

"An important and beautifully written must-read of a novel."

—SILAS HOUSE, author of *Southernmost*



when stars
rain down

a novel

ANGELA
JACKSON-BROWN

A Note from the Author

Dear Reader,

Racism in the 1930s was rampant throughout the country, but especially in southern states like Georgia. Because my goal as a writer is always to strive to be historically accurate, there are occasions when characters in the book, who are members of the Ku Klux Klan, will use the “N-word.” My intent in using this word is not to shock but to punctuate the fact that racism was brutal and still is brutal nearly eighty-five years later. I have been a target of the hate that word gives, and I want the readers of this book to understand the full weight of a word so powerful that it is now referred to by its first letter. The white people who were actively participating in the racist behavior found in *When Stars Rain Down* were ordinary, and this word is a necessary reminder of the hate that lived in the hearts and minds of some of the white citizens of Parsons, Georgia, whom everyone in the community knew. Even when “that word” was not being spoken out loud, many of the white characters illustrated the power of the word

through their actions. My hope is that a day will come when that word and other derogatory words are no longer part of our lexicon, but the way we ensure that happens is by staring back at our collective history without blinking or flinching.

Sincerely,
Angela Jackson-Brown



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798



The inside of Miss Peggy's house was hot like the End of Days the preachers preached about during summertime revival meetings. My pastor, Reverend Perkins, said just this past Sunday that if this heat was a clue of how hot hell was going to be, we should all be lining up to get rebaptized. This type of heat was new to all of us and had some of the End of Days crowd prophesizing that maybe this was the sign of the end. I didn't know about that but I knew one thing: this heat made everything unbearable to do, especially cooking and cleaning.

I was naturally thin, and usually when everybody else was soaked with sweat, I was walking around with a sweater on. But this day, I felt like somebody had drenched me in water. We'd been experiencing unseasonable weather since the middle of April. Tornadoes had been hitting all around us, and it only got worse as the days went on. Now we were in the middle of one of the worst droughts to ever hit the state of Georgia. Lou Zoller, on WSB radio, said 1936 would go down as one of the deadliest

years when it came to the weather. It most surely felt like Mother Nature was on a warpath, and we were her targets.

Of course it didn't help that I was stuck cooking in the kitchen like it was the day before Christmas instead of the middle of June. I would be eighteen in a few days and I had planned on spending this day shopping in Atlanta with my cousin Lucille. She and I were going to look for outfits to wear to Founder's Day in a few weeks, a celebration that had been going on in Parsons, Georgia, since before Granny was born. Everybody, young and old, Colored and white, wanted to be at Founder's Day dressed in their best outfits. Yet here I was, cooking and cleaning at Miss Peggy's house instead of gazing at dresses made out of tulle, taffeta, and silk. I wasn't planning on buying one of those off-the-rack dresses; since I was pretty handy with a needle and a thread, I planned on making the dress that I liked and saving some money.

I had asked for the day off weeks before, and Granny and Miss Peggy had said yes, but when Miss Peggy told me Jimmy Earl was coming home on the same day as my trip to Atlanta, I knew I had to stay and help her and Granny get ready. Both of them were too old to try to cook and clean in all this heat. I was sad that I had to give up my trip to Atlanta, but I would have just spent the day worrying about Granny and Miss Peggy.

Jimmy Earl was coming home from the University of Georgia to visit for the summer, and Miss Peggy wanted all his favorite foods waiting on the dinner table when he walked inside the door. Ordinarily, on hot days like this, we didn't even cook. I'd make some sandwiches or a tray of vegetables or fruit, and that would be about all. But Miss Peggy was bound and determined

that Jimmy Earl get the king's treatment when he returned from school.

I leaned against the counter. I was so hot I could hardly breathe. The windows were all open, and I had a little fan sitting in the windowsill that wasn't doing much more than circulating hot air. I filled up my mason jar with some of the spring water I'd stopped for that morning. Miss Peggy had indoor water and a Frigidaire she kept it cool in, but water straight out of the faucet just didn't taste the same to me, even though the water came from the well my grandfather had dug for Miss Peggy and her husband when they first built this house.

