn for example to whites of a different type. You would study the Irish cultural and social movement. You would turn your back on all these tiresome clever European novels and read about the Russian peasants, the story and struggle of their lowly, patient, hard-driven life, and the great Russian novelists who described it up to the time of the Russian Revolution. You would learn all you can about Ghandi and what he is doing for the common hordes of India. You would be interested in the native African dialects and, though you don't understand, be humble before their simple beauty instead of despising them."

The mulatto student was not moved in his determination not to go to the African Bar, and so Ray went alone. He loved to hear the African dialects sounding around him. The dialects were so rich and round and ripe like soft tropical fruit, as if they were fashioned to eliminate all things bitter and harsh to express. They tasted like brown unrefined cane sugar – Sousou, Bambara, Woloff, Fula, Dindie ...

The *patron* of the African Bar pointed out men of the different tribes to Ray. It was easy to differentiate the types of the interior from those of the port towns, for they bore tribal marks on their faces. Among civilized people they were ashamed, most of them, of this mutilation of which their brothers of the towns under direct European administration were free; but, because tattooing was the fashion among seamen, they were not ashamed to have their bodies pricked and figured all over with the souvenirs of the brothels of civilization.

It was no superior condescension, no feeling of race

solidarity or Back-to-Africa demonstration – no patriotic effort whatsoever – that made Ray love the environment of the common black drifters. He loved it with the poetical enthusiasm of the vagabond black that he himself was. After all, he had himself lived the rough-and-tumble laboring life, and the most precious souvenirs of it were the joyful friendships that he had made among his pals. There was no intellectual friendship to be compared with them.

It was always interesting to compare the African with the West Indian and American Negroes. Indeed, he found the Africans of the same class as the New World Negroes less “savage” and more “primitive.” The Senegalese drunk was a much finer and more tractable animal than the American Negro drunk. And although the Senegalese were always loudly quarreling and fighting among themselves, they always made use of hands, feet, and head (butting was a great art among them) and rarely of a steel weapon as did the American and West Indian Negroes. The colored touts that were reputed to be dangerous gunmen were all from the French West Indies. The few Senegalese who belonged to the sweet brotherhood were disquietingly simple, as if they had not the slightest comprehension of the social stigma attaching to them.

At the African Bar the conversation turned on the hostile feeling that existed between the French West Indians and the native Africans. The *patron* said that the West Indians felt superior because many of them were appointed as petty officials in the African colonies and were often harder on the natives than the whites.

“*Fils d’esclaves! Fils d’esclaves!*” cried a Senegalese sergeant. “Because they have a chance to be better

instructed than we, they think we are the savages and that they are ‘white’ Negroes. Why, they are only the descendants of the slaves that our forefathers sold.”

“They got more advantages than we and they think they’re the finest and most important Negroes in the world,” said the student from the Ivory Coast.

“They’re crazy,” said the *patron*. “The most important Negroes in the world and the best off are American Negroes.”

“That’s not true! That can’t be true!” said a chorus of voices.

“I think Negroes are treated worse in America than in any other country,” said the student. “They lynch Negroes in America.”

“They do,” said the *patron*, “but it’s not what you imagine it. It’s not an everyday affair and the lynchings are pulled off in the Southern parts of the country, which are very backward.”

“The Southern States are a powerful unit of the United States,” said Ray, “and you mustn’t forget that nine-tenths of American Negroes live in them.”

“More people are murdered in one year in Marseilles than they lynch in ten years in America,” said the *patron*.

“But all that comes under the law in spite of the comedy of extenuating circumstances,” said Ray, “while lynch law is its own tribunal.”

“And they Jim Crow all the Negroes in America,” said the student.

“What is Jim Crow?” asked the Senegalese sergeant.

“Negroes can’t ride first class in the trains nor in the same tramcars with white people, no matter how

educated and rich they are. They can't room in the same hotels or eat in the same restaurants or sit together in the same theaters. Even the parks are closed to them —"

"That's only in the Southern States and not in the North," the *patron* cut in.

"But Ray has just told us that ninety per cent of the Negroes live in those states," said the student, "and that there are about fifteen millions in America. Well then, the big majority don't have any privileges at all. There is no democracy for them. Because you went to New York and happened to make plenty of money to come back here and open a business, you are over-proud of America and try to make the country out finer than it is, although the Negroes there are living in a prison."

"You don't understand," said the *patron*. "I wasn't in the North alone. I was in the old slave states also. I have traveled all over America and I tell you the American Negro is more go-getting than Negroes anywhere else in the world — the Antilles or any part of Africa. Just as the average white American is a long way better off than the European. Look at all these fellows here. What can they do if they don't go to sea as firemen? Nothing but stay here and become *maquereaux*.⁷ The Italians hog all the jobs on the docks, and the Frenchman will take Armenians and Greeks in the factories because they are white, and leave us. The French won't come straight out and tell us that they treat us differently because we are black, but we know it. I prefer the American white man. He is boss and he tells you straight where he can use you. He is a brute, but he isn't a hypocrite."

The student, perplexed, realizing that from the

earnestness of the café proprietor's tone there was truth in what he said, appealed to Ray in face of the contradictory facts.

"You are both right," Ray said to the student. "All the things you say about the Negro in the States are facts and what he says about the Negro's progress is true. You see race prejudice over there drives the Negroes together to develop their own group life. American Negroes have their own schools, churches, newspapers, theaters, cabarets, restaurants, hotels. They work for the whites, but they have their own social group life, an intense, throbbing, vital thing in the midst of the army of whites milling around them. There is nothing like it in the West Indies nor in Africa, because there you don't have a hundred-million-strong white pressure that just carries the Negro group along with it. Here in Europe you have more social liberties than Negroes have in America, but you have no warm group life. You need colored women for that. Women that can understand us as human beings and not as wild over-sexed savages. And you haven't any. The successful Negro in Europe always marries a white woman, and I have noticed in almost every case that it is a white woman inferior to himself in brains and physique. The energy of such a Negro is lost to his race and goes to build up some decaying white family."

"But look at all the mulattoes you have in America," said the student. "White men are continually going with colored women."

"Because the colored women like it as much as the white men," replied Ray.

"Ray!" exclaimed Goosey who had entered the café, "you are scandalous and beneath contempt."

"That's all right, Goosey. I know that the American Negro press says that American colored women have no protection from the lust and passion of white men on account of the Southern state laws prohibiting marriage between colored and white and I know that you believe that. But that is newspaper truth and no more real than the crackers shouting that white women live in fear and trembling of black rapists. The days of chivalry are stone dead, and the world today is too enlightened about sex to be fooled by white or black propaganda.

"In the West Indies, where there are no prohibitory laws, the Europeans have all the black and mulatto concubines they need. In Africa, too. Woman is woman all over the world, no matter what her color is. She is cast in a passive rôle and she worships the active success of man and rewards it with her body. The colored woman is no different from the white in this. If she is not inhibited by race feeling she'll give herself to the white man because he stands for power and property. Property controls sex.

"When you understand that, Goosey, you'll understand the meaning of the struggle between class and class, nation and nation, race and race. You'll understand that society chases after power just as woman chases after property, because society is feminine. And you'll see that the white races today are ahead of the colored because their women are emancipated, and that there is greater material advancement among those white nations whose women have the most freedom.

"Understand this and you will understand why the white race tries so hard to suppress the colored races.

You'll understand the root of the relation between colored women and white men and why white men will make love to colored women but will not marry them."

"But white women marry colored men, all the same," said Goosey. "White women feel better toward colored people than white men."

"You're a fool," replied Ray. "White men are what their women make them. That's plain enough to see in the South. White women hate Negroes because the colored women steal their men and so many of them are society wives in name only. You know what class of white women marry colored men."

"There are Negroes in America who had their fortunes made by white women," said Goosey.

"There *are* exceptions – white women with money who are fed up. But the majority are what I said a while ago. ... Show me a white woman or man who can marry a Negro and belong to respectable society in London or New York or any place. I can understand these ignorant black men marrying broken-down white women because they are under the delusion that there is some superiority in the white skin that has suppressed and bossed it over them all their lives. But I can't understand an intelligent race-conscious man doing it. Especially a man who is bellyaching about race rights. He is the one who should exercise a certain control and self-denial of his desires. Take Senghor and his comrades in propaganda for example. They are the bitterest and most humorless of propagandists and they are all married to white women. It is as if the experience has over-soured them. As if they thought it would bring them closer to the white race, only to realize too late that it couldn't.

"Why marry, I ask? There are so many other ways of doing it. Europe can afford some of its excess women to successful Negroes and that may help to keep them loyal to conventional ideals. America 'keeps us in our place' and in our race. Which may be better for the race in the long run.

"The Jews have kept intact, although they were scattered all over the world, and it was easier for them than for Negroes to lose themselves.

"To me the most precious thing about human life is difference. Like flowers in a garden, different kinds for different people to love. I am not against miscegenation. It produces splendid and interesting types. But I should not crusade for it because I should hate to think of a future in which the identity of the black race in the Western World should be lost in miscegenation."

Six distinguished whites entered the café, putting an end to the conversation. They were the two gentlemen bums, three other men and one woman. The woman saw Ray and greeted him effusively with surprise.

"Oh, Ray, this is where you ran away to hide yourself, leaving all the artists to mourn for their fine model."

"But she is American," the Ivory Coast student, popped at the woman's friendly manner, whispered to the *patron*.

"Sure," he answered, in malicious triumph. "Did you think there were no human relations between white and black in America, that they were just like two armies fighting against each other all the time?"

Ray did not know who the woman was, whether she was American or European. She spoke French and

German as readily as she spoke English. He had met her at the studio of a Swiss painter in Paris (a man who carried a title on his card) when he was posing there, and she had made polite and agreeable conversation with him while he posed. Later, he saw her twice at cabarets in Montmartre, where he had been taken by bohemian artists, and she had not snubbed him.

The gentlemen bums were as surprised as the Ivory Coast student (but differently) when the woman greeted Ray. They had met the group and were going through the town with them. The leading spirit of the party had desired to stop in the bar when he was told that it was a rendezvous for Negroes.

He was a stout, audacious-looking man, a tireless international traveler, who liked to visit every country in the world except the unpleasantly revolutionary ones. The accidental meeting was a piquant thing for Ray, because he had heard strange talk of the man before. Of celebrations of occult rites and barbaric saturnalia with the tempo of nocturnal festivities regulated by the crack of whips. A bonfire made of a bungalow to show the beauties of the landscape when the night was dark. And a splendid stalwart, like one of the Sultan of Morocco's guards, brought from Africa, as a result of which he had been involved in trouble with governmental authorities in Europe.

Certainly, Ray had long been desirous of seeing this personage who had been gossiped about so much, for he had a penchant for exotic sins. Indeed, a fine Jewish soul with a strong Jeremiah flame in him had warned Ray in Paris about what he chose to call his cultivation of the heathenish atavistic propensities of the subterranean personality. The Jewish idealist thought

the cocottes and gigolos monkeying on the promenade more interesting to watch than the society people. The white monkeys were essential to the great passion play of life to understudy the parts of those who were holding the stage by power of wealth, place, name, title, and class – everything but the real thing.

And as there were civilized white monkeys, so were there black monkeys, created by the conquests of civilization, learning to imitate the white and even beating them at their game. He recalled the colored sweetmen and touts and girls with whom he had been familiar in America, some who lived in the great obscure region of the boundary between white and black. Following as they did their own shady paths, he had never been strongly repelled by their way of living, because it was a rôle that they played admirably, scavengers feeding on the backwash of the broad streaming traffic of American life. They were not very different from the monkeys of the French Antilles who carried on their antics side by side with the Provençals and Corsicans and others of the Mediterranean breed. They had acquired enough of civilized tricks to play their parts fittingly.

But not so the Africans, who were closer to the bush, the jungle, where their primitive sex life had been controlled by ancient tribal taboos. Within those taboos they had courted their women, married and made families. And so it was not natural for them, so close to the tradition of paying in cash or kind or hard labor for the joy of a woman, to live the life of the excrescences attaching like mushrooms to the sexual life of civilization. Released from their taboos, turned loose in an atmosphere of prostitution and perversion and

trying to imitate the white monkeys, it was no wonder they were very ugly.

After the dinner the younger American created a problem. He was of middle build, wearing a fine New York suit, reddish-brown stuff. He was the clean-shaven, clean-cut type that might have been either a graduate student looking at the world with the confident air of one who is able to go anywhere, or a successful salesman of high-class goods. He wore no horn-rimmed glasses to hide his clear-seeing eyes, and his jaw was developing into the kind common to the men who are earnest, big, and prosperous in the ideals of Americanism.

“But this ‘Blue Cinema,’ what is it, really?” he demanded.

“I suppose it is a cinematic version of the picture cards the guides try to sell you in the street,” the leader answered. “You don’t have to go, you know.”

“Oh, I’d like to see the thing, all right,” replied the young man, “but – are there colored or white persons in the picture?”

“White, I suppose. The colored people are not as advanced and inventive as we in such matters. Excepting what we teach them,” the leader added, facetiously; “they often beat us at our game when they learn.”

“But she isn’t going, is she?” The American indicated the young woman. “They won’t let her in a *maison de rendezvous*.”

“Most certainly I am. Am I not one of the party? There isn’t anything I am not old enough to see, if I want to. Do you want to discriminate against me

because I am a woman?"

"They'll let her in in any place if we pay the price," said the Britisher.

"But she can't go if he is going." The young man looked at Ray.

"Oh, Ray!" The young woman laughed. "That's what it's all about. You needn't worry about him. He has posed in the nude for my friends and he was a perfectly-behaved *sauvage*." She stressed the word broadly.

"That's all right," said Ray to the young man. "I am not going if you go. I am full of prejudices myself."

"Well, good night," the young man said. Abruptly he left the party.

"My friend has done his bit for the honor of the Great Nordic race," the remaining American remarked.

Nobody thought that the "Blue Cinema" would be really entertaining. The leader was blasé and desired anything that was merely different. But they were all curious, except the gentlemen bums, who had seen the show several times as guides and were indifferent. It was very high-priced, costing fifty francs for each person.

The fee of admission was paid. In the large dim hall they were the only audience. ...

Before the first reel had finished the leader asked the young woman if she preferred to go.

"No, I'd rather see it out," she said.

There was no brutal, beastly, orgiastic rite that could rouse terror or wild-animal feeling. It was a calculating, cold, naked abortion.

The "Blue Cinema" struck them with the full force of a cudgel, beating them down into the depths of disgust.

Ray wondered if the men who made it had a moral purpose in mind: to terrify and frighten away all who saw it from that phase of life. Or was it possible that there were human beings whose instincts were so brutalized and blunted in the unsparing struggle of modern living that they needed that special stimulating scourge of ugliness. Perhaps. The "Blue Cinema," he had heard, was a very flourishing business.

He was sitting against a heavy red velvet curtain. Toward the end of the show the curtain was slightly agitated, as if someone ⁸ on the other side had stirred it. He caught the curtain aside and saw some half a dozen Chinese, conspicuous by their discolored teeth and unlovely bland smiles, standing among a group of girls in a kind of alcove-room which the curtain divided from the cinema hall. The woman of the party saw them too, before Ray could pull the curtain back, and gave a little scream. The Chinese there did not surprise Ray. He knew that they were hired to perform, like monkeys. There were other houses that specialized in Arabs, Corsicans, and Negroes when they were in demand.

