

CHAPTER 1

Part 1

Sue Ann had made a bad mistake by telling the field and house slaves that she was pregnant by the plantation owner, Mr. Gibson. Especially by telling the house slaves. Sue Ann was pretty, young, and trusting. Furthermore, she didn't fully understand what she was saying. Mr. Gibson had bought her a year earlier in Mississippi from a very old plantation, along with a few other slaves.

Now Sue Ann was five months pregnant and was working in the cotton fields.

"Is yo' really got Mr. Gibson's baby, honey?" Old Aunt Jane looked up from her chopping for a moment and studied Sue Ann's belly. When Sue Ann nodded yes, the old woman clucked her tongue and dolefully shook her head. "The house

slaves been doing lots of talkin', and yo' got to be keerful, child."

Aunt Jane knew that Sue Ann was young and none to wise about masters. The old woman liked Sue Ann because she was about the same age her daughter should be. Aunt Janes's daughter had been sold separately from her when her baby was one year old. "Mr. Gibson is married, and the house slaves tell Miss Martha everythin' that goes on among the slaves," Old Aunt Jane warned as she rose from her stooped position. She stretched way back, then stood there, stooped in a perpetual stance like the old tree near her clapboard shanty. "When Miss Martha tells her husband about this, he'll have to make a liar out of you."

Miss Martha already had confronted Mr. Gibson with Sue Ann's pregnancy. Gibson asked the neighboring plantation owners to bring all their pregnant slaves to his place early next day, before light.

Aunt Jane told Sue Ann she had seen what happens to girls who claim they are pregnant by their slave masters.

"Run as far and as fast as you can, child."

But Sue Ann thought the master had real concern for her, and she wanted to talk to him once more.

"Old man Gibsons' gonna' chop you up like you chops them weeds if you don't git," the other field girls convinced her that night. She decided to run away before dawn, but that was to late. Gibson kicked open the door to Sue Ann's shack as

five wagons were approaching the big house. Each wagon was driven by a docile looking black boy with the owner seated beside him, cradling either a rifle or a shotgun. One wagon carried Mr. Moss and his slaves. The other held Mr. Hamilton and his slaves, Mr. Porther and his slaves, Mr. Lloyd with his slaves, and Mr. Bradly with his slaves. Of all the masters, Old Man Bradly was most feared and hated by all. When Aunt Jane saw him, her heart seemed to crawl from her chest up into her mouth. She had heard that he was so mean that if a slave lied to him, man or woman, he would drive a nail through his tongue into a tree stump, and through his hands for stealing. Bradly had the largest plantation around and owned many slaves. He was a short man with a heavy frame. He walked very slowly with a sway in his stride. His legs were bent as though crippled with arthritis. He was a hairy man with heavy eyebrows. Although his hair was dark, he had steely blue eyes which revealed his sadism when he rested them upon a slave. Now, as always, he carried his whip and large hunting knife.

Mr. Gibson stood in Sue Ann's doorway, Bradly stopped his wagon and walked over to ask what was going on. Gibson told him what Sue Ann had said, and that he was going to whip her in front of all the other pregnant slaves. "I've got three other pregnant women besides this one here."

Bradly told Gibson, "A whipping is not good enough punishment," Bradly grunted, "especially since you are a married man. If the baby is born with light skin and light eyes," he gave Gibson a knowing look, "Miss Martha might believe Sue

Ann's story. Let me handle it my way, because I can teach niggers a lesson for years to come, put fear into niggers not yet born. Also, I will show them the white man is boss, and the meanest son-of-a-bitch alive!"

Old man Bradly told Moss and Hamilton to bring Sue Ann out to him. He told them to tie her between two trees, upright and spreadeagled. Bradly then stripped the now terrified Sue Ann of her nightgown.