I mopped the sweat from my face with the dish towel on the counter and looked around the kitchen. There wasn't a single spot that wasn't filled up with a pot or pan or serving tray of Jimmy Earl's favorite foods. The menu for his homecoming consisted of baked ham, short ribs, fried chicken with gravy, dressing, collard greens, stewed okra and tomatoes, potato salad, apple dumplings, buttermilk biscuits, and German chocolate cake. Most everything was already done except for a few things like the biscuits and the gravy that I planned on making right around the time Jimmy Earl arrived.

It was four thirty, and Jimmy Earl was sure to be home any minute. Miss Peggy tried to help me earlier after Granny had to go home on account of her gout acting up, but Miss Peggy was getting feeble her own self, so it was up to me to make sure Jimmy Earl's homecoming dinner was everything his gran wanted it to be.

"Opal, I swear you done got to be as good of a cook as your Grandma Birdie," Miss Peggy said as she walked into the kitchen

taking slow, measured steps. Miss Peggy used to be a big woman like my granny, but she'd lost a whole lot of weight over the last few months. And on top of that, her movements were getting slower. A sign of age, she had said. I'd wondered if that was really the case, but I didn't dare ask. Even at the age of nearly being an adult, I still understood my place when it came to Granny and Miss Peggy. Some things they just wouldn't discuss with me, and their health was generally something they only talked about with each other in hushed tones.

Miss Peggy made her way over to the stove where the pot of greens was still cooking. She stuck the big metal spoon into the pot and dipped out some of the pot likker. She blew on it and then took a sip. I watched her as she closed her eyes and moaned.

"Lord, chile, this pot likker is better than any I've ever cooked. You're gonna make some lucky man a good wife someday."

"I'm not looking for no husband," I muttered. But even when I said the words, I knew I wasn't exactly being honest. I was almost eighteen. No, I didn't necessarily have a boy in mind to marry since Granny wouldn't even let me keep company with a boy yet, but I did wonder who might be the boy I would someday marry and start a family with.

"Every girl is looking for a husband, honey. Some just look harder than others. But never mind all of that. When do you think everything will be ready? Jimmy Earl should be home any minute, and his mama's been napping all afternoon. Hopefully she won't get in one of her moods today," Miss Peggy said.

Jimmy Earl's mama, Miss Corinne, was a bit touched. As far

as I knew, she'd been that way most of her life, but especially after she had Jimmy Earl, or at least that's what Granny told me. She said some women never overcame the stress and strain of childbirth and that Miss Corinne suffered more than most, especially since her marriage to Jimmy Earl's daddy, Mr. Earl Ketchums, didn't work out. Miss Corinne and Jimmy Earl had to come back home and live with Miss Peggy and Miss Peggy's now deceased husband, Mr. Cecil.

A lot of days my whole job revolved around keeping Miss Corinne quiet. Usually that meant listening to her while she sang from the Methodist hymnal. If she got restless, I would just make a song request to calm her down.

"Sing me 'To God Be the Glory,' Miss Corinne," I might say, and she would run off for her hymnal even though she knew nearly every song in there by heart. I'd make her sing song after song until she was worn completely out. Other times, if she wasn't interested in singing, I would take her for a long walk. We'd go from Miss Peggy's house all the way out to mine and Granny's house over in Colored Town and then back again. Sometimes we'd do it more than once in a day's time if she was really riled up, but this heat had made it impossible for me to take her walking.

I was thankful Miss Peggy had convinced her to sleep. I wouldn't have been able to cook and tend to Miss Corinne too.

"Miss Peggy, all I've got left to do is make the biscuits and let these greens cook for another half hour and then everything will be ready," I said.

"What about the deviled eggs? Jimmy Earl loves Birdie's

devised eggs. Should you make some of them too?” Miss Peggy asked, wiping her forehead with her handkerchief.

“Miss Peggy, we’ve got so much food here now, it’ll take Jimmy Earl and half of the county the rest of the week and part of next to eat everything. I hardly made this much when he came home for Christmas last year,” I said, determined not to cook one more thing that we hadn’t already agreed upon.

I was beyond tired. Of course, I understood Miss Peggy’s excitement. Jimmy Earl hadn’t been home since Christmas. He was studying pharmacy at the University of Georgia, and during the breaks and holidays, he worked at a pharmacy up there in Athens, and he did some janitorial work at the local hospital to help pay for his schooling. So his deciding to come home for the summer and help around the farm and work at Mr. Lowen’s Drugstore was a big deal. And, I had to admit, I had missed him too.