As they were leaving the lady president of affairs appeared and suggested their seeing also the tableaux vivants.

"Oh no, the dead ones were enough," replied the leader.

"Why did you scream?" the leader asked, roughly, when the party was in the street again.

"It was my fault," said Ray. "I pulled the curtain back and she suddenly saw a roomful of people behind it."

"That was nothing. I saw them, too, as you did, but I

didn't scream." He turned on her again. "You say you want to go to any place a man goes and stand anything a man can stand, and yet you scream over a few filthy Chinese."

"I'm sorry," she said. "It was out before I could check myself."

"I suggested leaving in the beginning, but you insisted on staying it out; I didn't expect you to scream. Did you enjoy it?"

"It was so ugly," she said, adding: "I think I'll go to the hotel. You men can stay, but I'm finished for tonight."

The leader laughed and asked the American to take her home.

"Oh, I don't need an escort. I'll just take a taxi," she said.

"You'd better not go alone. The taxis are not safe this time of night," said Ray.

"I don't care whether you need an escort or not. *I* am taking you to the hotel," said the American.

They walked to the main street and Ray hailed a green Mattei taxicab. "They are run by a big company and are safe," he said. "The unsafe ones here hang around the shady places – just as in New York and Chicago. Some of the private drivers are touts, and as you never know which is which, I always recommend my friends to ride with the Trust."

"Where shall I find you fellows afterward?" the American asked.

"Where now?" said the leader. "After this 'blue' refinement I should like to go to the roughest and dirtiest place we can find."

"I think Banjo's hangout down Bum Square way is just the place we are looking for," said Ray.

"That's the place," the Britisher agreed.

They told the American how to find it.

"Whether it is blue or any other color of the rainbow, the cinema is for the mob," said the leader. "It will never be an art."

"I don't agree," said Ray. "Pictorial pantomime can be just as fine an art as any. What about Charlie Chaplin?"

"He's an exception. A conscientious artist with a popular appeal."

"All real art is an exception," said Ray. "You can't condemn an art wholesale because inartistic people make a bad business of it. The same condition exists in the other arts. Everybody is in a wild business race and the conscientious workers are few. It's a crazy circle of blue-cinema people, poor conscientious artists, cynical professionals and an indifferent public."

"You know I like the cinema for exactly the reverse of its object," said the leader. "Because it's about the easiest way to see what people really are under the acting."

Ray laughed and said: "The 'Blue Cinema' was just that," and he added: "Some of us don't need the cinema, though, to show us up. We are so obvious."

In the Bum Square they ran into Banjo with his instrument.

"Where you coming from?" Ray asked.

"Just finish performing and said *bonne nuit* to a kelt."

The leader was curious to know what "kelt" meant.

Banjo and Ray exchanged glances and grinned.

“That’s a word in black freemasonry,” explained Ray, “but I don’t object to initiating you if Banjo doesn’t.”

“Shoot,” said Banjo.

“In the States,” said Ray, “we Negroes have humorous little words of our own with which we replace unpleasant stock words. And we often use them when we are among white people and don’t want them to know just what we are referring to, especially when it is anything delicate or taboo between the races. For example, we have words like ofay, pink, fade, spade, Mr. Charlie, cracker, peckawood, hoojah, and so on – nice words and bitter. The stock is always increasing because as the whites get on to the old words we invent new ones. ‘Kelt’ I picked up in Marseilles. I think Banjo brought it here and made it popular among the boys. I don’t know if it has anything to do with ‘keltic.’”

“Oh no,” said the leader. “Kelt is a real word of Scottish origin, I think.”

“That might explain how Banjo got it, then. He used to live in Canada.”

The party went to Banjo’s hangout and the whole gang was there drinking and dancing.

The American joined them very late, worried about his younger friend. A panhandling Swede had accosted him in the Bum Square and told him that he had seen his friend in Joliette, helplessly drunk and getting into a taxicab with a couple of mean-looking touts. The American had gone at once to his friend’s hotel, to Joliette, and then had searched in all the bars of the quarter, but could not obtain any information about him.

The next day he was found in a box car on a lonely quay beyond Joliette, stripped of everything and wearing a dirty rag of a loin-cloth for his only clothing. The sudden and forced reversal to a savage state had shocked him temporarily daft.

Chapter 17

Breaking-up

When the dawn came filtering down through the Ditch, Ray left the party and staggered through Boody Lane to find his bunk. Dengel and Ginger had left the place before him, knocking their heads together in a drowsy roll. Malt had sprawled in a corner over a table. The bistro man helped him to a room upstairs. Banjo was full and tight as a drum, but he kept right on playing and drinking as if he were just beginning a performance. Goosey was tired out, but he was curious about the distinguished company and his desire to keep up with it kept him awake. The gentlemen guides had tried to persuade Ray to go with the party to an all-night café off the Canebière for a big breakfast, but he had declined. All the nourishment Ray needed then was to lay his body down and rest.

Boody Lane showed no stir of life as he passed through it. All the holes in the wall and the cafés were closed. Not a dog, not a cat prowled through the alley. A strange clinical odor rose from the heaps of rubbish in the gutters, communicating to his wine-fogged senses an unpleasant sensation as if he were in quarantine. He

had remarked that strange odor in the Ditch at regular intervals and he could not account for it. The big hospital was just on the hill above. That could not be the source of the smell, he argued, for he had often walked through the street right under the hospital without detecting it.

Ray's head was pounding with the tom-tom of savage pain and his brain was in a maze, reacting against himself. For weeks he had been purposelessly boozing and lazing and shutting his mind against a poem in his heart and a story in his head, both clamoring to be heard. There was no reason why he shouldn't do something, and yet he couldn't do anything.

He could not sleep, although he was so tired. The racket in his head left him unstrung. The drinking-bout after the cinema was a stupid thing, he knew. Couldn't expect anything but a mess from mixing myself up like that. Every time he dozed off he woke up with a broken dream of some vivid experience, as if his real self did not want to go to sleep.

However, repose was so good, even though sleep played the imp, that he had no idea how many hours he had lain there until Banjo broke into the room, demanding if he was going to sleep through the night after sleeping all day.

"You can carry on sleeping forevah," said Banjo. "I'm gwine to leave you-all. I'm gwine away to the Meedy."

"Which Midi and who are you going away with?" Ray asked. "You're right in the Midi now, don't you know that?"

"Oh, I gwina away to the real Meedy down the coast whar the swell guys hang out at."

Ray guessed at once that the leader of the party had proposed to take Banjo along, and he said: "You'd better stay here in Marseilles. It's no use you running off with those people. They're no good for you."

"Ain't nothing bad foh mine, pardner. I was bohn on the go same like you is, and Ise always ready for a change."

"Where they taking you?"

"Nice, Monte Carlo, some a them tony rayschts. I don't care which one. But I'm going there and don't you fear. You hold mah place for me in Boody Lane till I come back, mah friend."

"Boody Lane in your seat. You're a damn fool to go. What about the orchestra? Aren't you going to fool with that any more?"

"The orchestry! What you wanta remember it now for? You'd fohgotten it as well as I and everybody did, becausen theah was so many other wonderful things in this sweet poht to take up our time. All the same, pardner, Ise jest right in with the right folkses now to hulp me with an orchestry."

"Help my black hide. You'll get nothing but a drunken bath outa those people, and it's better you get that way in the Ditch than where you're going. They can't help themselves, much less you. You can think about an orchestra, but they can't think about anything. They don't want to. I know it's no good your going with them. I'm sorry I introduced you to them."

"Hi, pardner, what's eating you? You jealous of a fellah just becausen they done took me instead a you?"

"You big bonehead. He wanted me to go, and it was after I refused he asked you. I know those people. I'm

sure I can stand them better than you by being a charming, drunk, unthinking fool. But I couldn't stand them sober and thinking just a little bit. You won't be able to stand them drunk or sober. I know it. You'll cut a hell of a hog before you know what's happening.

"How do you think I've been traveling round so much without having any money? I wasn't a steady seaman like you. I did it by getting on to people like those for a while. I could carry on – *for a while*. But I always got tired and quit. I can't see you carrying on with them for any time at all – can't imagine you ever being funny with that big lump of a buffalo."

"Well, I'm gwina try it, all the same, pardner. I know them folks mahself just like you does. I been around Paree with one a them once, a dandy hoojah. Didn't I tell you about it?"

"Yes, but he was different."

"Why don't you come with us, and ef we didn't like it we could come back together?"

"I don't want to go and they wouldn't want two of us, crazy. One black boy is just odd enough for a little diversion. But what do you want to quit us for? What about Latnah?"

"You know she is mad at me. Nearly stick me with a dagger. I leave her to Maltie and you."

Perhaps Banjo did not know how great his influence was over the beach boys. His going away with his instrument left them leaderless and they fell apart. And as a psychological turn sometimes foreshadows a material change, or *vice versa*, even in obscure isolated cases, the boys felt that something was happening and realized that it was becoming very difficult for them to

gain their unmoral bohemian subsistence as before.

They did not know that the Radical government had fallen, that a National-Union government had come into power, and that the franc had been arrested in its spectacular fall and was being stabilized. They knew very little about governments, and cared less. But they knew that suddenly francs were getting scarce in their world, meals were dearer in the eating-sheds and in the bistros, and more sous were necessary to obtain the desirable red wine and white, so indispensable to their existence.

However, some of them had an imperfect commonsense knowledge of some of the things that were taking place in the important centers of the world, and that those things were threatening to destroy their aristocratic way of life. Great Britain's black boys, for example. They observed that colored crews on British ships west of Suez were becoming something of a phenomenon. Even the colored crews on the Mediterranean coal ships, of which they had a monopoly in the past, were being replaced by white crews. The beach boys felt the change, for the white crews would not feed them the left-over food.

The beach boys were scattered and broke. Goosey and Buggy had joined a gang of Arab and Mediterranean laborers and were sent by a municipal agency to work in an up-country factory. Ray had no money. He owed rent on his room and could not obtain any money by either begging, beseeching, versifying, or storytelling.

Latnah solved the situation by proposing that she, Ray, and Maltie should go to the vineyards to work. The agencies wanted hands. The pay was about thirty francs a day, with free board and lodging and plenty of wine.

They could save their wages to return to Marseilles. The harvesting would last about a month.

Ray jumped at the idea. He had been just about fed up with the Vieux Port when he met Banjo. The meeting and their friendship had revived his interest. Now that Banjo was gone and the group dispersed, the spell was broken and he felt like moving on. He tried to get Ginger to go along. But Ginger, as an old-timer on the docks, preferred to stay and take his chances with Dengel.

Third Part⁹

Chapter 23

Shake That Thing Again

Ray returned to the Ditch, and at the African Bar Banjo was treating Malty, Ginger, Dengel, and some West African boys. Banjo had received notice from the consulate to prepare to leave in a day or two. Ray was boisterously welcomed. Girls and their touts were dancing to the continuous racket from the pianola. Banjo suggested that the gang should go to his old hangout, where he would play and they could kick up their own racket.

The long back room in the rear of the bistro was the boys' for spreading joy. Banjo revived "Shake That Thing" for the party. Malty joined him blowing a little

horn or whistling, while the boys kept up a humming monotone of accompaniment as they danced.

Old folks doing it, and young folks too,
The young folks learning the old how to do,
Shake That Thing, Shake That Thing.
I'm getting sick and tired, but ... OH, SHAKE THAT THING!

Front and rear the bistro was jammed – girls and touts and beach boys. The girls helped themselves liberally to the boys' wine on the tables. Dengel, who rarely danced, was dogging it with a boy from Grand Bassam. A vivacious girl pointed at them and cried: "Look at that Dengel dancing. I thought he didn't do anything but booze."

She cut in between them and, her feminine curiosity rising over her passion for gain, she ignored the boy from Grand Bassam, who was new to the Ditch and supposed to have money, and, taking hold of Dengel, said "Dance with me." Tall and very slim, Dengel looked like a fine tree fern. He bent over to the girl in that manner of swaying inebriation peculiar to him, and executed an African jig so wildly that space had to be cleared for them. Surprised at Dengel's rough wildness, the girl laughed and shrieked and wiggled excitedly.

When Banjo stopped playing, she rushed up to him and asked for the same thing again. Just at that moment a tout entered and whispered something to the Jelly-roll *patrone* of the bistro, who held up her hand and called: "Listen! If any of you have guns or any other weapons, give them to me, for there's going to be a *rafle*¹⁰ tonight."

The touts handed over their guns and knives to her.

Of the colored men, only a mulatto, a Martiniquan, had a revolver, which he gave to the woman. She put the weapons in a drawer of the counter and locked it. A boy who was a stranger to the quarter asked her: "You always know when the police are going to operate down here?"

"Sure. That's understood," she said. She was near the entrance, and stepping out into the narrow alley she said, with a raucous laugh, "That for the police."

She reentered the bistro heaving with laughter and, patting one of the Senegalese who was standing white-eyed by the door, said: "*Tu as vu le clair de lune?*"

Hearing that the police were coming, Ray felt that he could not stand being handled by them again just then. He might do something crazy and get into serious trouble. So he quietly slipped off. Just as he reached the corner the police entered the bistro. He had to cut across Boody Lane to reach the Bum Square, and as he was passing he saw a policeman coming out of one of the holes-in-the-wall and finger-wiping his long mustache as if he had just finished the most appetizing *hors-d'œuvre* in the world. Maybe.

In the Bum Square he met Latnah. Her manner was strangely preoccupied. Ray asked her if she knew the boys were celebrating in the Ditch. She knew, but did not care to go.

"I think you're blue like me," said Ray. "Maybe what we need to fix us up is a pipe dream."

"You do that, too?" Latnah asked.

"I do anything that is good for a change. All depends on the place and the time and the second person singular?"

"Then I have stuff," Latnah said. "We go." They went up to her little place. She spread the colored coverlet on the floor and threw down two little cushions for pillows. She brought out a basket of oranges and dates. And they sat down together on the rug. A little brass plate, lamp, tube, and the iodine-like paste strangely fascinating in its somnolent thickness. Latnah prepared for the ritual.

"Take fruit. It good with fruit," she said.

"I know that," Ray replied.

"You know all about it," she smiled subtly. "I think is leetle Oriental in you."

"Maybe. There's a saying in my family about some of our people coming from East Africa. They were reddish, with glossy curly hair. But you have the same types in West Africa, too. You remember the two fellows that used to be at the African Bar during the summer? They looked like twins and they were heavy-featured like some Armenians."

"I think they were *mulattres*," said Latnah.

"No, they weren't mixed – not as we know it between black and white today. Perhaps way back. I heard they were Fulahs."

"We all mixed up. I'm so mixed I don't know what I am myself."

"You don't? I always wonder, Latnah, what you really are. Except for the Chinese, I don't feel any physical sympathy for Orientals, you know. I always feel cold and strange and far away from them. But you are different. I feel so close to you."