The other plantation owners stood around with their guns cocked. The slave women wanted to beg and cry for Sue Ann's life, but knew better, for they'd be beaten or worse for showing mercy to their own kind. In the crowd was Bessie Mae, a slave girl who belonged to Bradly and was pregnant by him. Pretty, young, and very emotional, she knew something terrible was going to happen because they had come a long ways, and were missing time at work. Bessie Mae had seen beating before, but never anything like what she was about to see. The men attracted to the spot by the commotion were kept well behind the women because this was a show mainly for the women. But of course, the white owners let the male slaves stay as this punishment also would serve as a lesson for them, too.

As the sun slowly rose, Bradly reached for his hunting knife and started to walk toward Sue Ann. When she started to cry and beg for her life, one of the young slave men knocked Hamilton down to the ground with a thud. The young slave, named Hezehiah, ran toward Bradly hollering, "No! No!

Please, No!" because he had been Sue Ann's sweetheart back in Mississippi, where they had been on the same plantation. Before Hezehiah could reach Bradley, the blast from Moss's shotgun rang out. The blast had tore Hezehiah almost in two. Bradley had stopped momentarily, but now continued on toward Sue Ann looking at her as though she were his most hated enemy. She called on Jesus, and made a frantic gyrations to escape her bonds. As she pleaded with Bradley for mercy, he stabbed the knife into the tip of her stomach, pushing it to the hilt, then pulled it down past the navel.

As the knife slid into her, the male slaves groaned aloud and leaned forward as though struck simultaneously by a great wind. The women were quiet, all with soft tears running down their cheeks.

After Sue Ann was laid open, Bradley reached inside the screaming woman and yanked out the fetus. He threw it to the ground and stomped it. He had blood spattered all over him, and his hand and arm were dripping with blood.

At that moment Bradley began to cut Sue Ann, and the blood began to flow. Bessie Mae had to bite her tongue to keep from screaming. She knew better than to scream because one of the older women had told her not to do so, and why.

The sun was higher now, but the morning still cool, and steam began to rise from Sue Ann's body like a gutted hog in late autumn. The sight of this made Bessie Mae's stomach do a strange turn, as if her baby felt every emotion she did.

The dread knowledge that Bradly, this evil beast, was the father of her unborn baby. Bradly went to the watering trough and washed the blood from his face, hands, arm, and knife. When he got back, he looked into the faces of each slave woman and his boy driver until they dropped their eyes in submission. All except Bessie Mae, who was still passed out.

So Sue Ann hung between the trees like a butchered hog, and Hezekiah lay 30 feet away, in a pool of blood. The slaves buried them together as the wagons started back to their own plantations.

After this brutal murder of young Sue Ann, for a time a lot of things plagued Bradly around his plantation. His barn caught fire, and his water buckets had the bottoms knocked out of them. Some of his prized livestock perished in the fire. Some of the spokes were broken in his wagon wheels. Slaves were expensive, so Bradly didn't want to kill any unless he had to. He whipped many black backs in an effort to find out who was causing the trouble. Three of his male slaves tried to run away. Bradly and a few other plantation owners, with their dogs, caught the runaways the same day. Bradly brutally beat the two young slave, chained their ankles, and branded an R on their cheek. He hanged the older slave. This example stopped all trouble..

One day when Bessie Mae was in her seventh month of

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pregnancy and her cotton bag was only a quarter full, the overseer asked her why she was being lazy. He told her to "stop bullshittin'" and to start working.

Bessie Mae understood what he meant and she tried to work, but her body was too large and the pain was greater than her fear. After watching her work a while, the overseer rode up behind her and struck her soundly with his whip. She fell and turned on her back, holding her stomach. Even the overseer could see what this meant. He allowed the other women to help her deliver, and he handed them his knife to cut the cord. They told the groaning woman to push down hard and this would help her deliver. Bessie Mae bore down and her baby was born in the cotton field. But the mother died in childbirth. The women took the baby to the Housemother; she cleaned her up, and named her Flor Mae, giving the baby the same middle name as her mother.