Jimmy Earl and I had grown up together. He was five years older than me, but he always treated me like a little sister. It never mattered that he was white and I was Colored. Granny said when I was a toddler and she would bring me to work, Jimmy Earl insisted that he was in charge of taking care of me.

“Earl! Earl Ketchums, where you at?” I heard Miss Corinne call from the front room, startling both me and Miss Peggy.

“Blessed Savior,” Miss Peggy muttered.

I still needed to mix up my biscuit dough and get the red-eye gravy cooking. The last thing I needed was to have to go deal with Miss Corinne. I looked at Miss Peggy.

She patted my hand. “I’ll tend to Corinne. You just go on

and finish up the cooking. And when you get done with them biscuits, you fix two plates . . . one for you and one for Birdie, and then you head on home. Birdie probably ain't ate today."

"Are you sure, Miss Peggy? Soon as I get these biscuits in the oven I can go see about Miss Corinne," I said. I was tired but I knew Miss Corinne did better with me than she did with Miss Peggy or my granny. I hated to see Jimmy Earl's homecoming spoiled because Miss Corinne was acting out.

Miss Peggy smiled, but the sadness was all over her face. "No, honey. You go on home once those biscuits are done. You been cooking and cleaning all week. I'll get Corinne to settle down," she said and walked out the kitchen, almost dragging her left leg behind her.

It wasn't easy seeing Miss Peggy and Granny getting old. It was like one day they were middle-aged, still spry and in complete control of their faculties and their bodies, and the next day, they were old women with brittle bones and labored breaths. It scared me.

I gave the greens one last stir and then turned them down real low. Everything looked good. Then I started making the biscuits and the gravy. I was so good at making Granny's cat-head biscuit recipe, she never bothered to make them anymore. She just called on me to make her biscuits. The gravy was easy as well. I just used some of the juice from the ham I had baked, stirred in some flour, and then added the melted butter and half of a cup of this morning's coffee to give it that strong taste everybody loved so much. I turned the gravy down low so it would keep warm until Jimmy Earl got home.

Once those two things were done, I was officially finished cooking, and I was happy for that. I just wanted to get my things and go home, where I could lay out on the porch underneath the stars and catch a breeze if I was lucky. I started fixing plates for mine and Granny's supper. I hoped she would feel up to eating. Then I tidied up the kitchen, making sure Miss Peggy didn't have anything to do but serve the food when Jimmy Earl got home. She and Granny had set the dining room table with the fancy china the day before, so all I needed to do was go find Miss Peggy—but before I could go looking for her, I heard Miss Corinne getting louder and louder in the front room.

"I want to go see Earl Ketchums, Mama," I heard Miss Corinne yell. "And I want to go see him right now."

Clearly Miss Corinne had forgotten that the last time she snuck off to see Earl Ketchums, her daddy had still been alive and had shot Mr. Earl in his rear end, promising to aim higher if he didn't stay away from Miss Corinne. Even after Mr. Muldoon's death, we kept a clear eye on Miss Corinne, making sure she never went off on her own to see him. Jimmy Earl saw his daddy every now and then, but even he would admit that it was best she not be around Mr. Earl because he lived like somebody thrown away. He didn't work, except for selling moonshine, and, as Granny would say, he stayed drunker than Cooter Brown most of the time.

"Corinne, you are getting yourself riled up for nothing. Now go somewhere and be still," I heard Miss Peggy say back to her.

What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!

“Oh, Lord,” I said under my breath. Miss Corinne was about to get wound up and it was going to take an act of God to settle her down. I hurried into the sitting room just in time to see Miss Corinne pull her dress over her head as she continued to sing the words to her favorite song, but she was singing it so fast, all of the words seemed to run together.

Oh what peace we often forfeit,
Oh what needless pain we bear,

“Corinne Louise Muldoon Ketchums, have you lost your ever-loving mind?” Miss Peggy yelled, her face turning all shades of red.

All because we do not carry,
Everything to God in prayer.

I ran over and pulled Miss Corinne’s dress back down. “I’ve got her, Miss Peggy.”

Miss Peggy sank into the closest chair, the color steadily draining from her face. I worried that she might just pass out, but I turned my attention back to Miss Corinne, who was trying to pull away from me. I wrapped my arms around her waist and tried to pull her close. She struggled, but then, after a moment or two, she relaxed in my arms.