"My mother was Negresse," said Latnah. "Sudanese or Abyssinian – I no certain. I was born at Aden. My

father I no know what he was nor who he was.”

Latnah picked an orange clean of its white covering and handed a half of it to Ray. He put his tube down and slipped a lobe into his mouth. The incense of the rite rose and filled the little chamber, drifting on its atmosphere like a magic canopy. Drowsily Ray remembered Limehouse and those days of repose in the quiet dens there.

Latnah must have captured his thoughts psychically, for she suddenly said, “It no never haunt you?”

“No. I remember it as one of the strange and pleasant things in my life, just as another person might recall any interesting event. But when I quit I just put it out of my mind – forgot it and started in living differently.”

“You beaucoup Oriental,” said Latnah. “Banjo never touch anything strange like us. *Il est un pur sauvage du sang.*” She sighed.

Ray locked her to him in his elbow. Peace and forgetfulness in the bosom of a brown woman. Warm brown body and restless dark body like a black root growing down in the soft brown earth. Deep dark passion of bodies close to the earth understanding each other. Dark brown bodies of the earth, earthy. Dark ... brown ... rich colors of the nourishing earth. The pinks bring trouble and tumult and riot into dark lives. Leave them alone in their vanity and tigerish ambitions to fret and fume in their own hell, for terrible is their world that creates disasters and catastrophes from simple natural incidents.

A little resting from the body’s aching and the mind’s trouble in sweet dreaming. Ray’s hankering was for scenes of tropical shores sifted through hectic years. Salty-warm blue bays where black boys dive down deep

into the deep waters, where the ships shear in on foamy waves and black youths row out to them in canoes and black pilots bring them in to anchor. Cocoanut palms like sentinels on the sandy shore. Black draymen coming from the hilltops, singing loudly – rakish chants, whipping up the mules bearing loads of brown sugar and of green bunches of bananas, trailing along the winding chalky ways down to the port.

Oh, the tropical heat of earth and body glowing in the same rhythm of nature ... sun-hot warmth wilting the blood-bright hibiscus, drawing the rich creaminess out of the lush bell-flowers, burning green fields and pasture lands to crispy autumn color, and driving the brown doves and pea doves to cover cooing under the fan-broad cooling woodland leaves.

But he dreamed instead of Harlem ... the fascinating forms of Harlem. The thick, sweaty, syrup-sweet jazzing of Sheba Palace. ... Black eyes darting out of curious mauve frames to arrest the alert prowler ... little brown legs hurrying along ... with undulating hips and voluptuous caressing motion of feminine folds.

Chapter 25

Banjo’s Ace of Spades

A funeral was winding its way through the Ditch. It was not the chauffeur’s, but a policeman’s. He had been shot a day before the chauffeur by a Ditch-dweller just let out of prison. In the Ditch they said it was a story of revenge. It was a large funeral. All the big city officials

were there or represented, black-bearded, gray-haired men, black-clothed, decorated, beribboned and medaled. The most important ones had orated valiantly over the corpse, praising the valor and virtues of the force.

Obseques solennes.

A full turnout of the force. And dutiful comrades in service actively making the way clear for the mourning officials and the immense crowd. Wreath-covered hearse and carriages following, chockful of flowers. From the church on the hill above the quarter, slowly, pompously, and solemnly the mournful army went marching through the Ditch and all the girls along the way crossed themselves and all the touts uncovered.

Directly in the line of march, Ray was sitting on the terrace of the African Bar. Not wanting to salute, nor be conspicuous by not saluting, a show stinking with insincerity and more loathsome to see than the obscene body of a crocodile, he got up and went inside, turning his back on the lugubriously-comic procession.

When the noble company had passed far and away out of the Ditch, Ray started off for Joliette to find Banjo and Goosey and give them the farewell hand. But in the Bum Square he met Goosey, who had spent all the morning hunting for Banjo. He had the consular letter from the captain of Jake's ship on which they were to go home. But Banjo was missing. He had not returned to the hotel after last night's feasting and merrymaking. Goosey had gone by all the familiar box-holes of the place, but Banjo was not to be found in any.

"Only thing to do is go back to Joliette and wait for him at the hotel," suggested Ray. "Then if he doesn't show up in time, you'll have to go alone."

They went to the hotel in Joliette and waited on the terrace over a couple bottles of beer. And when the impatient Goosey was becoming unbearably fidgety as the time of the boat's departure approached, Banjo came rocking leisurely up to them.

"Good God, man, get some American pep into you and don't act so *African*," cried Goosey. "Don't you know we've got to move by the white folks' schedule time now? You think the skipper's going to wait on us?"

"Don't excite you'se'f, yaller boy. Go you' ways without me. I ain't gwine no place."

"Not going!" cried Goosey. "After the consul paid for your board and lodging and gave you a free passage back home? You sure joking. You remember Lonesome Blue?"

Lonesome Blue had finally disappeared from the scene. When a ship was found for him he had vanished. The police could not have picked him up again, for he had been furnished papers that gave him immunity. Nobody knew where he had gone.

"Remember you'self, you," said Banjo. "I ain't studying you nor Lonesome nor no consuls when I done finish make up mah mind. There is many moh Gawd's own consuls than theah is in Marcelles and this heah Lincoln Agrippa, call him Banjo, has got moh tricks in his haid than a monkey."

Goosey looked bewildered and scared of going alone. He was shocked by Banjo's sudden desertion and felt cheated of his strong support. His lower lip hung down in a mournful way.

"Well, I guess I've got to go back alone," he said. "I've been sick near death's door and would have been in the

boneyard like Bugsy if the consul hadn't helped me out. I'm going home."

"Sure gwine back this time, eh?" Banjo grinned aloud. "Won't take no chances telling another skipper to chase himse'f. Yo' gwine back home to what you call them United Snakes after you done sweahs offer them. You was so bellyaching about race I knowed you'd bust. Ise a gutter-snipe as you said, all right, and mah pardner done bury his brains in the mud and we ain't singing no Gawd's own blues —"

"That hasn't got a thing to do with my going back," said Goosey. "I still hold to my opinion. I know what my race has got to buck up against in this white man's world, if you don't know and Ray with his talent don't want to. I know what I was running away from and if I couldn't make it over here —"

"Couldn't make the point of mah righteous nose!" exclaimed Banjo. "Red-nigger, you kain't make nothing at all but the stuff you was made foh. You done got carried ovah heah by accident. And a li'l French luck carried you along upstate. But you done flopped so soon as you got left on you' own, 'causen you ain't got no self-makings in you. Get me? You go right on back to them United Snakes that you belongs to with you li'l pot a French dirt."

"And you'll hear from me, too, some day," said Goosey. "Some day you'll hear about me orating for my race and telling them about the soil of liberty."

With a kind of prayerful gesture Goosey held up his sacred souvenir.

"And you think we don't care a damn about race, eh?" Banjo turned seriously on Goosey. "Listen and hear me, Goosey. You evah seen a lynching?"

"No."

"I guess you hadn't. Well, I seen one down in Dixie. And it was mah own li'l brother. Jest when he was a-growing out of a boy into a man and the juice of life was ripening a pink temptation kept right on after him and wouldn't let be until he was got and pulled the way of the rope. You didn't go through the war, neither?"

"No, I didn't."

"I knowed. Because you was too young. I did because I was jest young enough. I was in Kenada when I joined up and I remember a buddy a mine calling me a fool for it. I remember he said that he would only wanta fight if they was calling him to go to Dixie to clean up foh them crackers. But I joined up all the same, and went through that war, for I was just crazy for a change. And the wul' did, too. And one half of it done murdered the other half to death. But the wul' ain't gone a-mourning forevah because a that. Nosah. The wul' is jazzing to fohgit."

"Except the bloody politicians," said Ray.

"They ain't in our class, pardner. Yessah. The wul' is just keeping right on with that nacheral sweet jazzing of life. And Ise jest gwine on right along jazzing with the wul'. The wul' goes round and round and I keeps right on gwine around with it. I ain't swore off nothing like you. United Snakes nor You-whited Snakes that a nigger jest gotta stand up to everywhere in this wul', even in the thickest thicket in the Congo. I know that theah's a mighty mountain a white divilment on this heah Gawd's big ball. And niggers will find that mountain on every foot a land that the white man done step on. But we niggers am no angels, neither. And I guess that if evah I went down in the bushes in the

Congo, even the cannibals them would wanta mess with mah moon if I leave me careless, and if I runned away to the Nothanmost pole, the icebugs would squash me frozen stiff if I couldn't protect mahself. I ain't one accident-made nigger like you, Goosey. Ise a true-blue traveling-bohn nigger and I know life, and I knows how to take it nacheral. I fight when I got to and I works when I must and I lays off when I feel lazy, and I loves all the time becausen the honey-pot a life is mah middle name.

"You got a li'l book larnin', Goosey, but it jest make you that much a bigger bonehead. You don't know nothing when to use it right from when you should fold it up and put it away like you does a dress suit after a dickty party. You got a tall lot yet to larn, Goosey boy. You go right on back to them theah United Snakes and makem shoot a li'l snake-bite wisdom into you and take somathat theah goosiness outa you' moon."

The noisy honk-honking of a horn dispersed an idly-gossiping group in the middle of the streets as a taxicab dashed through them and swerved to a stop before the hotel. Out of it jumped Jake.

"I done took it in mah haid to come and get you fellahs," he said. "Because after that theah goodest of time last night, I got to thinking you-all might be feeling too sweet in you' skin to get outa it for that unrighteous sea change. So here I is with taxi and everything to make sure you-all don't get left."

"Youse one most faithful¹¹ buddy," Banjo grinned. "But Ise jest finish explaining to Goosey heah that Ise most gratiate to the consul foh hulping me this far along, but I ain't gwine no further. And I was a-telling him like a wise old-timer to dust his feets and make

that boat alone befoh it miss him, foh this nigger ain't gwine no place."

"Ain't going!"

Jake grinned. Banjo grinned. Ray grinned. Goosey only was glum. Jake understood Banjo too thoroughly to ask any questions. He enjoyed the situation. For a moment he felt strangely moved to throw himself in with Banjo and send Goosey back alone to the ship. But the next moment he reflected that he was no longer a wild stallion, but a draft horse in harness now with the bit in his mouth and the crupper under his tail, and – that he liked it.

The taxicab slowly trailing them, the boys crossed down the street and into the Seamen's Bar, where they stood at the counter, *à l'Américaine*, for the final drink together,

"When is you coming back to look us over?" Jake asked Ray.

"When the train puts me off," said Ray. "I like this rolling along, stopping anywhere I'm put off or thrown off. Like Banjo. I may get off to see you one a these days if the train pass your way."

"Well, when youse tired a rowling, if evah a broad evacuate you on any a them Gawd's own beach, you point you' nose straight foh Harlem. And if it is even in the middle of the night you get theah, we'll put out that elevator runner that lodging with us and make room to take you on."

They drove from the Joliette square down the docks to the ship, where they said good-bye. As Goosey went up the gang-plank after Jake, Banjo called out again:

"Go'-by, Gawd blimey you, Goosey, and don't fohgit

what I done told you. Put it in you' flute and blow it."

Banjo and Ray wandered casually along the docks. Workmen were busy completing the big new American warehouse. The hand trucks were noisy on the paving stones with the shifting of boxes and barrels and the loading and unloading of ships. The eternal harvest of the world on the docks. African hard wood, African rubber, African ivory, African skins. Asia's gifts of crisp fragrant leaves and the fabled old spices with grain and oil and iron. All floated through the oceans into this warm Western harbor where, waiting to be floated back again, were the Occident's gifts. Immense crates, barrels, cases of automobiles, pianos, player-pianos, furniture; sand-papered, spliced, and varnished wood; calico print, artificial silk; pretty shoes and boots; French wines, British whiskeys, and a thousand little salesmen-made goods. Composite essence of the soil of all lands.

Commerce! Of all words the most magical. The timbre, color, form, the strength and grandeur of it. Triumphant over all human and natural obstacles, sublime yet forever going hand in hand with the bitch, Bawdy. In all relationships, between nations, between individuals, between little peoples and big peoples, progressive and primitive, the two lovers spread and flourish together as if one were the inevitable complement of the other.

Ray was wondering if it could have been otherwise – if it were madness to imagine the gorgeous concourse of civilization, past, present and to be, without these two creatures of man's appetites spreading themselves together, when Banjo said:

"Wha's working on you, pardner?"

"Me? Oh, just when are we going to get outa here?"

"Fed up with the ole poht, eh, scared of it gitting you now?"

"No fear. I've got this burg balled up with a mean hold on 'em."

"Nuts is good dessert, pardner, but I ain't seen no monkey antics yet."

"You will when the exhibition is open."

A Peninsular and Oriental boat had entered a basin farther up the docks and the boys rounded some warehouses to reach it. When they got there they found Malty and Ginger panhandling. The crew was Indian.

"Ain't nevah nothing doing on a coolie-jabbering boat," said Malty, deprecatingly, "but it ain't costing us nothing nowadays to hang around."

"The A-rabs am the best of them people for a handout on a broad," said Banjo.

There was a company of British soldiers on board and on the upper decks groups of tall, svelte, dignified Indians were conspicuous among the European passengers.

A knot of Senegalese were gathered a little way off to themselves, with their eyes on the galley. Three Indian boys of the beach were signaling to the Indian cooks against the railing above. The cooks seemed unheeding, looking down unsympathetically on the dark rabble beneath them. At last one of them went to the kitchen, returning with a paper packet which he threw down to the three Indian boys. The packet burst, scattering a mess of curried food in the dust. With nervous eagerness the boys seized the packet and scraped up the food from the ground.

The knot of Senegalese began stirring with excitement as their eyes turned the other way from the boat and saw a little cart rumble by them. It bore two scavenger-like whites and came to a halt near the gangway. They had come to get the garbage of the great liner, that was not dumped overboard, but brought into port and sold for the feeding of pigs.

Kitchen boys, two to each can, toted the garbage down the gangplank to dump it in the cart. The rank stuff was rushed and raided by the hungry black men. Out of the slime, the guts of game and poultry, the peelings of vegetables, they fished up pieces of ham, mutton, beef, poultry, and tore savagely at them with their teeth. They fought against one another for the best pieces. One mighty fellow sent a rival sprawling on his back from a can and dominated it until he had extracted some precious knuckles of bones with flesh upon them. Another brought up a decomposed rat which he dashed into the water, and wiping his hand on the sand, dived back again into the can. There were also two white men in the rush. A small Southern European was worsted in the struggle and knocked down, while a big Swede, with the appearance of a great mass of hard mildewed putty, held his own.

"Look at the niggers! Look at the niggers!" the passengers on deck cried, and some of them went and got cameras to photograph the scene.

Once when Ray was badly broke he had gone with Bugsy to sell an American suit and shirt to a young West African called Cuffee. Many of them, British and French black boys, clubbed together in a big room that took up half of a floor, for which each paid two francs a day. They were cooking when Ray got there; the smell of

the stuff was good and he was hungry. They offered him some, but Bugsy whispered to him not to eat, because he had seen them picking over the garbage of the docks.