When Bradly heard of the death, he had the slave men dig a hole in the cotton field where she had died and bury Bessie Mae there where her child as soon as she could walk would help others chop and hoe and fill the cotton bags of others until at length, she was large enough to have one of her own.

Part 11

Neither Housemother nor anyone else who knew, ever told Flora Mae that she was Bradly's daughter. As the girl grew

older she was aware that she was extra light, so she asked Housemother who her father was. Housemother told Flora Mae that her mother probably was raped by one of the white overseers in the field. This shocked Flora Mae enough to let it go at that and she never asked again. There were two reasons Housemother didn't tell the truth.

First, she was afraid Flora Mae would mention it to Bradly. Second, she knew Flora Mae hated Bradly for the evil things she had seen him do to her people. Housemother didn't want Flora Mae to know such an evil man was her father and she feared that Bradly might take exceptional interest in that body that now was 17 years old.

The overseer who had hit Bessie Mae with the whip had been dead for five years now. He had a fatal sunstroke one day in the field. Many changes had taken place on the plantation, too, during the intervening 17 years. By 1864 the Civil War had been raging for three years and was going very badly for the south, for a number of reasons.

Bradly's plantation was almost dilapidated. In 1862 when the Union Army had begun to hire runaway slaves, Bradly's were among the first to go. The smell of freedom was in the air! Women and men ran away whenever possible. The few slaves who remained, the young and strong, were confiscated by the Confederacy for all types of labor.

A slave by the name of Pickit tried his best to get Flor Mae to go with him to Ohio by the underground railroad.

But, the housemother was too old and sick to travel. Flora Mae loved Housemother as her own mother and wouldn't leave her behind.

"Go," Housemother had said, "you are young and can take care of yourself, and have a long life ahead. I am old, sick, and will die on Bradly's plantation. All I can hope and pray for is to see Bradly die before I do."

At length, Flora Mae, Housemother, and two old slaves named Bubbles and James were all that Bradly had left. Flora Mae remembered how much Housemother had taught her about how to survive around the plantation, and how she had been sheltered. She remembered how Housemother had always comforted her when she was hurt. She knew Housemother had advised her wisely on the ways of white people. Housemother had always told Flora Mae that her own mother, Bessie Mae, was a brave woman and well loved by the other slaves for her kindness and had been beautiful like Flora Mae.

The girl had brownish hair, big hazel eyes, and nice full lips. Her skin was very light, and her body tall, slim and shapely as that of any woman in the region. Housemother always dressed Flora Mae in such a way as to disguise this lovely figure and natural beauty. As the cotton fields deteriorated from lack of slaves, Flora Mae worked in the kitchen with Housemother who knew when to keep Flora Mae out of sight. Remembering everything that Housemother had done for her, Flora Mae made up her mind not to go anywhere until she

figured out a way to take Housemother with her.

Bradly still was hanging on because he believed the South would rise again, and things would be like they once were. Bradly's dream never would come true in his lifetime because the South was on its last legs. Though the Yankees was winning the war, the bluecoats were suffering many losses because the South fought back bravely. Due to the Yankees heavy casualties, they couldn't send out their best men on scouting missions. Therefore, some scouts were undisciplined adventure seekers, looters, rapists and thieves, and now they were coming ever closer to Bradly's plantation.

One early morning, Old Man Bardly walked down to the only slave shack left talking to Bubbles and James. The slave owner still had his whip in his hand and the same hunting knife on his side with which he had sliced poor Sue Ann. There he was, still trying to bark orders, telling his two slaves to go hunt food. But now he lacked the authority he used to have, for the old slave all but laughed at him. Bradly knew the only reason they stayed was because they were old and needed a roof over their heads, land they could hunt on and a garden in which to grow some food. Bradly needed Bubbles and James worse than they needed him. The two old slaves said, "Yes, Boss," and looked at each other smiling. Bradly handed them his shotgun and they went off to hunt meat for food.