“I want to go see Earl Ketchums,” Miss Corinne said, tears streaming down her face. “You’ll take me, Opal? You’ll take me now? I need to see him right now. Right now. Right. Now!”



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

“Let’s talk about it tomorrow, Miss Corinne. Jimmy Earl will be home in a few minutes and you don’t want to miss him, do you?” I asked. I reached into Miss Corinne’s dress pocket and retrieved one of her daddy’s handkerchiefs that she’s kept with her since he died three years ago. Normally, she would have on a pair of his dungarees. They would nearly swallow her up, but wearing them was the only thing that seemed to keep her calm when she started missing Mr. Cecil, which was all of the time. I had convinced her to wear a dress today in Jimmy Earl’s honor. She looked like a fragile white baby doll. I wiped the tears from her face.

“Jimmy Earl’s coming home?” she asked, a half smile on her face. “He’s coming back? Is Daddy coming back too?”

I decided to ignore her last question. “Yes ma’am, Jimmy Earl will be here any minute and you don’t want him to find you all wound up, now, do you?” I smoothed down her brownish-blond hair that looked just like her mama’s used to look before it became thinned out and gray colored. I had French braided Miss Corinne’s hair earlier during the day, but between her restless sleeping and the heat, it looked like I hadn’t even touched it. “Why don’t we go upstairs and get you changed and fixed up again?”

“You’ll take me to see Earl Ketchums tomorrow?” she asked, not to be thrown off from her original request.

I took her by the hand. “Let’s get you cleaned up and we’ll talk about that later.”

I looked over at Miss Peggy. She was watching us closely, and I could see tears trickling down her face, which was unusual

because Miss Peggy wasn't a crying type of woman. She mouthed, "Thank you." I nodded and led Miss Corinne out of the sitting room and up the stairs to her room.

Clearly, I wouldn't be going home anytime soon.



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798



Summer nights in Colored Town were always my favorite. I looked around my granny's porch, seeing all of my aunts, uncles, and cousins and a smattering of neighbors and friends. As always, I felt so much love for all of them that it seemed like my heart might just burst wide open. Most of us were domestic workers, field hands, or sharecroppers, so we made our living by the soil or dirt of other folks' houses, but once we got home and washed off the dirt and sweat of the day, we always found a way to come together and congregate underneath those starry Georgia skies.

My Uncle Lem was playing his guitar and singing "Little Black Train." I looked over at Granny. She disapproved of secular songs, but she didn't say anything right then. I knew her, though, and she would let him play one or two songs before she'd tell him to sing something about Jesus. And, of course, Uncle Lem would comply and flow right into "Precious Lord" or "Pearly White City." If Mr. Tote, our next-door neighbor, hadn't already had too much to drink for the night, he would join in and play

his harmonica. Once he and Uncle Lem started playing gospel songs, all of Colored Town would join in singing from the various porches. It sounded like a celestial choir singing.

I leaned back, resting my head on my cousin Lucille's leg. The porch was so full of people that by the time I got home from work there were no more seats.

About thirty houses lined the street of Colored Town, and almost all of them were my kin, or folks who'd loved me like I was their relation. The houses were so close that whatever went on inside those thin walls, everybody close by heard it. On any given night you might hear soft quarrels, the sounds of lovemaking, or the giggles and laughter that were just natural sounds to hear among those of us who lived in Colored Town. Not a one of us was rich, but we had all that we ever needed, and that was each other.

All throughout our little community the smells of summer squash, mustard greens, or sweet corn cooking filled the air along with the sweet, mouthwatering smell of peaches almost ripe enough to pick from the trees. And it wouldn't be a summer night if somebody didn't crack open a watermelon, causing all of the young children to line up, impatiently waiting for some of nature's candy. I had already eaten supper, but I was tempted to get in the watermelon line myself. My Uncle Little Bud had a gaggle of youngins lined up to get a slice. Even with the drought, those melons would be refreshing in weather like this.

We all worried how this lack of rain was going to affect our crops and our gardens. So far, things were doing okay, but we were in the early days of this rainless weather. Granny said this

morning when we were getting ready to go to work that we all better start talking to God about sending us a few of his tear-drops to cover the earth.

“Why you so quiet, Opal?” my cousin Lucille asked. She was braiding my hair for me. Mostly, I kept it braided and pinned up. I worked so hard cleaning and cooking every day, I didn’t have time to fool with my hair.