The Africans did not understand the art of panhandling as did the American and West Indian Negroes. When they could get no work on the docks they would not beg food of any ship that was not manned by their own countrymen speaking their language. Seamen who came in with money would help their fellows ashore. But outside of their own primitive circle the African boys were helpless.

"Ain't you ashamed a you' race?" Banjo asked Ray.

"Why you think? We've been down to the garbage-line ourselves."

"Not to eat it, though. I'd sooner do some'n' illegal and ketch jail."

"It's just a difference a stomach," said Ray. "Some stomachs are different from others." He remembered the time he had worked as a waiter in hotels and how the feeding of certain of the guests was always an interesting spectacle for him. They were those pink-eared, purple-veined, respectable pillars of society who in a refined atmosphere of service always stirred up in him an impression of obscenity. Their bellies seemed to him like coarse sacks that needed only to be filled up and rammed down with a multitude of foodstuffs.

It was a long way from them to these stranded and lost black creatures of colonization who ate garbage to appease the insistent demands of the belly. At night they would go to the African Bar and dance it away.

"Taloufa is right heah with us again," said Maltz.

"Taloufa back in this burg?" exclaimed Banjo.

“You betchyu he sure is. And ef you got anything foh helping him, git it ready, for he ain’t nothing this time more’n a plumb broke nigger.”

The boys found Taloufa at the Seamen’s Bar in Joliette with his guitar, and a bow of colored ribbons decorating it, broke but unbroken. He was talking to an Indian, a thin, gray-haired man.

“I thought you were in England,” said Ray.

“Wouldn’t let me in,” replied Taloufa.

“How you mean wouldn’t let you in?”

From a set of papers in his pocketbook Taloufa extracted a slip and handed it to Ray.

The paper bore Taloufa’s name and fingerprint and read:

“The above-named is permitted to land at this port on condition that he proceeds to London in the charge of¹² an official of the Shipping Federation, obtains document of identity at the Home Office, and visa (if required), and leaves the United Kingdom at the earliest opportunity.

(Signed)
Immigration Officer.”

When Taloufa arrived in England, the authorities would not permit him to land, but wanted him to go home direct to West Africa. Taloufa did not want to go there. Christian missionaries had educated him out of his native life. A Christian European had uplifted him out of and away from his people and his home. His memory of his past was vague. He did not know what had become of his family.

He tried to convince the authorities that he had a right to land in England. He had friends in Limehouse

and in Cardiff. He had even a little property in the shape of a trunk and suitcase and clothes that he had left behind when he failed to return from his last American voyage. Nevertheless, he was permitted to land only to see about his affairs and under supervision.

Colored subjects were not wanted in Britain.

This was the chief topic of serious talk among colored seamen in all the ports. Black and brown men being sent back to West Africa, East Africa, the Arabian coast, and India, showed one another their papers and held sharp and bitter discussions in the rough cafés of Joliette and the Vieux Port.

The majority of the papers were distinguished by the official phrase: Nationality Doubtful.

Colored seamen who had lived their lives in the great careless tradition, and had lost their papers in low-down places to touts, hold-up men, and passport fabricators, and were unable or too ignorant to show exact proof of their birthplace, were furnished with the new “Nationality Doubtful” papers. West Africans, East Africans, South Africans, West Indians, Arabs, and Indians – they were all mixed up together. Some of the Indians and Arabs were being given a free trip back to their lands. Others, especially the Negroes, had chosen to stop off in French ports, where the regulations were less stringent. They were agreed that the British authorities were using every device to get all the colored seamen out of Britain and keep them out, so that white men should have their jobs.

Taloufa, under supervision, had crossed from England to Havre, had gone to Paris and, his money exhausted, had come to Marseilles to get a ship in any way he could. The Indian conversing with him was a unique

case. Gray-haired, with a fine, thin, ancient, patient face, he was brown and brittle like a reed. He had left India as a ship's boy when he was so small that he could not recall anything of his people or his home. He had been a steward on English ships for years, before and all during the war.

One day, he said, he came in from a voyage and the medical officer for the local Seamen's Union put him on the sick list and took him off his ship. He said he was not ill, but he knew that the union officials were replacing colored seamen with white by any means. He went to a reputable private doctor and received a certificate attesting that he was not ill. He took it to the local official of his union, but that official ignored him. He had already put a white man in the Indian's place as steward. In a fit of anger the Indian foolishly tore up his union card and left the local office.

Weeks and months passed and he did not get another job. One day he was persuaded to take a place on a boat that was going out to stay in service in the East. But when he reached Marseilles, where the crew was to sign on, the steward changed his mind about going to the Far East on a "Nationality Doubtful" paper. Then he came up against the fact that he could not get back into England where he had lived for over forty years. He was six weeks on the beach in Marseilles. He had a pile of foolscap correspondence with the British Home Office. He was a "Nationality Doubtful" man with no place to go.

This was the way of civilization with the colored man, especially the black. The happenings of the past few weeks from the beating up of the beach boys by the police to the story of Taloufa's experiences, were, to

Ray, all of a piece. A clear and eloquent exhibition of the universal attitude, which, though the method varied, was little different anywhere.

When the police inspector said to Ray that the strong arm of the law was against Negroes because they were all criminals, he really did not mean just that. For he knew that the big and terror-striking criminals were not Negroes. What he unconsciously meant was that the police were strong-armed against the happy irresponsibility of the Negro in the face of civilization.

For civilization had gone out among these native, earthy people, had despoiled them of their primitive soil, had uprooted, enchained, transported, and transformed them to labor under its laws, and yet lacked the spirit to tolerate them within its walls.

That this primitive child, this kinky-headed, big-lauding black boy of the world, did not go down and disappear under the serried crush of trampling white feet; that he managed to remain on the scene, not worldly-wise, not "getting there," yet not machine-made, nor poor-in-spirit like the regimented creatures of civilization, was baffling to civilized understanding. Before the grim, pale rider-down of souls he went his careless way with a primitive hoofing and a grin.

Thus he became a challenge to the clubbers of helpless vagabonds – to the despised, underpaid protectors of property and its high personages. He was a challenge of civilization itself. He was the red rag to the mighty-bellowing, all-trampling civilized bull.

Looking down in a bull ring, you are fascinated by the gay rag. You may even forget the man watching the bull go after the elusive color that makes him mad. The rag

seems more than the man. If the bull wins¹³ it, he horns it, tramples it, sniffs it, paws it – baffled.

As the rag is to the bull, so is the composite voice of the Negro – speech, song and laughter – to a bawdy world. More exasperating, indeed, than the Negro's being himself is his primitive color in a world where everything is being reduced to a familiar formula, this remains strange and elusive.

From the rear room of the café came sounds of music, shuffling of feet, shrill feminine cackle, and Malt's deep, far-carrying laughter. Banjo was at his instrument again. Presently Malt dashed in.

"For the love a life, Taloufy, come on in heah and play that holy wonderful new thing you done bring back heah with you."

"Wait a minute —"

"Wait you' moon! You come right along and make that mahvelous music and fohgit the white man's crap."

Taloufa followed Malt with his guitar. His new piece was a tormenting, tantalizing, tickling, tintinnabulating thing that he called "Hallelujah Jig" and it went like this:

"Jigaway, boy, jig ... jig, jig, jig, jig, jig, jig, jig, jig
Jig, jig. Jig, black boy ... jig away ... jig away. ...

"Lay off the coal, boy, and scrub you' hide,
Jigaway ... jigaway.
Bring me a clean suit and show some pride,
Jigaway ... jigaway.

"Step on the floor, boy, and show me that stuff
Jigaway ... jigaway,

Strutting you' business and strutting it rough,
Jigaway ... jigaway.

"Show me some movement and turn 'em loose,
Jigaway ... jigaway,
Powerfulways like electric juice,
Jigaway ... jigaway.

"Up the ole broad, boy; good nite to the bunk,
Jigaway ... jigaway,
What you say, fellahs? I say hunky-tunk,
Jigaway ... jigaway.

"When the lights go out until the stars fade,
Jigaway ... jigaway,
For that's the bestest thing in the life of a spade,
Jigaway ... jigaway.

"Jigaway, boy, jig, jig, jig, jig, jig, jig, jig, jig,
Jig, jig, jig, black boy ... jig away ... jig away. ..."

Above the sound of the music the Indian was emphasizing the necessity for all colored people to wake up and get together, for, he said, although Indians belonged to the white stock according to science – the white people, particularly the British, were treating them like black people.

But Ray could not hear any more. The jigaway music was pounding in his ears. The dancing and singing and sugary laughter of the boys. It filled his head full and poured hot fire through his veins, tingling and burning. Such a sensual-sweet feeling. There was no resisting it.

"Pardon me," he said to the Indian, and hurried into the rear room.

Slowly the Indian gathered up his bundle of foolscaps methodically assorting the letters according to date. Then he went to the partition and looked in on the boys. Against the glass pane he looked like an ancient piece of broken bronze, a figure from an Oriental temple leaning among indifferent objects in the window of a dealer in antiques.

It was dismaying to him that those boys with whom he had just been conversing so earnestly should in a moment become forgetful of everything serious in a drunken-like abandon of jazzing.

"Just like niggers," he muttered, turning away. "The same on the ships. Always monkeying and never really serious about anything."

Yet the next day Taloufa stowed away safely for America, leaving the Indian on the beach, making his pathetic appeals to the English gentleman's Home Office.

"It was Taloufa bring that cargo a good luck," declared Banjo. "It's the same with humans like with them stars ovah us. Good and bad luck ones. Now Lonesome Blue was sure hard luck. But Taloufa is a good-luck baby."

It was indeed in every way a cargo of good luck that the boys were handling. They were no longer "on the beach." A wealthy shipowner from the Caribbean basin, profiting by the exchange rate, had bought a boat, which he was overhauling to take back to the West Indies. And the boys were on the boat.

It was a formidable polyglot outfit. The officers represented five European nations. The crew were supposed to be Caribbean. Maltby was chosen to find and recommend the men. He got his gang in first,

including Dengel, who wished to cross the Atlantic by any means.

"Though youse French," Maltby told him, "you masticate that Englishman's langwitch bettah than a lottah bush niggers back home."

Maltby also took West African boys, a "colored" South African, a reed-like Somali lad, and another Aframerican besides Banjo. They were all "going on the fly" and none of them was thinking of staying with the boat after the trip, but rather of getting to Cuba, Canada, and the United States. Ray worked with them, but said he was not going to sign up, as the very thought of returning to the Caribbean made him jumpy.

Ray teased Banjo about going as a seaman to the West Indies so soon after he had turned down a free trip to the United States. He predicted that Banjo would follow his nose to the States in quick time, for he would find the islands too small and sleepy for him.

"I'm gwine along with the gang, pardner, and tha's a different thing from going back with Goosey. This heah is like a big picnic for all of us. If youse wise, you'll join in with us."

The boys scraped, scrubbed, painted. They got only twenty francs a day, although the regular wage for such work was over thirty francs. But they were beach boys and not union men. And the union bosses had no knowledge of what was going on on the little boat. There is sometimes much free-for-all work on the docks. However, the boys did not allow *their* work to push them hard. They made shift to get through it. It would be different when they signed on. Then they would get the union wages of British seamen.

The African Café, The Rendezvous Bar, The bistro-cabaret in the Rue Coin du Reboul – all of them nightly did well with the boys. The Ditch looked at them differently, for they measured up to and above the “leetah” standards.

At last the boat was shipshape and ready to sail. The day came when the boys were called to sign on. Ray could have had an easy place, but he would not take it and he watched Banjo sign a little wistfully. They all had the right, under British Seamen’s Regulations, to take part of their month’s wages in advance. Each of the boys availed himself of this, that he might buy needful articles. Banjo took a full month’s wages.

They cashed their cheques with a seamen’s broker, in Joliette. That night they had a big celebration. But Banjo was not with them. Nor had he used any of his money to buy new things. He invited Ray to go with him to a quiet little café in Joliette, and there he announced that he was not going to make the trip.

“And Ise gwine beat it outa this burg some convenient time this very night, pardner. Tha’s mah ace a spades so sure as Ise a spade. You come along with me?”

Not going on the ship. ... Beat it. ... Come along with me.

“But you’ve signed on and taken a month’s wages” protested Ray. “You can’t quit now.”

“Nix and a zero for what I kain’t do. Go looket that book and you won’t find mah real name no moh than anybody is gwine find this nigger when I take mahself away from here. I ask you again. Is you going with me?”

Ray did not reply, and after a silence Banjo said: “I

know youse thinking it ain’t right. But we kain’t afford to choose, because we ain’t born and grewed up like the choosing people. All we can do is grab our chance every time it comes our way.”

Ray’s thoughts were far and away beyond the right and wrong of the matter. He had been dreaming of what joy it would be to go vagabonding with Banjo. Stopping here and there, staying as long as the feeling held in the ports where black men assembled for the great transport lines, loafing after their labors long enough to laugh and love and jazz and fight.

While Banjo’s words brought him back to social morality, they brought him back only to the realization of how thoroughly he was in accord with them. He had associated too closely with the beach boys not to realize that their loose, instinctive way of living was more deeply related to his own self-preservation than all the principles or social-morality lessons with which he had been inculcated by the wiseacres of the civilized machine.

It seemed a social wrong to him that, in a society rooted and thriving on the principles of the “struggle for existence” and the “survival of the fittest” a black child should be brought up on the same code of social virtues as the white. Especially an American black child.

A Chinese or Indian child could learn the stock virtues without being spiritually harmed by them, because he possessed his own native code from which he could draw, compare, accept, and reject while learning. But the Negro child was a pathetic thing, entirely cut off from its own folk wisdom and earnestly learning the trite moralisms of a society in which he

was, as a child and would be as an adult, denied any legitimate place.

Ray was not of the humble tribe of humanity. But he always felt humble when he heard the Senegalese and other West African tribes speaking their own languages with native warmth and feeling.

The Africans gave him a positive feeling of wholesome contact with racial roots. They made him feel that he was not merely an unfortunate accident of birth, but that he belonged definitely to a race weighed, tested, and poised in the universal scheme. They inspired him with confidence in them. Short of extermination by the Europeans, they were a safe people, protected by their own indigenous culture. Even though they stood bewildered before the imposing bigness of white things, apparently unaware of the invaluable worth of their own, they were naturally defended by the richness of their fundamental racial values.

He did not feel that confidence about Aframericans who, long-deracinated, were still rootless among phantoms and pale shadows and enfeebled by self-effacement before condescending patronage, social negativism, and miscegenation. At college in America and among the Negro intelligentsia he had never experienced any of the simple, natural warmth of a people believing in themselves, such as he had felt among the rugged poor and socially backward blacks of his island home. The colored intelligentsia lived its life "to have the white neighbors think well of us," so that it could move more peaceably into nice "white" streets.

Only when he got down among the black and brown working boys and girls of the country did he find something of that raw unconscious and the-devil-with-

them pride in being Negro that was his own natural birthright. Down there the ideal skin was brown skin. Boys and girls were proud of their brown, sealskin brown, teasing brown, tantalizing brown, high-brown, low-brown, velvet brown, chocolate brown.

There was the amusing little song they all sang:

"Black may be evil,
But Yellow is so low-down;
White is the devil,
So glad I'm teasing Brown."