Bradly turned and walked slowly back to the house talking

to himself about, "smart-assed niggers," and that he should, "whip the black bastards."

Flora Mae and Housemother were in the kitchen starting to prepare what little food there was left. Only Flora Mae knew how sick Housemother really was. She had terrible pains in her stomach that came and went. Flora Mae did most of the heavy work to lighten Housemother's load.

Housemother was sitting in the kitchen feebly attempting to peel potatoes. Flora Mae reached for a bucket and went to the barn to milk the cow. Besides the cow, Bradley had a few chickens and a good horse for the only wagon left. The barn, like the house was dilapidated.

Three Yankee soldiers were approaching the place while on a scouting mission. Two of them were white, and the other black. Although Old Man Bradley was upstairs looking out of his window and watching Flora Mae go to the barn, he did not see the trio. Instead he scowled and muttered, "Lazy bitch! She should be hoeing the garden or something." At this, he turned and reached for his pipe. Flora Mae didn't see them either; her back was to the road.

But the soldiers saw Flora Mae and their eyes lit up in anticipation. Silently, they tied their horses and moved in on foot. When Bradley turned back to the window after lighting his pipe, he saw the last Yankee soldier entering the barn. Bradley loaded another shotgun and began creeping down the stairs. He slipped out the door and headed stealthily

toward the barn, fondly hoping he could kill some Yankee soldiers.

Flora Mae was just about to sit down and start milking when she sensed someone was in the barn. She whirled around and saw the three soldiers. The two white soldiers were grinning from ear to ear, but the black soldier was very sober faced. He was thinking that Flora Mae was the most beautiful high-yellow black girl he ever had seen. Instantly he wanted Flora Mae for himself and didn't want her to be raped.

With gun in hand, one of the white soldiers ordered Flora Mae to lie down in the hay manger and she wouldn't be hurt. The terrified girl had heard stories before about the Yankee soldiers, and now she believed they were all true. So she did as she was told.

With a silent plea for help in her eyes, Flora Mae looked at the first black soldier she had seen. Valeno was going to go first. Charlie Pye was going to be second, and Milton last. Pye was the black soldier. They were going in this order because Milton had been first last time they raped a girl, and Pye first the time before that. He could say nothing against them raping Flora Mae because they all had raped Southern white girls, too.

Valeno reached down and tore the top of her dress open, exposing the most beautiful set of tits he ever had seen. They were big and firm, pinkish around the side, with light

brownish nipples. As he looked at her, Flora Mae dropped her big soft hazel eyes in a strange mixture of bashful terror. Pye and Milton, standing behind Valeno with their eyes wide open were practically drooling. Pye felt like screaming for he wanted her all for himself.

"You sons-of-bitches!" Valeno shouted. "Go stand in the corner until I'm finished, like I do when you're doing it!" They did so, reluctantly.

By now Valeno had pulled off Flora Mae's pants and her dress was up. He rubbed his hand over her leg and thighs. They were firm, yet her skin was soft as cotton. As Flora Mae shut her eyes and turned her head to one side, Bradley eased through the door with his shotgun cocked.

"Get up, you Yankee son-of-a-bitch!" Bradley yelled. "I'm gonna blow your ass into hell!" Valeno lost his hard on right away and leaped up. Flora Mae jumped up, too, trying to cover herself up as best as she could.

Valeno, thinking fast, said, "Mister, please be careful with that thing. I ain't no Yank!" Bradley didn't see or know the other two soldiers were behind him in the corner. Milton picked up a four-pronged pitchfork that was leaning against the wall. He eased up behind Bradley and lunged. The two middle prongs went all the way through Bradley's neck, leaving a prong on each side. Bradley straightened up and his shotgun went down and fired, blasting off his foot at the ankle. The prongs pinned Bradley to a nearby

post.. The desperately wounded man reached up and grabbed the prongs on each side of his neck, struggling to free himself. In his frantic efforts to pull away from the post, his neck began to tear worse. Blood was gushing from his nose and mouth and running from his shattered foot stump all over the floor. The horrible sight made all those present, pause in frozen silence. Bradley's eyes were bugged wide open and his head was tipped to the left side, with his hands now holding the prongs in a death grip.