“Girl, I couldn’t be you with all this hair. I wouldn’t never pin it up,” Lucille said, not able to keep the good-natured envy out of her voice. Her mama, Aunt Shimmy, said Lucille would have broken her neck swinging her hair all over the place if God had blessed her with as much hair as mine. I didn’t mind Lucille doting on my hair. It made me feel special.

Of all of my girl cousins, I considered myself the dowdiest. I was thin as a reed with not much of a shape, my features were plain, and I was quiet most times unless I was talking to someone I was close to like Lucille or Granny. But even with them, I usually let them do most of the talking and I would listen.

No one ever said I wasn’t pretty. Actually, I think Granny and the aunties spent more time telling me how beautiful I was than they did the other girl cousins, but that just was never a word I connected with myself. Folks said I favored my mama, and my mama favored my granddaddy. Since I’d never known either one of them, I just took folks’ word for it. Granny didn’t believe in pictures, so there wasn’t a single photo of Mama or Granddaddy lying around anywhere for me to compare myself to.

Granny had four sons and my mama. From them, she had twelve grandchildren, and she was months away from having her

first great-grandchild. So even though I didn't have any brothers or sisters, to my knowledge, I was never alone, and Lucille was the one I felt closest to. She was two years younger than me, but she acted twenty years older. Where I was shy and closemouthed, Lucille was outgoing and quick with a comeback no matter the situation. Her hair might not have been a minute long, but she always kept it styled like the women in the movie picture magazines she liked to read.

"Opal, did you hear me? Why are you so quiet tonight?" Lucille asked again, but she kept right on talking before I could answer. Which was good. I wasn't entirely sure why I was feeling so moody.

It was like my spirit was telling me that something was about to happen. I didn't know if it was good or bad, I just knew something was brewing. I had felt this way most of my life. Somehow, I could just feel when something was about to happen—so much so, folks in the family would ask me if I had a feeling about something before they went off and did it. Granny would fuss if she heard anyone talk that way. "Ain't nothing but hoodoo," she would say, but still folks would ask. Sometimes I had a strong feeling, other times just an inkling. But I kept that away from Granny.

I started having one of my feelings soon after I left Miss Peggy's house. I was able to get Miss Corinne settled pretty quickly, leaving before Jimmy Earl even made it home, but as I walked from Miss Peggy's to Colored Town, I started feeling strange. Sometimes I felt a bit off right before my monthlies, but I'd just finished with that. I tried to shake it off, but it wouldn't go away.

“Opal, you feeling all right?” Granny asked from her seat on the porch. Normally, the grown folks didn’t pay us no mind, but Granny had been looking at me peculiar ever since I got home. If nobody else noticed I wasn’t myself, two people always did: Granny and Lucille. “This weather’s got everybody feeling out of sorts,” Granny said. “Maybe you oughta go inside and take you a good dose of castor oil. A good working out might do you a world of good.”

Everybody on the porch laughed. I felt my face flush. Whatever Granny thought to say, she said it. Didn’t matter to her if you got embarrassed. She used to say getting embarrassed was Satan’s revenge on vain men and women.

“Mama, you figure giving folks the runs is the answer to everything,” teased Uncle Little Bud, Granny’s youngest son, as he came back to the porch. Granny reached over and slapped him playfully on the arm.

“You just too mouthy, Little Bud,” Granny scolded, but she did it with a smile. Everybody said Uncle Little Bud was her favorite, at least after Mama ran off. Uncle Little Bud was just shy of thirty and was newly married to his longtime and long-suffering girlfriend, Cheryl Anne. Uncle Little Bud farmed, like all of my other uncles, and Cheryl Anne took in wash. She was quiet like me, but she loved herself some Uncle Little Bud, and in his rascally way, he loved her too. But then, all of Granny’s sons were good husbands, uncles, and fathers. The only bad apple in the bunch was my mama. As I let thoughts of her creep into my head, the bitterness rose up in my throat, almost making me choke. You would think somebody as old as me would be over

her mama's leaving her, but there were times when the pain was so fresh and so raw, it felt like she had just left.

"I'm fine, Granny," I said. "Just tired."

"Well, you sure worked yourself to death this week. I'm sorry I couldn't be more help to you," Granny said. "Why don't you take tomorrow off? I can take care of things myself."