Among them was never any of the hopeless, enervating talk of the chances of "passing white" and the specter of the Future that were the common topics of the colored intelligentsia. Close association with the Jakes and Banjoes had been like participating in a common primitive birthright.

Ray loved to be with them in constant physical contact, keeping warm within. He loved their tricks of language, loved to pick up and feel and taste new words from their rich reservoir of niggerisms. He did not like rotten-egg stock words among rough people any more than he liked colorless refined phrases among nice people. He did not even like to hear cultured people using the conventional stock words of the uncultured and thinking they were being free and modern. That sounded vulgar to him.

But he admired the black boys' unconscious artistic capacity for eliminating the rotten-dead stock words of the proletariat and replacing them with startling new ones. There were no dots and dashes in their conversation – nothing that could not be frankly said and therefore decently – no act or fact of life for which

they could not find a simple passable word. He gained from them finer nuances of the necromancy of language and the wisdom that any word may be right and magical in its proper setting.

He loved their natural gusto for living down the past and lifting their kinky heads out of the hot, suffocating ashes, the shadow, the terror of real sorrow to go on gaily grinning in the present. Never had Ray guessed from Banjo's general manner that he had known any deep sorrow. Yet when he heard him tell Goosey that he had seen his only brother lynched, he was not surprised, he understood, because right there he had revealed the depths of his soul and the soul of his race – the true tropical African Negro. No Victorian-long period of featured grief and sable mourning, no mechanical-pale graveside face, but a luxuriant living up from it, like the great jungles growing perennially beautiful and green in the yellow blaze of the sun over the long life-breaking tragedy of Africa.

Ray had felt buttressed by the boys with a rough strength and sureness that gave him spiritual passion and pride to be his human self in an inhumanly alien world. They lived healthily far beyond the influence of the colored press whose racial dope was characterized by pungent “bleach-out,” “kink-no-more,” skin-whitening, hair-straightening, and innumerable processes for Negro culture, most of them manufactured by white men's firms in the cracker states. And thereby they possessed more potential power for racial salvation than the Negro *litterati*, whose poverty of mind and purpose showed never any signs of enrichment, even though inflated above the common level and given an appearance of superiority.

From these boys he could learn how to live – how to exist as a black boy in a white world and rid his conscience of the used-up hussy of white morality. He could not scrap his intellectual life and be entirely like them. He did not want or feel any urge to “go back” that way.

Tolstoy, his great master, had turned his back on the intellect as guide to find himself in Ivan Durak.¹⁴ Ray wanted to hold on to his intellectual acquirements without losing his instinctive gifts. The black gifts of laughter and melody and simple sensuous feelings and responses.

Once when a friend gave him a letter of introduction to a Nordic intellectual, he did not write: I think you will like to meet this young black intellectual; but rather, I think you might like to hear Ray laugh.

His gift! He was of course aware that whether the educated man be white or brown or black, he cannot, if he has more than animal desires, be irresponsibly happy like the ignorant man who lives simply by his instincts and appetites. Any man with an observant and contemplative mind must be aware of that. But a black man, even though educated, was in closer biological kinship to the swell of primitive earth life. And maybe his apparent failing under the organization of the modern world was the real strength that preserved him from becoming the thing that was the common white creature of it.

Ray had found that to be educated, black and his instinctive self was something of a big job to put over. In the large cities of Europe he had often met with educated Negroes out for a good time with heavy literature under their arms. They toted these books to

protect themselves from being hailed everywhere as minstrel niggers, coons, funny monkeys for the European audience – because the general European idea of the black man is that he is a public performer. Some of them wore hideous parliamentary clothes as close as ever to the pattern of the most correctly gray respectability. He had remarked wiry students and Negroes doing clerical work wearing glasses that made them sissy-eyed. He learned, on inquiry, that wearing glasses was a mark of scholarship and respectability differentiating them from the common types. ... (Perhaps the police would respect the glasses.)

No getting away from the public value of clothes, even for you, my black friend. As it was, ages before Carlyle wrote *Sartor Resartus*,¹⁵ so it will be long ages after. And you have reason maybe to be more rigidly formal, as the world seems illogically critical of you since it forced you to discard so recently your convenient fig leaf for its breeches. This civilized society is classified and kept going by clothes and you are now brought by its power to labour and find a place in it.

The more Ray mixed in the rude anarchy of the lives of the black boys – loafing, singing, bumming, playing, dancing, loving, working – and came to a realization of how close-linked he was to them in spirit, the more he felt that they represented more than he or the cultured minority the irrepressible exuberance and legendary vitality of the black race. And the thought kept him wondering how that race would fare under the ever tightening mechanical organization of modern life.

Being sensitively receptive, he had as a boy become interested in and followed with passionate sympathy all the great intellectual and social movements of his age.

And with the growth of international feelings and ideas he had dreamed of the association of his race with the social movements of the masses of civilization milling through the civilized machine.

But traveling away from America and visiting many countries, observing and appreciating the differences of human groups, making contact with earthy blacks of tropical Africa, where the great body of his race existed, had stirred in him the fine intellectual prerogative of doubt.

The grand mechanical march of civilization had leveled the world down to the point where it seemed treasonable for an advanced thinker to doubt that what was good for one nation or people was also good for another. But as he was never afraid of testing ideas, so he was not afraid of doubting. All peoples must struggle to live, but just as what was helpful for one man might be injurious to another, so it might be with whole communities of peoples.

For Ray happiness was the highest good, and difference the greatest charm, of life. The hand of progress was robbing his people of many primitive and beautiful qualities. He could not see where they would find greater happiness under the weight of the machine even if progress became left-handed.

Many apologists of a changed and magnified machine system doubted whether the Negro could find a decent place in it. Some did not express their doubts openly, for fear of “giving aid to the enemy.” Ray doubted, and openly.

Take, for example, certain Nordic philosophers, as the world was more or less Nordic business: He did not think the blacks would come very happily under the

super-mechanical Anglo-Saxon-controlled world society of Mr. H. G. Wells. They might shuffle along, but without much happiness in the world of Bernard Shaw. Perhaps they would have their best chance in a world influenced by the thought of a Bertrand Russell, where brakes were clamped on the machine with a few screws loose and some nuts fallen off. But in this great age of science and super-invention was there any possibility of arresting the thing unless it stopped of its own exhaustion?

“Well, what you say, pardner?” demanded Banjo. “Why you jest sidown theah so long studying ovah nothing at all? You gwine with a man or you ain’t?”

“Why didn’t you tell me before, so I could have signed on like you and make a getaway mahself?”

“Because I wasn’t so certain sure a you. Youse a book fellah and you’ mind might tell you to do one thing and them books persweahs you to do another. So I wouldn’t take no chances. And maybe it’s bettah only one of us do this thing this time. Now wese bettah acquainted, theah’s a lotta things befoh us we’ll have to make together.”

“It would have been a fine thing if we could have taken Latnah along, eh?”

“Don’t get soft ovah any one wimmens, pardner. Tha’s you’ big weakness. A woman is a conjunction. Gawd fixed her different from us in moh ways than one. And theah’s things we can git away with all the time and she just kain’t. Gome on, pardner. Wese got enough between us to beat it a long ways from here.”

1929

Claude McKay, “Whe’fe Do?” and “Cudjoe Fresh from

de Lecture,” from *Songs of Jamaica*, 1912. Claude McKay, “America,” “The Tropics in New York,” “Harlem Shadows,” “The White City,” “Africa,” “The Tired Worker,” “If We Must Die,” from *Complete Poems*, ed. William J. Maxwell. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004. Used by permission of the Literary Representative for the Works of Claude McKay, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. From Claude McKay, *Banjo – A Story Without Plot*. San Diego / New York / London: Harper & Bros., 1929 (copyright renewed in 1957). Used by permission of the Literary Representative for the Works of Claude McKay, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

Notes

SONGS OF JAMAICA

¹ Claude McKay’s *Songs of Jamaica* is published prior to the periodization of Volume 2’s first section, which begins in 1920. Nonetheless it is included here, because the pedagogy it affords links more to his subsequent work and its context than to the African American literature highlighted in the third and final section of Volume 1.

BANJO: A STORY WITHOUT A PLOT

¹ The complete “First Part” consists of chapters 1–5.

² *p-i* private investigator.

Jessie Fauset (1882–1961)

Called a literary “midwife” to the New Negro Renaissance by Langston Hughes, Jessie Redmon Fauset achieved recognition not just as an influential editor but also as a prolific novelist. Publishing four novels over a nine-year span, Fauset exploded stereotypical characterizations of light-complexioned and middle-class African Americans. A teacher, intellectual, artist, and literary editor of *The Crisis* magazine, Fauset shepherded the talents of Hughes, Nella Larsen, Countée Cullen, Claude McKay, and Jean Toomer. She also sought to cultivate New Negro consciousness in the younger generation through the short-lived but popular children’s magazine *Brownie’s Book* (1920–1921).

The African American middle class became the subject of Fauset’s fiction, but she was not born into it. Although a half-brother, Arthur Huff Fauset, was a noted anthropologist with a doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania, Jessie’s childhood was far from elite. She was the youngest of seven children born in Camden County, New Jersey, to African Methodist Episcopal minister Redmon Fauset and Annie Seamon Fauset. After her mother’s death, her father married a widow with three children; three more births brought to 13 the number of children in a household dependent on a minister’s salary. A graduate of Girls’ High School

in Philadelphia, Fauset was denied admission to Bryn Mawr College due to her race, so she attended Cornell University, where she graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1905. For 14 years she taught French and Latin at Dunbar High School in Washington, DC, before earning a master’s degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1919. That same year, she became literary editor of *The Crisis*, a seven-year appointment that launched her literary career along with those of Cullen, McKay, and Toomer. While editor she published a number of short stories in this magazine, including “Double Trouble,” serialized in the August and September 1923 issues, and “Dark Algiers the White,” in the April and May 1925 issues.

Following the publication of her first novel, *There is Confusion* (1924), Fauset’s writings appeared in two defining anthologies of the decade – Alain Locke’s *The New Negro* (1925) and Cullen’s *Caroling Dusk* (1927). Analogous to Charles W. Chesnutt, who wrote his short stories partly to contest Joel Chandler Harris’s stereotypes of African American folk, Fauset wrote *There is Confusion* in response to T.S. Stribling’s perpetuation of mulatto stereotypes in his 1922 novel *Birthright*. Likewise taking up the ambiguities and intricacies of race and racial passing, her next three novels – *Plum Bun* (1929), *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931), and *Comedy: American Style* (1933) – were published after she left *The Crisis* to teach at DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx, New York City. She lived with her husband, insurance broker Herbert Harris, in Montclair, New Jersey, and preoccupied herself with largely domestic duties. She served briefly as a visiting professor at the Hampton Institute in 1949. After

Harris died in 1958, she spent the last three years of her life with her stepbrother in Philadelphia.

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Double Trouble¹

I

Angélique came walking delicately down Cedarwood Street. You could see by the way she advanced, a way which fell just short of dancing, that she was feeling to the utmost the pleasant combination of her youth, the weather and the season. Angélique was seventeen, the day was perfect and the year was at the spring.

Just before Cedarwood crosses Tenth, she stopped, her nice face crinkling with amusement, and untied and retied the ribbon which fastened her trim oxford. Before she had finished this ritual Malory Fordham turned the corner and asked rather sternly if he might

not perform the task. "Allow me to tie it for you," he had said with unrelieved formality.

"Sure I'll allow you." Angélique was never shy with those whom she liked. She replaced the subtler arts of the coquette with a forthrightness which might have proved her undoing with another boy. But not with Malory Fordham. Shy, pensive, and enveloped by the aura of malaise which so mysteriously and perpetually hung over his household he found Angélique's manner a source both of attraction and wonder. To him she was a radiant, generous storehouse of light and warmth which constantly renewed his chilled young soul.

"We're in luck this afternoon," said Angélique resuming her happy gait. "Sometimes I have to tie my shoes a dozen times. Once I took one shoe off and shook it and shook it, trying to get rid of make believe dust. I was glad you didn't turn up just then for I happened to look across the street and there was cousin Laurentine walking, you know that stiff poker-like way she goes – " Angélique bubbling with merriment imitated it – "I know she was disgusted seeing me like 'my son John, one shoe off and one shoe on'."

"It's a wonder she didn't take you home," said Malory, admiring her.

"Oh, no! Cousin Laurentine wouldn't be seen walking up the street with me! She doesn't like me. Funny isn't it? But you know what's funnier still Malory, not many folks around here do like me. Strange, don't you think, and me living all my life almost in this little place? I never knew what it was to be really liked before you came except for Aunt Sal. I say to myself lots of times: 'Well, anyway, Malory likes me,' and then I'm completely happy."

"I'm glad of that," Malory told her, flushing. He was darker than Angélique for his father and mother had both been brown-skinned mulattoes, with a trace of Indian on his mother's side. Angélique's mother, whom she rarely saw, was a mulatto, too, but a very light one, quite yellow, and though she could not remember her father, she had in her mind's eye a concept of him which made him only the least shade darker than her mother. He had to be darker, for Angélique always associated masculinity with a dark complexion. She did not like to see men fairer than their wives.

Malory dwelt for several moments on Angélique's last remark. You could see him patently turning the idea over and over. His high, rather narrow, forehead contracted, his almond, liquid eyes narrowed. His was a type which in any country but America would have commanded immediate and admiring attention. As it was even in Edendale he received many a spontaneous, if surreptitious, glance of approval.

He evolved an answer. "I don't know but you're right, Angélique. I think I must have been home six months before I met you, though I knew your name. I seem to have known your name a long time," he said musing slowly over some evasive idea. "But I never saw you, I guess, until that night when Evie Thompson's mother introduced us at Evie's party. I remember old Mrs. Rossiter seemed so queer. She said – "

"Yes, I know," Angélique interrupted, mimicking, "Oh, Miz Thompson, you didn't ever introduce them! That," concluded the girl with her usual forthrightness, "was because she wanted you to meet her Rosie – such a name Rosie Rossiter! – and have you dance attendance on her all evening!"

Fordham blushed again. "I don't know about that. Anyhow, what I was going to say was if I were you I wouldn't bother if the folks around here didn't like me. They don't like me either."

"No, I don't think they do very much. And yet it's different," Angélique explained puzzling out something. "They may not like you – probably because you've lived away from home so long – but they're willing to go with you. Now I think it's the other way around with me. They sort of like me, lots of the girls at times have liked me a great deal, new girls especially. But they shy away after a time. When Evie Thompson first came to this town she liked me better than she did anyone else. I know she did. But after her mother gave that big party she acted different. She has never had me at a real party since and you know she entertains a lot – you're always there. Yet she's forever asking me over to her house when she hasn't company and then she's just as nice and her mother is always too sweet."

They were nearing the corner where they always parted. Cousin Laurentine did not allow Angélique to have beaux. "Perhaps they're jealous." Malory proposed as a last solution.

The girl's nice, round face clouded. She was not pretty but she bore about her an indefinable atmosphere of niceness, of freshness and innocence. "Jealous of the boys you mean?" She bit her full red lip. "No, it's not that; none of the boys ever treats me very nicely, none of them ever has except you and Asshur Judson."