The sight of Bradley's horror gave Flora Mae a strange feeling of elation that she didn't understand, but Milton exclaimed, "Oh man! If we get caught for this, we'll really be in trouble!"

"We should kill the girl, too," Valeno said. "Without a witness, we can't get in trouble."

Pye balked at this, "No! We ain't gonna kill her!" Pye was holding his gun, and Milton and Valeno looked into his eyes and saw trouble if they'd try to kill Flora Mae. Pye reasoned with them, "She don't give a fuck about no slavemaster."

Valeno looked at Pye and said, "Okay man. But I hope this ain't no mistake. Let's get the hell outa here!" Pye was the last to go out of the barn. He looked back at Flora Mae and smiled, and, despite the carnage there, she smiled back.

When the soldiers left, Flora Mae ran to the house and

told Housemother what had happened. "The lord works in mysterious ways," Housemother solemnly replied. She wanted to see Bradley's body, but Flora Mae said that his body looked terrible and it would be better if she didn't see it.

"Start getting your things together because we're gonna get outa here as fast and as far as we can," Flora Mae said.

Housemother asked, "Where we gonna go? How far can you get with a sick old woman?" Flora Mae told her they would go to Atlanta. "Atlanta!" Housemother exclaimed, "Baby, I'm too old and sick to go. You go child, cause I have to stay and look after Bubbles and James."

"I had clean forgot about them," Flora Mae said as the two men walked into the yard holding a few rabbits they had shot. "They'll just have to go with us!" She told the two old slaves what had happened. This was the first time they ever had been without a master and they too wondered what they would do. Flora Mae just started ordering Bubbles and James like they were children, telling them to hitch up the horse and wagon, then bring it around to the back kitchen door. They quickly looked at Housemother who nodded her head approvingly. Housemother then told Flora Mae she would go but there was one thing she wanted to do first--see Bradley's body.

So they all went out to the barn. No one made a sound for a moment upon seeing the body of Flora Mae's father, but the three who knew said nothing, until Housemother exclaimed,

"I hope the devil sticks him one for me, the murdering bastard!"

Flora Mae asked Bubbles and James if they'd bury him. Bubbles, without changing his expression said, "Let him rot right there on that post." James picked up Bradley's other shotgun and took his knife.

On the way back to the house, Bubbles and James were ahead of Housemother and Flora Mae.

"Since the war is on, we may run into trouble," Housemother warned Flora Mae. "There's a lot of strange people travelin' on the roads. A lot of ex-slaves are running loose out there, hungry. A lot of bad men, honey, black and white. We can't trust nobody!"

Flora Mae reasoned, "We got to leave here! Some of the white trash may come here and think we don ol' Bradley in. Besides, I hear a lots about Atlanta. It's a city! Black folks got a chance there. Housemother, you heard what the runaways said about Atlanta before they got caught!"

Housemother said, "Yes, honey, we goin', but it ain't Atlanta I'm talkin' about. It's the gettin' there!"

"We'll go in the house and see what we can find," Flora Mae said. "We'll take all the food and stuff we can. Bubbles and James both got a shotgun and shells?" she asked.

"Yes, they have, baby, an' they're both tough ol' men from workin' so hard. But they ain't never shot no man befo' and they're scairt o' white men."

"Well, let's just hope we're lucky."

Flora Mae and Housemother went in the kitchen and started getting together what they could. They had to be careful not to carry too much, since they had only one horse. They got a skillet, a pot, some tin plates, and some knives, forks, and spoons. Housemother grabbed her big kitchen knife, the one she always swore she would stick into Bradley. Flora Mae was getting some blankets to keep them warm on cool nights when pains started to hit Housemother again. She was glad Flora Mae wasn't there to see her ball up and cringe with pain, but the young woman walked in and caught her, just as the old one was straightening back up.