I shook my head. "No, Granny. I wouldn't do that to you. Tomorrow's wash day. I'll be fine after a good night's rest."

"Neither one of you needs to work like you do," Uncle Myron, Granny's oldest son, scolded. I groaned underneath my breath. I knew where this conversation was going. I could have kicked myself for even bringing up the fact that I was tired.

"Come on, Myron. Don't get started with all that tonight," Uncle Little Bud teased. He knew where the conversation was going too. Everybody did. "You ain't got but one note, and you like to sing it ever chance you get."

Everybody laughed, but Uncle Myron was not to be deterred from saying his piece. He was the leader of our family, second only to Granny, and he was the most prosperous of everybody, so sometimes he acted like that meant his words were the only words that mattered. Uncle Myron had a farm that he leased out while he ran a little country store at the edge of Colored Town. To hear him tell it, me helping Granny keep house at Miss Peggy's was just a step above blaspheming the good Lord.

"I'm going to say what I know is right to say, Little Bud. Mama is too old to be working like she do at them white folks' house, and Opal ought to be somewhere in school. She's too smart to be a domestic worker," Uncle Myron said.

I gently pushed Lucille's hands away and stood up. I wasn't fixing to sit and listen to him preach to me and Granny about how terrible our life choices were. Not on this night. I didn't even care that my hair was only half fixed.

"I'm going for a walk. I won't go far. Just down to the end of the road," I said and took off before anybody could try and stop me. I was safe, and they knew it. Everybody around here looked out for everybody else. It was a rare night when there wasn't some grown folks walking down the street or sitting on their porches keeping an eye on the younger kids and us teenagers. There were always eyes on us.

I heard Lucille ask Aunt Shimmy if she could go with me, and I was thankful that Aunt Shimmy said no. I didn't feel like hearing Lucille's mouth right then. I loved her, but at that moment, I needed the solitude of the dirt road leading to the edge of Colored Town where the peach orchard was. I also heard Aunt Shimmy fussing at Uncle Myron for hurting my feelings. I just kept walking until I got to the orchard, not even wanting to hear his reply.

Because of the drought, the trees weren't doing as good as they normally did. The young boys tried to keep them watered, but the humans, the livestock, and the vegetables were more important than the orchard, so the trees were suffering now. When normally the peaches would have been plump, almost ready to burst, they were smaller and knottier. The peach smell still permeated the air, but not like in previous summers.

I continued to walk, not stopping until I reached the peach orchard. I found a comfortable spot underneath one of the trees

and sat. I was determined to get away from the sound of my family's voices discussing me. This was a conversation that happened regularly. Everybody seemed to think they knew what was best for me, but seldom did anybody ever ask me what I wanted.

I wouldn't say my feelings were hurt; I was just tired of the same old conversation. Uncle Myron's three sons and two daughters were all college graduates or attending college. His sons all graduated from Morehouse, and one taught there and the other two taught at Colored high schools in Atlanta. His two youngest children, the twins, Emma and Eveline, were juniors down in Alabama at Tuskegee Institute. They both wanted to be nurses. All of Uncle Myron's children were smart from the time they were little, and it made perfect sense that they went to college.

Uncle Myron and late Aunt Josephine had worked themselves to death to make sure all of their kids went to college, and I was proud of my cousins. I probably screamed as loud as anybody at the boys' graduations, but school just wasn't my thing. I hated it. I always mixed up my letters and I could hardly add two plus two. I was so thankful when Granny let me drop out in eighth grade. As far as I was concerned, I had stayed eight years longer than I needed because I just didn't seem to hold on to much of what I got taught from those schoolbooks. We had some good teachers at the Colored Training School. I just wasn't quick to catch on to book learning.

But where I felt stupid in the classroom, I felt like a shining star in the kitchen and in the house in general. There was something about cooking and cleaning that made me feel good about myself. I liked that I could take little or nearly nothing

and turn it into a meal. I liked that I could clean house better than anybody I knew, old or young, and I loved that I could take scraps of material and, before you knew it, I would have a dress or a pair of pants or a quilt made. Those things were my passion . . . my joy, and I hated that Uncle Myron tried to make me feel like something was wrong with me for wanting to be a housekeeper like my granny.