"Asshur Judson!" Malory echoed in some surprise. "You mean that tall, rough, farmer fellow? I'd have thought he'd be the last fellow in the world to know how to treat a nice girl like you."

"Mmh. He does, he did. You know the boys – most of them" – for the first time Fordham saw her shy, wistful – "when I say they're not nice I mean they are usually too nice. They try to kiss me, put their arms around me. Sometimes when I used to go skating, I'd have horrid things happen. They'd tease the other girls, too, but with me they're different. They act as though it didn't matter how they treated me. Maybe it's because my father's dead."

"Perhaps," Malory acquiesced doubtfully but he was completely bewildered. "And you say Asshur Judson was polite?"

"I'd forgotten Asshur. You didn't know him well, I think; he came while you were still in Philadelphia and he went away right after you came back. We'd been skating one day. I wasn't with anyone, just down there in the crowd, and I struck off all alone. Bye and bye who should come racing after me but Asshur. I looked back and saw him and went on harder than ever. Of course he caught up to me, and when he did he took me right in his arms and held me tight. I struggled and fought so that I know he understood I didn't like it, so he let me go. And then that hateful Harry Robbins came up and said: 'Don't you mind her, Jud, she's just pretending, she'll come around!'" Her voice shook with the shame of it.

"And then?" Malory prompted her fiercely.

"I heard Judson say just as mad, 'What the deuce you talking about, Robbins?'"

Malory failed to see any extraordinary exhibition of politeness in that.

"Oh, but afterwards! You know my Cousin Laurentine doesn't allow me to have company. Of course he didn't

know that, and that night he came to the house. Cousin Laurentine let him in and I heard her say: 'Yes, Angélique is in but she doesn't have callers.' And he answered: 'But I must see her, Miss Fletcher, I must explain something.' His voice sounded all funny and different. So I came running down stairs and asked him what he wanted.

"It was all so queer, Malory. He came over to me past Cousin Laurentine standing at the door like a dragon and he took both my hands, sort of frightened me. He said: 'You kid, you decent little kid! Treat 'em all like you treated me this afternoon, and try to forgive me. If you see me a thousand times you'll never have to complain of me again.' And he went."

"Funny," was Malory's comment. "Didn't he say anything more?"

"No, just went and I've got to go. Got to memorize a lot of old Shakespeare for tomorrow. Silly stuff from Macbeth. 'Double, double, toil and trouble.' 'Bye Malory."

"Good-bye," he echoed, turning in the direction of his home where his mother and his three plain older sisters awaited him.

On his way he captured the idea which had earlier eluded him. He remembered speaking once, before he had met her, of Angélique Murray to his odd subdued household and of receiving a momentary impression of shock, of horror even, passing over his mother's face. He looked at his sisters and received the same impression. He looked at all four women again and saw – nothing – just nothing, utter blankness, out of which came the voice of Gracie, his hostile middle sister. "Good heavens, Malory! Don't tell me that you know

that Angélique Murray. I won't have you meeting her. She is ordinary, her whole family is the last thing in ordinairiness. Now mind if you meet her, you let her alone."

At the time he had acquiesced, deeming this one of the thousand queer phases of his household with which he was striving so hard to become reacquainted. He had been a very little boy when he had been taken so hurriedly to live in Philadelphia, but his memory had painted them all so different.

In spite of his sister's warning Angélique's brightness when he met her, her frankness, her merriment proved too much for him. She was like an unfamiliar but perfectly recognizable part of himself. Pretty soon he was fathoms deep in love. But because he was a boy of practically no ingenuities but mechanical ones he could hit on nothing better than walking home from school with her. She was the one picture in the daily book of his life and having seen her he retired home each day like Browning's lovers to think up a scheme which would enable him sometime to tear it out for himself.

Angélique, hastening on flying feet, hoped that Cousin Laurentine would be out when she reached home. She could manage Laurentine's mother, Aunt Sal, even when she was as late as she was today. But before she entered the house she realized that for tonight at least she would be free from her cousin's hateful and scornful espionage. For peeping through the window which gave from the front room on to the porch she was able to make out against the soft inner gloom the cameo-like features of the Misses Courtney, the two young white women who came so often to see Aunt Sal and Laurentine. They were ladies of indubitable breeding

and refinement, but for all their culture and elegance they could not eclipse Laurentine whose eyes shone as serene, whose forehead rose as smooth and classical as did their own. The only difference lay in their coloring. The Misses Courtney's skin shone as white as alabaster;² their eyes lay, blue cornflowers, in that lake of dazzling purity. But Laurentine was crimson and gold like the flesh of the mango, her eyes were dark emeralds. Her proud head glowed like an amber carving rising from the green perfection of her dress. She was a replica of the Courtney sisters startlingly vivified. Angélique, on her way to the kitchen poising on noiseless feet in the outside hall, experienced anew her thrill at the shocking resemblance between the two white women and the colored one; a resemblance which missed completely the contribution of white Mrs. Courtney and black Aunt Sal, and took into account only the remarkable beauty of Ralph Courtney, the father of all three of these women.

Aunt Sal in the background of the picture was studying with her customary unwavering glance the three striking figures. The Misses Courtney had travelled in Europe, they spoke French fluently. But Laurentine had travelled in the West Indies and spoke Spanish. When the time came for the Misses Courtney to go, they would kiss Laurentine lightly on both cheeks, they would murmur: "Good-bye, Sister," and would trail off leaving behind them the unmistakable aura of their loyal, persistent, melancholic determination to atone for their father's ancient wrong. And Laurentine, beautiful, saffron³ creature, would rise and gaze after them, enveloped in a sombre evanescent triumph.

But afterwards!

Up in her room Angélique envisaged the reaction which inevitably befell her cousin after the departure of these visitors. For the next three weeks Laurentine would be more than ever hateful, proud, jealous, scornful, intractable. The older woman, the young girl shrewdly guessed, was jealous of her; jealous of her unblemished parentage, of her right to race pride, of her very youth, though her own age could not be more than twenty-eight. "Poor Cousin Laurentine," the child thought, "as though she could help her father's being white. Anything was liable to happen in those old slavery times. I must try to be nicer to her."

When later she opened the door to her cousin's tap, her determination was put to a severe test, for Laurentine was in one of her nastiest moods. "Here is another one of those letters," she said bitingly, "from that young ruffian who pushed his way past me that night. If I had my way I'd burn up every one of them. I can't think how you manage to attract such associates. It will be the best thing in the world for all of us when your mother sends for you."

Angélique took Asshur's letter somewhat sullenly, though she knew the feeling which her cousin's outburst concealed. In that household of three women this young girl was the only one who could be said to receive mail. Even hers was, until very lately, almost negligible – a note or two from a proudly travelling schoolmate, some directions for making candy from Evie Thompson or from the girl who at that moment was espousing her inexplicable cause, a card or so from a boy and now this constant stream of letters from Asshur Judson. As she opened these last or sat down to answer them in the shaded green glow of the dining-

room, she had seen Cousin Laurentine's face pale with envy under the saffron satin of her skin.

Laurentine received letters and cards from the Misses Courtney when they were abroad – a few bills – she made rather a practice of having charge accounts – and an occasional note from the white summer transient expressing the writer's pleasure with "that last dress you made me." Once the young divinity student who, while the pastor was on his vacation, took over the services of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, sent her a post card from Niagara Falls. Laurentine exhibited a strange negligence with regard to this card; it was always to be found in the litter of the sewing-table. "Oh," she would say casually to the customer whom she was fitting, "that's a card from Mr. Deaver who substituted here last summer. Yes, he does seem to be a fine young man."

Angélique did not at once open Asshur's letter. She had too many lessons to get. Besides she knew what it would contain, his constant and unvarying injunction "to be good, to be decent" coupled with an account of his latest success in some branch of scientific agriculture; he was an enthusiastic farmer. She liked to hear from him, but she wished his interests were broader. Laying the letter aside unregretfully she fell to memorizing the witches' speech in Macbeth and then in her little English Handbook under the chapter on "The Drama – Greek Tragedy," she made a brief but interested foray among the peculiarities of the ancient stage. Reading of Greek masks, buskins⁴ and "unities" she forgot all about Asshur's letter until as usual Aunt Sal put her fine dark head in the door and told her in mild but unanswerable tones that it was "most nigh

bedtime."

She jumped up then and began to undress. But first she read the letter. Just as she thought it began like all his former letters and would probably end the same. No, here was something different. Asshur had written:

"My father says I'm making great headway, and so does Mr. Ellis, the man on whose farm I'm experimenting. Next year I'll be twenty-one and father's going to let me work a small farm he owns right up here in northern New Jersey. But first I'm coming for you. Only you must keep good and straight like you were when I first met you. You darn spunky little kid. Mind, you be good, you be decent. I'm sure coming for you."

It was a queer love-letter. "So you'll come for me," said Angélique to her image in the glass. She shook out her short, black, rather wiry hair till it misted like a cloud about her childish round face. "How do you know I'll go with you? I may find someone I like ten times better." Dimpling and smiling, she imitated Malory's formality: "May I tie your shoe for you?"

All night long she dreamed she was chasing Malory Fordham. Was it a game? If so why did he so doggedly elude her? Then when, laughing, she had overtaken him, why did he turn on her with round gaping mouth and horrid staring eyes that transformed him into a Greek tragic mask? Through open, livid lips came whistling strange words, terrible phrases whose import at first she could not grasp. When she did she threw her arm across her face with a fearful cry and fell back convulsed and shuddering into the arms of a dark, muffled figure whose features she fought vainly to

discover.

II

Edendale, like many another Jersey town, as well as all Gaul, was divided into three parts. In one section, the prettiest from a natural point of view, lived Italians, Polacks and Hungarians who had drifted in as laborers. In another section, elegant and cultivated, dwelt a wealthy and leisure class of whites, men of affairs, commuters, having big business interests in Philadelphia, Trenton, Newark and even New York. Occupying the traditional middle ground were Jews, small tradesmen, country lawyers and a large group of colored people ranging in profession from Phil Baltimore successful ash-contractor to the equally successful physician, Dr. Thompson. This last group was rather closely connected with the wealthy white group, having in far preceding generations, dwelt with them as slaves or more recently as houseservants. Sometimes, as in the case of Aunt Sal Fletcher and the Courtneys, who following the Civil War, had drifted into Jersey from Delaware, they had served in both capacities.

Malory and Angélique came to know the foreign quarters well. Here on the old Hopewell Road beginning nowhere and going nowhither they were surest of escaping the eye of a too vigilant colored townsman as well as that of the occasional white customer for whom the girl's cousin sewed. Malory was in no danger from a possibility like this last for the Fordhams on the maternal side had been small but independent householders for nearly a century. Even now Mrs.

Fordham lived on a small income which came partly from her father's legacy partly from the sale of produce from a really good truck-farm. Her husband had showed a tendency to dissipate this income but he had died before he had crippled it too sorely. Malory was determined to have more money when he grew older, money which he would obtain by his own methods. He never meant to ask his family for anything. The thought of a possible controversy with the invincible Gracie turned him sick.

He would be an engineer, how or where he did not know. But there would be plenty of money for him and Angélique. Already all his dreams included Angélique. He had not told her but he loved her fervently with an ardor excelling ordinary passion, for his included gratitude, a rapt consciousness of the miracle which daily she wrought for him in the business of living. She was so vivid, so joyous, so generous, so much what he would wish to be that almost it was as though she were his very self. Every day he warmed his hands at that fire which she alone could create for him.

He it was who fought so keenly against the clandestine nature of their meetings. Not so Angélique. This child so soon, so tragically to be transformed into a woman, was still a romantic, dreaming girl. Half the joy of this new experience lay in its secrecy. This was fun, great fun, to run counter to imperious, unhappy Laurentine, to know that while her cousin endured the condescending visit of the son of the ash-contractor in the hope that some day, somehow she might receive the son of the colored physician, she herself was the eagerly and respectfully chosen of the son of the first colored family in the county. This was nectar and ambrosia,⁵

their taste enhanced by secrecy.

But Malory hated it. He had not told his family about the girl because clearly for some fool reason they were prejudiced against her, and as for Angélique's family – no males allowed. Hence this impasse. But he wanted like many another fond lover to acquaint others with his treasure, to show off not only this unparalleled gem, but himself too. For in her presence he himself shone, he became witty, his shyness vanished. The Methodist Sunday School picnic was to be held the first week in June. His sisters never went; proud Laurentine would not think of attending. He told Angélique that he would take her.

"Wonderful!" she breathed. She had a white dress with red ribbons.

They met on that memorable day, rather late. Laurentine could not keep Angélique from attending the picnic, but she could make her late; she could make her feel the exquisite torture which envelops a young girl who has to enter alone and unattended the presence of a crowd of watchful acquaintances. Angélique, inwardly unperturbed – she knew Malory would wait for her forever – outwardly greatly chafing, enjoyed her cousin's barely concealed satisfaction at her pretended discomfiture. With a blithe indifference she went from task to task, from chore to chore. "Greek tragedy," she whispered gaily into the ear of Marcus, an adored black kitten.

Malory did not mind her lateness. Indeed he was glad of it. So much the more conspicuous their entrance to the grounds. As it chanced, practically the whole party was in or around the large pavilion grouped there to receive instructions from Mrs. Evie Thompson who had

charge of the picnic. A great church-worker, Mrs. Evie. When the two arrived the place was in an uproar, Mrs. Evie, balanced perilously on a stool, tried to out talk the noise. Presently she realized that her voice was unnecessarily loud, the sea of black, yellow, and of white faces had ebbed into quiet but not because of her. Malory just outside the wide entrance, in the act of helping Angélique up the rustic steps caught that same fleeting shadow of horror and dismay, that shadow which he had marked on the faces of his household, rippling like a wave over the faces of the crowd, touching for a second Mrs. Thompson's face and vanishing. Appalled, bewildered, he stood still.

Mrs. Thompson rushed to them. "You just happened to meet Angélique, Malory? You – you didn't bring her?" Her voice was low but anxious.

"Of course I brought her," he replied testily. What possessed these staring people? "Why shouldn't I bring her?"

"Why not indeed?" soothed Mrs. Thompson. She herself came from a "best family" in some nearby big city. "It's such luck, that's all. I was wishing for Angélique. She's such a help at a time like this, so skilful. I want her to help me cut sandwiches."

Malory, rather sulkily accepting this, allowed his guest to be spirited away to exercise this skill. The crowd drawing a vast, multi-throated breath dispersed. Mrs. Thompson was anything but skilful herself. In the course of the afternoon she cut her assistant's hand. "I don't anticipate an infection," she remarked, peering at the small wound with an oddly unrepentant air, "but you'd better come home with me and let Doctor dress it. Sorry I can't invite you too Malory, but there's hardly

room in the buggy for four. Evie and I are both fat."

Malory passed a night of angry sleeplessness. "I don't know what to think of these people," he told Angélique when they met the next day. "Do you know what I want you to do? You come home with me now and meet my mother and sisters. When they get to know you, they'll like you too and I know they can make these others step around." It was the first time he had betrayed any consciousness of the Fordham social standing.