"It's nothin' child, I'll be alright," Housemother answer is. Flora Mae, with much pity and love for Housemother, put her arms around her.

Flora Mae, Bubbles, and James went upstairs to see if they could find anything of value in Bradley's room. After they were there a couple of minutes, they began to relax, and the search became hurried but thorough.

Bradley's room had a large old bed he'd shared with his long dead wife. There was a big trunk at the foot of it. The room also held two closets and two big oak chairs. There were a lot of boxes around the room, containing whiskey jugs, old bottles, clothes, and papers. Bradley hadn't let anyone in his room for a long time. Since so many slaves had been running off, he was afraid of something getting stolen.

On Bradley's dresser they found some tobacco, powder, shot and caps for the shotguns, and a few books. They took all of that. The drawers held old socks, long johns, dirty coveralls, and some old sheets. They took none of that. One closet was locked, as was the trunk at the end of the bed. Bubbles and James knew this, but had forgotten. Whenever the women had cleaned Bradley's room, they had spoke of his locked trunk and closet. James spoke of going to get something to break them, but Flora Mae told him she would see if the keys were in one of Bradley's pockets.

When Flora Mae reached the barn door, she had an uneasy feeling at first. His blood had dried. She went through his pockets and found some keys, and a nice pocket watch.. It was probably the nicest thing he has left, she thought. He had given all his money and possessions to the Confederate Army, truly believing that the Confederacy would win the war and the South could resume its old ways.

As Flora Mae searched Bradley, there was something else she began to feel which she didn't quite understand. She left the barn with the keys and watch in her hand.

The closet and trunk held more junk, but on closer observation, Flora Mae noticed there appeared to be a false bottom in the trunk. She hurriedly threw the junk out on the floor. Bubbles and James started ducking and jumping, for in her excitement, Flora Mae was throwing it everywhere. She

lifted out the false bottom to find four gold candlesticks, ten gold coins, a very fine set of dueling pistols in a laquered case, and a sterling set of silver wrapped in tissue.

Flora Mae said, "Hallelujah! So ol' Bradly didn't give away everything," and they took the loot down to the wagon.

The wagon had no top so they let down the tailgate to make a bed for Housemother, then helped her in. They got some blankets and put a pillow under her head. For food they had the rabbits that Bubbles and James had shot earlier that day, some salt pork, bread, and some home preserves.

As the three were helping Housemother into the wagon, Flora Mae noticed that Bubbles and James were talking to the old woman very sweetly and looking at Housemother in a way that Flora Mae had before never noticed. Bubbles was telling Housemother, "Don't worry sweetheart," with her hand between his and James was saying very gently, "You jes' keep praying, Housemother, an' we'll get you to Atlanta. Then you'll be jes' fine!"

Watching them made Flora Mae blush at their tender moments. Then she remembered how six or seven years earlier James and Bubbles had come to the back kitchen door to get extra food from Housemother. And how she had smiled at them so tenderly and they'd smiled back. Flora Mae knew that the two men and Housemother had been sweethearts.

Bubbles and James went back in the house for some more

things. Neither of them knew how old they were, but they figured about 60 years. Because of their long years of friendship, they even looked alike. Many people thought they were blood brothers, but they weren't.

Bubbles had salt and pepper hair, more salt than pepper, which was very tight to his head. His skin was very dark with two worry lines across his forehead. His eyes were brownish red where the whites should be, as if the blackness of his skin was trying to come out in his eyes. He had bags under those eyes, a big nose but strong, and from either side of that a line ran almost to the corner of his lips. His lips were large and had a rim around the top and bottom which gave them shape. He looked as though if he'd open his mouth real wide, he could put a teacup in it.