Uncle Myron said he farmed and ran his mercantile so his sons wouldn't have to and so his daughters could be married to professional men, but I wondered if just maybe one of his sons wouldn't have minded being given the chance to till the soil or plant some tobacco or peanuts. Uncle Myron called what most of us all did slave work. He didn't set out to be mean with his words, but he was, and he never paid attention to the hurt on Granny's face every time he brought the subject up.

I also resented that he made it seem like I wasn't taking care of Granny. Most of what Granny did every day was sit and keep Miss Peggy company while I worked. I made sure that Granny only did what she wanted to do. If she was forced to stop working, I just knew she wouldn't be long for this world. She got joy out of cooking and cleaning, and Miss Peggy never made us feel like we were slaves. She paid us good money for what we did, and Granny and I saved nearly every nickel so that when the day came that Granny couldn't work anymore, she would have a little nest egg—although I knew Miss Peggy would probably keep paying Granny until the day she died, work or no work.

I never intended to leave Granny. If anybody ever bothered to marry me, they would have to know Granny and I were a

package deal. I always planned on taking care of her and making sure she knew that unlike my mother, I would never leave her. And as was my custom, I felt the tears begin to fall. The thought of Granny dying someday always left me overwhelmed and in tears, but since I was alone, I let the tears fall. Then I heard a voice.

“What you doing out here all by yourself, pretty gal?”

I looked up and saw it was Cedric Perkins, the preacher’s son. I hadn’t even heard him walk up. I reached up to my hair. One side was hanging down my shoulder and the other side was plaited and pinned. I was mortified, but I tried not to show it. What was I going to do, anyway? Run?

Cedric was still wearing his farming clothes. It was still light enough outside that I could see his face, and definitely those pretty white teeth of his. The sky had become a beautiful mix of purples, oranges, and yellows with a hint of gray. But even with all that beauty, I was still caught up by the handsomeness of Cedric.

He sat down beside me. I could smell the faint scent of cigarettes, sweat, and cow manure on him, and his pants were painted red with dry Georgia clay. But it didn’t bother me none. That was a familiar smell if you grew up in the country. Most every man I’d ever known who was worth anything carried the smell of the land on his body. Even Uncle Myron wasn’t too stuck on himself to move some dirt around in his garden.

Cedric reached over and brushed the tear from my face. His hands were rough but nice at the same time. No boy had ever touched me in such a tender way before. My instincts said to get up and run home. But something else told me to stay put. I listened to the something else.

“Why you crying out here all by yourself? Somebody hurt you?” he asked. “Do I need to go beat somebody up, pretty gal?”

I shook my head. “I’m fine.” I didn’t feel comfortable sharing what I was thinking with anyone, let alone Cedric, one of the cutest boys in Henry County, Colored or white. Plus, I figured he would just make fun of me, so I continued to sit still, barely breathing I was so nervous.

Cedric leaned back against the tree we were sitting under. “You know, before my Grandma Apple died, she used to come out here and sit underneath these trees. She said the chinaberry tree was her favorite, but the peach trees did all right too,” he said. “You ain’t got to talk if you don’t want to. Do you mind if I sit here beside you and rest for a spell?”

“I don’t mind,” I whispered, even though I worried what my granny or uncles might say if they saw me sitting out in public with Cedric like this. Everybody knew that even though Cedric, or Stank, as most everybody called him, was the son of a preacher, he could be a bit of a hot head and a bad boy. One minute Cedric could be heard singing beautiful hymns in church and then a few hours later he was cussing somebody out for something or another on those same church grounds. He was not the kind of boy my granny was praying about for me.

“I bet your kinfolks would mind me sitting out here with you,” he laughed. “Miss Birdie shore don’t like me, do she?”

“It’s just she don’t know you that well. That’s all,” I said. Of course, I didn’t know him either. This time, and one time before, were probably the most words he and I had spoken to each other our entire lives. Yes, we went to the same church on Sundays

and on Wednesday nights, but the Perkins family lived a few miles outside of Colored Town and they pretty much stayed to themselves. I would see Cedric coming and going through our little segment of the town, but he and I had never really struck up much of a conversation with each other. I thought about the last time we did speak. It wasn't very cordial.

He and my Uncle Michael's son—Michael Jr., whom we called M.J.—were throwing the baseball around the day of the church picnic a few weeks ago, and I couldn't help but watch. I was helping my Aunt Shimmy with the cooking, sweat pouring down my face from the heat of the fire. Cedric had on a short-sleeved shirt, and his muscles bulged each time he threw the ball. He was like something I had never seen before. Cedric caught a glimpse of me looking at him before I could look away.