Angélique, nothing loth, agreed with him. She too had thought Mrs. Thompson extraordinary the day before, but she had not seen as Malory had that strange shadowy expression of horror. And in any case would have had no former memory to emphasize it.

The two moved joyously up the tree-lined street, Malory experiencing his usual happy reaction to Angélique's buoyancy. Nothing would ever completely destroy her gay equanimity he thought, feeling his troubled young spirit relax. There was no one like her he knew. His people, even Gracie, must love her. He was living at this time in the last years of the nineties and so was given to much reading of Tennyson. Angélique made him think of the Miller's daughter, who had "grown so dear, so dear." What of life and youth and cheerfulness would she not introduce into his drab household, musty with old memories, inexplicably tainted with the desiccation of some ancient imperishable grief!

At the corner of the street he took her arm. They would march into the house bravely and he would say, "Mother this is Angélique whom I love. I want you to love her too; you will when you know her." He perceived as he opened the gate that Angélique was nervous,

frightened. Timidity was in her such an unusual thing that he felt a new wave of tenderness rising within him. On the porch just before he touched the knob of the screen door he laid his hand on hers.

"Don't be frightened," he murmured.

"Look," she returned faintly.

He spun about and saw pressed against the window-pane a face, the small, brown face of his sister Gracie. In the background above her shoulder hovered the head of the oldest girl Reba, her body so completely hidden behind Gracie's that for a second, it seemed to him fantastically, her head swung suspended in space. But only for a second did he think this, so immediately was his attention drawn, riveted to the look of horror, of hatred, of pity which was frozen, seared on the faces of his sisters.

"For God's sake, what is it?" he cried.

Gracie's hands made a slight outward movement toward Angélique, a warding off motion of faintness and disgust such as one might make involuntarily towards a snake.

"I'm going in; come Angélique," the boy said in exasperation. "Has the whole world gone crazy?"

Before he could open the door Reba appeared, that expression still on her face, like a fine veil blurring out her features. Would it remain there forever he wondered.

"You can't bring her in Malory, you mustn't."

"Why mustn't I? What are you talking about?" Strange oaths rose to his lips. "What's the matter with her?" He started to pull the door from his sister's grasp when Gracie came, pushed the door open and stepped

out on the porch beside him.

"Oh Malory you must send her away! Come in and I'll tell you." She burst into tears.

Gracie his tyrant, his arch-enemy weeping! That startled him far more than that inexplicable look. The foundations of the world were tottering. He turned to his trembling companion. "Go home, Angel," he bade her tenderly. "Meet me tomorrow and we'll fix all this up." He watched her waver down the porch-steps then turned to his sisters:

"Now girls?"

Together they got him into the house and told him. ...

III

Angélique said to herself, "I'll ask Aunt Sal – Cousin Laurentine – but what could they know about it? No I'll wait for Malory. Can I have the leprosy I wonder?" She went home, stripped and peered a long time in the mirror at her delicate, yellow body.

Next afternoon near the corner of Cedarwood and Tenth she untied and retied her shoes twenty times. Malory did not come. She shook out bushels of imaginary dust. He had not come, was never coming.

At the end of an hour she went to the corner and peered down Tenth Street. Yes – no – yes it was he coming slowly, slowly down the steps of the Boys' High School. Perhaps he was sick; when he saw her, he would be better. ... He did not look in her direction; without so much as turning his head he came down the steps and started due west. Cedarwood Street lay east.

Without a second's hesitation she followed him. He

was turning now out of Tenth north on Wheaton Avenue. After all you could go this way to the old Hopewell Road. Perhaps he had meant for her to meet him there. A block behind him, she saw him turn from Wheaton, into the narrow footpath that later broadened into Hopewell Road. Yes, that was what he meant. She began to run then feeling something vaguely familiar about the act. On Hopewell Road she gained on him, called his name, "Malory, oh Malory." He turned around an instant, shading his eyes from the golden June sunlight to make sure and spinning back began to run, almost to leap, away from her.

Bewildered, horrified, she plodded behind, leaving little clouds of white dust spiraling up after her footsteps. As she ran she realized that he was fleeing from her in earnest; this was no game, no lover's playfulness.

He tripped over a tree-root, fell, reeled to his feet and, breathless, found her upon him. She knew that this was her dream but even so she was unprepared for the face he turned upon her, a face with horrid, staring eyes, with awful gaping lips, the face of a Greek tragic mask!

She came close to him. "Malory," she besought pitifully. Her hand moved out to touch his arm.

"Don't come near me!" His breath came whistling from his ghastly lips. "Don't touch me!" He broke into terrible weeping. "You're my sister – my sister!" He raised tragic arms to the careless sky. "Oh God how could you! I loved her, I wanted to marry her – and she's my sister!"

* * *

To proud Laurentine sitting in haughty dejection in the littered sewing-room, fingering a dog-eared postcard

from Niagara Falls came the not unwelcome vision of her stricken cousin swaying, stumbling toward her.

“Laurentine, tell me! I saw Malory, Malory Fordham; he says – he says I’m his sister. How can that be? Oh Laurentine be kind to me, tell me it isn’t true!” She would have thrown herself about the older woman’s neck.

Inflexible arms held her off, pushed her down. “So you’ve found it out have you? You sailing about me with your pitying ways and your highy-tighty manner. Sorry for Cousin Laurentine – weren’t you? – because her father was white and her mother wasn’t married to him. But my mother couldn’t help it. She had been a slave until she became a woman and she carried a slave’s traditions into freedom.

“But her sister, your mother,” the low, hating voice went on, “whom my mother had shielded and guarded, to whom she held up herself and me – me – ” she struck her proud breast – “as horrible examples – your mother betrayed Mrs. Fordham, a woman of her own race who had been kind to her, and ran away with her husband.” She spurned the grovelling girl with a disdainful foot. “Stop snivelling. Did you ever see me cry? No and you never will.”

Angélique asked irrelevantly: “Why do you hate me so? I should think you’d pity me.”

Her cousin fingered the postcard. “Look at me.” She rose in her trailing red dress. “Young, beautiful, educated – and nobody wants me, nobody who is anybody will have me. The ash-contractor’s son offers – not asks – to marry me. Mr. Deaver,” she looked long at the postcard, “liked me, wrote me – once – ”

“Why did he stop?” Angélique asked in all innocence.

Laurentine flashed on her. “Because of you. You little fool, because of you! Must I say it again? Because my mother was the victim of slavery. People looked at me when I was a little girl; they used to say: ‘Her mother couldn’t help it, and she is beautiful.’ They would have forgotten all about it. Oh why did your mother have to bring you home to us! Now they see you and they say: ‘What! And her mother too! A colored man this time. Broke up a home! No excuse for that. Bad blood there. Best leave them alone.’”

She looked at Angélique with a furious, mounting hatred. “Well you’ll know all about it too. Wait a few years longer. You’ll never be as beautiful as I, but you’ll be pretty. And you’ll sit and watch the years go by, and dread to look in your mirror for fear of what you’ll find there. And at night you’ll curse God – but pshaw you won’t – ” she broke off scornfully, “you’ll only cry – ”

Angélique crept up to her room to contemplate a future like Laurentine’s.

Hours later Aunt Sal came⁶ in, her inscrutable dark face showing a blurred patch against the grey of the room. In her hand something gleamed whitely.

“Thought you might want yore letter,” she said in her emotionless, husky voice.

Her letter, her letter from Asshur! Her letter that would reiterate: “Be a good kid and I’ll come for you. ...”

She seized it and fell half-fainting in the old woman’s arms. “Oh Asshur I’ll be good, I’ll be good! Oh Aunt Sal, help me, keep me. ...”

Dark Algiers the White¹

I

Marseille, which from Paris seemed to beckon, proved on our arrival to be pointing the other way. For across the Mediterranean which stretched careless and blue at the foot of the Rue de Cannebière loomed Africa. Perhaps that dream-land would never lie so near us again. Algiers was twenty-eight hours away, beyond a sea that smiled and faintly rippled: a sea warmed and gilded by the sun which had forsaken Paris; curtained and lighted at night by stars and constellations which we had never seen; mellowed by a saffron moon climbing from below the surface of the world to the warm, rich velvet of the sky.

Time spent a day and four hours in rolling back the curtain which separated our known from the unknown. Suddenly the ship stood still in the midst of a large and beautiful artificial harbor enclosed in a circular breakwater. Before us stretched the jetty and on it flashed a moving picture of brown and black faces, red fezzes, white turbans, white burnouses,² red blanket robes. All the strangeness and difference of that life which, starting far, far in the interior of Africa, yet breaks off so abruptly at the southern edge of the Mediterranean, rose instantly to meet us. Porters agile as monkeys swarmed up narrow rope-ladders over the side of the ship; one of them whipped a gay handkerchief from his

throat, passed it through the handles of our valises, threw the staggering load over his shoulder and abruptly started off. Through a lane of staring chattering faces we passed, entered a waiting car. In a moment we had sped from *Mustapha Inférieur*, the lower level of the city, to *Alger*, the city proper. Ten minutes later we had registered in the Hotel Oasis. For a few days we would be residents of Algiers, dwellers in Africa.

Alger la blanche! Algiers the White! White Algiers the French rightly call it. I shall never forget that first impression. The city rises white in tiers up the side of a hill, of many hills. The town is built in three layers, Mustapha Inférieur on a level with and slightly above the jetty; Alger the middle city; Mustapha Supérieur on the hill crests. The roads are white, and white and chalky the dust on the palm-trees that line the streets and dot the public gardens. And on all sides swarm white-clad patriarchal figures, superb in burnous and swathing turban. Staff in hand, they make one think according to his training of pictures seen in Sunday School or film-shown "Scenes from an Eastern Village." Dark figures clad in European clothes but crowned with red fezzes bring East and West together. Down the Boulevard de la République shine the white minarets of an Arabian mosque. In the public square in front rises the statue of the Duc d'Orléans, the shoulders and the head showing flat like card-board against the sky.

It was nearly dusk when we left the hotel to catch the first glimpse of the city. We boarded an open trolley-car and rode to its terminus. It was a trolley-car of many turnings whose conductor, a courteous young Arab, took his task as a game. From the running-board he

dashed to the pavement to turn on innumerable signal lights; he ran ahead and opened switches; from the gathering darkness friends hailed him and he made cheery responses. Some of them leaped on and rode a short distance. Either this traction company furnished endless passes or the young conductor considered this his treat, for his gay companions paid him nothing. Down on the sidewalk the white dust showed grey and grey walls showed dimly through grey air and suddenly appearing from around a turning and vanishing again in the misty night came mysterious figures of women clothed in white and numerous garments, a white face veil covering mouth and nose, cheeks and hair, all but two dark impenetrable eyes and a triangle of creamy forehead. An Arab in irreproachable "sack" suit and red fez mounted our trolley, first helping on his young wife. Mystery shrouded her; her two eyes stared unseeingly before her; she was like an automaton beside her lord; there was no conversation. When they dismounted we saw that her robe was wonderfully soft and white; that the stockings encasing her dainty ankles were faintly pink; that her shoes were russet and delicate. Before we ourselves descended an old woman came and sat opposite and we found a chance to examine her face veil. It seemed to be made of a piece of soft embroidered muslin shaped very much like the tiny white apron which a good American housewife sometimes assumes on a leisurely afternoon. The old Arabian woman's face was sallow and wrinkled. The triangle of flesh appearing above those faded eyes could scarcely ever have been smooth, so crissed and crossed was it now by a pattern of tiny lines. But old and faded and wrinkled as she was her clothing and her veil lent

her mystery and marvel. She was the very savor of the East.

The morning brought its measure of disenchantment. Algiers was still white, still different, still mysterious but the merciless sun revealed its defects and destroyed its magic. The white burnouses were not quite so white, the flowing robes terminating a foot from the ground afforded a glimpse of European trousers and shoes; the children were sore-eyed; there were beggars at every corner. Through the voluminous garments of the women showed the outline of misshapen bodies, broken and distorted by neglect, abuse and much bearing of children. Yet nothing could destroy, could penetrate their air of mystery. And the grave and regal bearing of the better type of Arab compensated for the shocking anomaly of his dress. This anomaly showed everywhere, in the jostling of streets bearing now Arabic, now French names; in the issuing of French sounds from bearded Arab lips; there were boulevards vaulted and arcaded like the Rue de Rivoli in Paris and just off them tier on tier of worn, crumbling steps which led to the dark and tortuous "native" quarters. So completely had my first glimpse of the city prepared me for a manifestation of life totally different from any which I had ever known that I was heart-broken at finding myself before an array of shops, in front of ranks of counters covered with jewels, bric-à-brac, pictures, gloves, materials such as one encounters any day in the Boulevard des Italiens or in Forty-second Street. It was unnecessary to close one's eyes to imagine oneself in Paris or New York.

Presently we find the courage to mount those worn and crumbling stairs which lead from spacious Rue

Bab-Azoun and to emerge into the first street which lies back of it. Here immediately one is in another world. The pavements are lined with shops and with booths, square and dark these last, some of them mere cubby-holes. In one, fezzes, gay handkerchiefs and meretricious jewelry are³ sold. The next is devoted to string. Algiers seems a center of the cord-making industry. Here a dark interior is lined with flaming bolts of cloth printed in crude, high colors; a little Arab, or perhaps he is a Turk, sits impassive behind a brief counter and dreams with wide staring velvet eyes beyond his shop, beyond the facing houses, perhaps beyond the sea. He does not see you as you pass by; from his expression I judge he will sell nothing today. Further down we enter a tiny dark shop; this one has windows displaying indifferently gay beads and faded basketry, a few bracelets showing in filigree Moorish emblems, the crescent and the hand of Fatmah. The spare grizzled proprietor shows us his wares. A passenger on the boat had warned us never to pay the first price mentioned. But we are Westerners. We do not haggle easily. He rejects with dignity our one timed suggestion at reduction. But the price is absurdly small in any case and we come away content.

This street and all the streets in Algiers swarm with people – children, boys, and men, men, men! I have never seen so many not even in New York. They pass perpetually through the ways on the pavements and in the road; they sit in the native business quarters, on the edges of the side-walk they spill over into the gutters; they warm the stone winding staircases which bisect the streets. Boys perched on stools eat couscous, the native dish, from a bowl or from a tin cup. Men

magnificently bronzed, lean and regal, a red cloak streaming behind them, thunder by on – obviously – Arabian steeds. It is too bad that moviedom has spoiled the integrity of this scene; our sophisticated eyes find in it a touch of artificiality.

By accident the artist of our group and I stumble into a magnificent shop on Rue Bab-Azoun. We enter to purchase a trifling souvenir; we remain to finger, to envy and to listen to the expounding of “Pohoomull Brothers, Brahmin merchants.” They are of course East Indians. I notice a curious phenomenon: the brothers are brown, we are brown, the Arabs are brown, but there is a difference in our brownness, so much so that clad all of us in Western dress, each would shortly be able to discriminate. The Pohoomull brothers greet us cordially; they call us “friends”; they order for us sweet, black Turkish coffee and Turkish cigarettes. They are delighted to show us a brooch in pearls and sapphires at 3000 francs, and minute and useless souvenirs at three. The more talkative partner leads us to a store-room of brasses and coppers; finely carved trays and vases; gorgeous incense burners; chimes, tables inlaid with copper and silver, cunning and unusual patterns wrought on knives and jugs and utensils whose uses we do not know. We assure him again and again that we have no intention of buying, that we are really quite poor. But he insists that it is a pleasure to him, that we are his “friends,” that something in the shape of our heads makes him recognize kindred spirits and that therefore he would do for us what he would do for few others: show us in detail his 3,000,000 francs worth of merchandise and count it time well-spent. He makes me think of Forster’s Dr. Aziz in his “Passage to India.”