James' description just about fit Bubbles, except James was about 5'9" tall and Bubbles was slightly shorter. They were both rather slow from the hard work of picking cotton from can to can't, and pulling a plow or whatever else Bradley used them for. This work had made their muscles hard. Even at their age, their skin hung closely to their bodies. They were lean and their legs were in good shape from plenty of walking and hunting, and running after game Bradley had killed when they were younger.

James had a few scars in his eyebrows and under one eye. These came from a time when he had to fight a slave named Bo, who belonged to Mr. Moss. Old Man Bradley had bet Moss that

his slave James was the toughest nigger in the country. The two plantation owners then made a wager and pitted Bo and James against each other. James had beaten Bo and fought three or four more times. In his last fight, he was almost killed so Bradly had stopped the fight. Bradly never had James fight again because he was such a good worker.

Bradly had left his mark on Bubbles also. One time when Bubbles was tired and thought he was ready to die anyway, he refused to work. Bradly smacked Bubbles across the face with his whip handle for refusing. At another time he'd have killed him, but with the war on, good bonds were hard to obtain. Bubbles had snatched the whip from Bradly and hit him on the head with it, laying him on the ground. The overseer charged Bubbles and tied him to the whipping post. Then they tore off his shirt. The overseer threw a bucket of water on Bradly to bring him around. Bradly had whipped Bubbles almost death. The slave finally had passed out from the pain. When Bubbles had regained his senses, Bradly then poured salt and pepper into his wounds, but the slave still refused to scream. Housemother had nursed them back to health.

Now, while the gate of the wagon was down, James and Bubbles stuck their loaded shotguns under the blankets on each side of the bed. They were both pointed toward the tailgate. James had the knife and was sharpening a long, thick stick on both ends. Flora Mae, about ready to leave, looked

at James and asked him why he was whittling.

"Sometimes a gun will jam up an' get you in trouble with big game," James explained. "Besides, we can spear fish if we run out of food. You see Flora Mae, with the stick sharp on both ends, if an animal attacks an' the shotgun don't work, I can stick his' stick 'tween my legs in the ground an' when he jumps at me, I falls back, an' the other end will run through him."

James was done with his stick and they were about to start their trip from Chatsworth to Atlanta. Bubbles had been to Atlanta with Bradly many times over the years to get supplies. He told Flora Mae the direction to head before she climbed aboard to drive. James and Bubbles preferred walking close to the wagon instead of riding. There would be less strain on the horse and easier for them to watch for game. They kept the tailgate down so if either of them would get tired, they could ride for a while.

Flora Mae gave a tug at the reins and the horse started to move away from this place that had scarred minds and bodies for life. Flora Mae was remembering when she was about 13 years old, she was scrubbing the kitchen floor on her hands and knees. Bradly had come in and hit her on the rear with his whip handle. She hated him for that. As they rode past the barn, Housemother also had her thoughts about Bradly. She particularly remembered back some 20 years or more. Bradly had had her clean up his room. He came in

behind her, closing the door and locking it. He'd said, "Jessie, her name before they had started calling her Housemother, I'm gonna teach you a new way to make love!"

She had said, "Please don't," and started to say more but he had told her to shut up.

So now as they passed the barn, remembering their humiliations and sufferings, Housemother felt joy at knowing where Bradly was now. Housemother thought if the black man has a God, he has surely forsaken us. Then she thought what was black people sufferin' so much fo'. Oh Lawd, what have we done so wrong? Then she reasoned with herself that maybe she had to go through so much in order to teach Flora Mae how to protect herself. Then maybe Flora Mae's children won't know the kind o' things we had to do. Oh Lawd, I hope someday we'll really be free an' happy. After that Housemother closed her eyes and fell asleep because the terrible pain had eased.

James was walking on the right side of the wagon carrying his sharpened stick. Bubbles was on the left side. The house was still in sight in the background. They both looked back at the house at the same time, then they looked at each other and smiled broadly with the smile of truly good-natured people. How good it was to be getting out of there.