The social amenities, he thinks, constitute friendship and when we in our tongue-tied Western fashion express our gratitude, for his belongings are marvellous and the atmosphere of his shop gracious and charming, he becomes more and more eager to please. He would do anything to make our stay in Algiers profitable and pleasant. Is there anything we desire; if it is not in his shop he will procure it elsewhere. He is so obviously sincere that my friend voices her great longing to paint⁴ a Moorish woman. The very thing – every day a number of girls come to his place to do embroidery – Pohoomull Brothers manufacture their own goods – “if Mademoiselle will look in tomorrow – .” Mademoiselle does look in tomorrow – three times, but the girls are not there. “You can never depend on them,” he apologizes, shaking his head in sorrow.

Like Dr. Aziz he falls down when put to the proof of his protestations.

II

Those worn, winding stairs intrigue me. They savor of old-world necessities when men lent themselves painfully to the vagaries of nature instead of bending her to their comfort. It is possible mounting thus from one level to another to reach the very crests of the city. I start out along a twisting, writhing street, les Tournants de Rorigo, which winds circularly around itself always ascending the hill. At times I make a short cut to the next round by the simple expedient of climbing one of the steep staircases. I am obsessed with this serpentine street and must know what lies at the far end. There are not many Arabs here yet one meets

them constantly always descending from above; there must be a colony of them up in the hill tops; perhaps the French drove them there when they took the city a century or so ago. I stop in a small bakery which oddly enough carries a side line in leather to buy a narrow red collar for a certain spoiled kitten in far-off New York and I ask the woman if it is safe for me to climb further. She assures me: “You may go anywhere, anywhere, Mademoiselle, and then besides one sees that you are from Martinique (Martiniquaise) and there is no danger here for a French woman!” Fortified I start again and almost at the top of the hill turn this time *down* a flight of steps and from a stone landing look into a miniature village some twenty feet below. There are perhaps a dozen houses here, or no, not houses, miserable shacks, swarming with women and children. They are unspeakably dirty and ragged yet somehow they strike a picturesque exotic note which makes me long for my artist friend. These women are without face veils; one of them passing directly before me wears a head-dress of scarlet, a green jacket with a purple collar, a cerise and yellow skirt. Another is dressed from head to foot in various shades of red. A woman carrying a copper water jug on her shoulder crowns her brown garment with a splendid turban of yellow and gold. I cannot sufficiently describe the picture they made in their gay clothing, the brilliant blue of the sky above, the strong gold of the sun above them, the black background of squalor and wretchedness behind. The farthest possibilities of mankind meet in them. A French woman mounting from below stops by my side a moment and tells me that this is “The Court of Miracles.” But she is unable to explain the reason for

this palpable irony.

She points to still another flight just a few feet away. "That leads to the Kasbah, the Arab quarter. If you really want to see the natives, how they live – they are there." Of course I want to see them, so I descend and mount again. This time I am in a world as different from lower Algiers as that world in turn is from New York. I am suddenly in a network of narrow, narrow, winding lanes – they are too small for streets for their entire width is not that of a New York side-walk. The lanes are paved, they keep a tortuous pattern which my inexperienced eye can glimpse but cannot follow. The houses on either side touch in their second and third stories so that one is constantly passing under square or vaulted arches. A few doors are open and loitering I spy in a dark interior a form bending intently over a wheel, a tiny lamp illuminating just the inch of work on which the artisan is painfully engaged. Once I catch a glow which lights up a whole room – there is a bake-oven here; in another door-way boys are twisting cord – one of them makes a spindle of his toe.

Dark and narrow as these lanes are there are those still darker and narrower, not wide enough for two people to pass without brushing shoulders. I do not enter any of these, indeed I am beginning to be conscious of a slowly mounting fear; I follow the pattern of streets, downward, downward in the direction of the sea where I know there is light and safety. I restrain an impulse to run and walk very erectly, very swiftly past the pinkish stone houses with their heavy small arched doors, closed so tightly; past groups of Arabs gambling; a French soldier overtaking me looks at me curiously; three well-dressed Arabs, their burnouses snowy, their

turbans gaily bound, pass me, then stop and look back. But clearly I have a definite goal, for I branch off suddenly and proceed still downward in another direction. And suddenly I am out at three o'clock of a brilliant January afternoon in a fairly broad street, still full of strange faces, but open to the sky and affording glimpses of the blessed sea.

I come back the next day with my friends, the artist and the student. We peer fearfully into the Cour des Miracles then halt at the foot of the stairs leading up to the Kasbah so that the artist may make a note of Arab children at play. As we stand a French woman, leading her little girl who has been intently regarding us for some moments, comes closer and asks me if we are thinking of visiting the quarters. And when I say yes she exclaims: "Not without an escort!" I tell her proudly that I had gone through the day before by myself. "Bon Dieu," she cries and tells me of terrible possible happenings, the tragedies of those sinister, black off-shoots and allies. She leads us out by a path that skirts the quarters and while the artist stops again promises that if I will come back the next afternoon she and her husband who is on the police force will show me about. If her husband should be on duty she will take me into one or two of the shops on the outskirts.

A rambling, crazy little trolley deposits me the next day at the very top of the hill. The French barracks is on one side and three or four sentinels are on patrol. My heart fails me at first for my guide does not appear and the sight of the strange bronzed faces regarding me curiously as I stand a lonely equally exotic figure in the middle of the sunlit road unnerves me. I have lost the courage which saw through my first visit, the

Frenchwoman's warnings have undermined it. Presently she and her little girl arrive, her husband is on duty, but there are one or two places where the two of us may pass in safety, and the French soldiers are all around. We enter first the Moorish cemetery of El Kettar which is built on an abruptly dropping terrace so thickly studded with tombs that one has scarcely a footing. Rich and poor are crowded together, the tombstones are mostly flat, with here and there an iron grill. Nothing more unlike our carefully kept cemeteries can be imagined. We turn then and walking past the barracks and along a hill crest winding circularly above the sea come slowly back to the same staircase of the Kasbah where I had first so bravely entered.

To my astonishment my little French friend stops before one of those heavy rounded doors, pushes it easily open, beckons for me to follow and I am actually in an Arab house in the Kasbah. This is the home she tells me of a Moorish friend hers, Fatmah. And calling the name loudly she leads me through a short, dark hall into a small courtyard and up a narrow winding stairway done in worn but beautiful tiles in old blue, red and yellow. At the first turn of the staircase we come to a curtained door opening on a dark oblong room five feet perhaps by eight. In a moment my eyes, accustomed to the gloom, pick out three figures of women sitting on the floor near a brazier of live coals. Their backs are against the wall, their feet are bare, their hands are in their laps. They sit thus, listless, doing nothing, absolutely nothing; life slips by. Fatmah is not there; a tiny woman, the oldest of the group, greets my French friend and conducts us to a house in another lane a dozen feet away. Arab families live, I am

told, as far as possible under one roof. If this is not feasible they seek adjoining houses. In this case Madame Fatmah, her sister Madame Kheira and their brother occupy three of the tiny dwellings. Madame Kheira's house which we now visit is fairly tall. Back of the inevitable heavy door is the equally inevitable courtyard lighted from a skylight flush with the roof of the house. The winding cement stairway gives on a narrow balcony in the back of which is a door leading again into a dark oblong room. Here we sit and wait for the still elusive Fatmah. The old lady, Fatmah's mother, is courteous and incurious; a young girl, Fatmah's niece, is frankly curious but still courteous. I sit Arab fashion on pillows on the floor and look about me. The place is very clean, the walls are done in flat high blue, a bed of old brass covered with magenta showing through coarse lace fills one end of the room, a sort of high-boy bearing a dish of oranges takes up the other. A wooden scimitar carved in dull red and blue hangs high on one wall and near it a small picture of a brilliant peacock. Two cats and a dog join our group as we exchange polite and amiable banalities after the fashion of ladies calling the world over.

Fatmah's niece directs us to the "terrace" which is really the roof of the room on the second floor. We have to mount a staircase without balustrade like a steeply set ladder but the climb is worthwhile⁵ for the terrace affords a new view of the Mediterranean and a far-off shadowy cape. The two cats have followed us and are met by two others above. The four of them, one yellow, one black and white, one grey and one a handsome white imperfectly valeted, are absolutely unobtrusive but they do like human company. Fatmah comes at last

closely trailed by her brother's little boy. She is wrinkled yet not old, busy, purposeful, industrious, a perfect Martha to the Mary of her sister Madame Kheira who comes to complete our group. Kheira is beautiful, her wonderful purple eyes are set slanting, their lashes are long and curling, her skin is the color of cream. The slightly accentuated lines of the mouth give her face character without age, otherwise she is unwrinkled. Her hair dyed a dark henna is perfection with her mat skin. I stare at her in such complete absorption that her glorious eyes finally question me and I blurt out: "You are so beautiful, Madame; I wish my artist friend could see you."

She smiles but receives the compliment without self-consciousness with the serene assurance indeed of an acknowledged belle. Her clothes are terrible, mere shapeless bloomers and a blouse or two, but they lose their grotesqueness surmounted by that perfectly chiselled face.

There was a little table about a foot and a half high on the terrace which I took to be a child's toy, but we pass within to another dark oblong room and there is the little table bearing a coffee service – a copper pot on a brass and copper tray chiselled and engraven like the ones in the shop of "Pohoomull Brothers." The Moorish women leave their shoes at the threshold and we sit on the floor about the doll table and drink thick sweet coffee from small handle-less cups. It is time for me to go. I rise and thank them: "Vous êtes très aimables, Mesdames; je vous remercie beaucoup." "Oh no," they reply, "it is we who thank you." Our politeness is that of Paris. "Au revoir Mademoiselle and good luck." They crowd the dark doorway and watch me. "She is really

very nice (gentille)," says Kheira. I turn and wave – a curve blots them out. I am on the safe highway again waiting for the Toonerville trolley.

My French friend waits with me. I do not know how to thank her for she has given me a rare afternoon such as I could never have procured at the hands of a guide. I ask if I may give her little girl a present. But blushing deeply she refuses. "It was a pleasure; you were so interested." I thank her again; my trolley appears. Our eyes dwell on each other with the glance of people whose lives for an hour have touched deeply at their only possible tangent. In spite of our good wishes and our expressions of *au revoir* we never expect to meet again.

In the morning, midway in hurried packing I hear a tap on my door. I cry "Entrez," and there she stands with her inevitable little girl. I am so amazed that I can hardly greet her. Downcast, dejected she offers me a bit of grimy paper bearing a few names. "A friend of mine," she stammers, "her husband broke his leg; we are getting up a subscription for her and I thought of you." She is so embarrassed! We fancy that her husband has sent her – "She was an American and you showed her about all afternoon and never got a penny from her. Catch her before she sails!" We are sorry for her plight, it is so clearly not of her own choosing. I give her the francs which she so richly deserves and return a hearty welcome to her profuse and apologetic thankfulness. The child says greedily, "Give them to me maman." Once more we exchange adieu. But our little idyl has a tarnished ending.

Algiers the White! gateway to the deeper mysteries of

Africa and of the East. Beyond lies the desert and the villages of the Kabyles. A few hours' ride from this seaport and we should be in the midst of strange exotic cities with new fantastic names, Blida, Bongie, Bou-Sâada and Biskra. Timgad, Laghouat and Touggourt; the gorges of Chiffa and the Ruisseau des Singes, the River of Monkeys.⁶

We tell our head-waiter, an elegant, serious young Frenchman with dead white skin and intense black hair, that we have never tasted the native dish, couscous. So he serves it as a specialty one night for dinner. It is not as new and different as bouillabaisse, the fish soup which we get in Marseille; it is really only a glorified stew of mutton, semoule (a cereal like farina), beans and peas. As this gorgeous climate affords three crops a year the vegetables are delicious.

On our last Sunday the artist and I strolling through the Faubourg Bab El Oued into the public square of the Place du Gouvernement pause to watch the Arabs filing by twos and threes for prayer into the Grand Mosque, Djama El Kebir. With one accord we pass in too, and removing our shoes, kneel in the dim silence on the great prayer carpet and with faces turned toward the rising of the sun breathe a prayer to the God who watches alike over East and West.

One picture is typically the East. I turn suddenly from the noise of Rue Marengo to the spacious and wide staircase leading into the Rue Sidi-Abderrah-Mane et Tsalbi. A bronze, lean beggar, a very patriarch of

beggars, sits at the top of these steps in the warm January sun-light. Above him rises a stone railing and above the railing show palms and orange trees. His hand stretched out he remains perfectly immobile: he does not look at the passersby; he does not solicit any alms. I watch for five minutes and nothing about him moves but his eye-lids. A woman, white-robed, half-veiled zig-zags up the steep stairs; her feet are thrust in high-heeled red slippers, she is stockingless but her ankles are concealed by silver bracelets four inches wide set with bright opaque red stones.

Again the porter slips his neckerchief through the handles of our bags and precedes us up the gangway⁷ of the steamer Timgad. The machinery starts up, the shore-hands cast off. A young Moorish monk beside us, his unshaven beard showing coal black against the soft tan of his face, waves a sad repressed farewell to someone on the jetty. We get up steam; Mustapha Inférieur vanishes; the bay is lost; Cape Matifou, farthest outlying point of the coast, fades into spray and mist. Algiers, Africa, again are dreams.

1925

Jessie Fauset, "Double Trouble" Part 1, from *The Crisis*, Vol 26, no. 4, August 1923 pp 155-159 and "Double Trouble" Part II, from *The Crisis*, Vol 26, no. 5, September 1923 pp 205-209. Used by permission of Gordon Feinblatt LLC. Jessie Fauset, "Dark Algiers the White" Part 1, from *The Crisis*, Vol 29, no. 6, April 1925 and "Dark Algiers the White" Part II, from *The Crisis*, Vol 30, no. 1, May 1925. Used by permission of Gordon Feinblatt LLC.

Notes

DOUBLE TROUBLE

¹ First published in *The Crisis* (August and September 1923).

² *alabaster* a white, translucent mineral used for ornaments.

³ *saffron* golden yellow-orange color.

⁴ *buskins* knee- or calf-length boots.

⁵ *ambrosia* something especially delightful to smell or taste.

⁶ *Original reads:* come [ed.].

DARK ALGIERS THE WHITE

¹ First published in *The Crisis* (April and May 1925).

² *burnouses* long, loose-fitting, hooded cloaks.

³ *Original reads:* is [ed.].

⁴ *Original reads:* to to paint [ed.].

⁵ *Original reads:* worth while [ed.].

⁶ *Original reads:* river of Monkeys [ed.].

⁷ *Original reads:* gang way [ed.].