“Hey, hey, M.J., isn't that your cousin over there with them great big eyes?” Cedric yelled. “She shore has turned out pretty.” I turned away and started back flouring the chicken for Aunt Shimmy to fry up in the cast-iron pot that was sitting on the fire Uncle Lem had made. I could hear the crackling of the grease, and I acted like I was so into getting that chicken to Aunt Shimmy that I didn't even have time to give Cedric Perkins a second look. I acted so well, I didn't even notice when he came up to the table.

“Hey there, Opal Pruitt. Ain't you gone speak to me?” he asked. He was good-looking. Couldn't nobody argue with that, but he was also arrogant as any one person I had ever met. Cedric was nearly eighteen like me, and also like me, he chose to work instead of go to school. I'd also heard M.J. say Cedric was hoping

to get picked to play with the Atlanta Black Crackers. M.J. said Cedric wasn't no Satchel Paige, but he wasn't no slouch either.

"Hello, Cedric Perkins. There. I spoke. You satisfied?" I said. I kept on flouring the chicken, thankful that none of the grown folks were paying us any mind.

"Well, I'd be more satisfied if you'd give me one of them piping hot chicken legs your auntie just fried up. They looking all golden brown and juicy," he said, flashing a mouthful of white teeth. Against his rich black skin, those teeth almost sparkled. I felt my face grow hot. I had to remind myself to stay focused on what I was doing or I might have stopped flouring chicken and just gazed at him like some lovestruck ninny.

So instead of flirting with him like my cousin Lucille would have done, I flashed him angry eyes. "Well, what with you being the preacher's son, I reckon you can get your chicken from anybody's table. We got just enough for ourselves."

He threw back his head and laughed. I looked down, fearing that my aunts, or worse, my uncles, would see me talking to Cedric.

"Well, since you put it that way, I reckon I'll just mosey over to Hazel Moody's table. I just bet she has a leg or a thigh she can spare," he said and started laughing as he walked away. I coulda just melted into the ground, I was so mortified, and I couldn't believe I didn't have something flirty and girlie to say back to him. I had basically invited him to go off and be with Hazel Moody.

I smiled to myself now, wondering what she would think about me sitting here underneath this peach tree with the boy she all but claimed as her own.

“Humph. Well, I guess the way your granny feels about me is true for how most folks feel about me in this town. They judge me by my loud mouth and flirtatious spirit, as Mama calls it,” he said.

“I try not to judge anybody that way. I don’t want nobody judging me,” I said.

He laughed. “Look at you over there quoting Scripture. ‘Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.’”

“You know that by heart,” I said. I was amazed by this side of Cedric.

“Well, they do say even the devil can quote Scriptures, so I reckon you ought not be too surprised that I can rattle off a few here and there,” he said with a smile.

“Don’t liken yourself to the devil,” I said in a quiet voice. “That ain’t nobody you should want to compare yourself to.”

“Well, ain’t that who you thought I was the other week when you wouldn’t even offer me a little ol’ chicken leg?” he teased.

I turned my back to Cedric. I was feeling way too shy to be having a conversation like this with a boy. I tried to think what Lucille would say, but before I could come up with something sassy, Cedric reached out and touched my arm.

“Hey, I’m sorry. I was just teasing,” he said. “And just so you know, I didn’t go to nobody else’s table. If I couldn’t eat at yours, I didn’t want to eat at nobody’s.”

“You could have,” I said, trying to sound bold, but my words barely came out above a whisper.

“Not if I wanted to ask permission to keep company with the prettiest girl in Colored Town,” he said.

I looked at him in confusion. “Who is that?”

He reached over and pushed a lock of my hair out of my face. “That would be you, pretty girl.”

“Oh my,” I said. I didn’t know how to take this Cedric Perkins at all. To be honest, this side of Cedric scared me a little. I knew how to handle myself with him when he was being flirtatious and teasing. But this? This serious, manly side of him was a bit scary. “I better go,” I said, getting up in a hurry.

Cedric jumped up quickly too. He was tall. At least six feet, and even though I was tall for most girls at five foot seven, I still felt small and petite next to him. Cedric brushed his fingers against my face. I shuddered a bit. I couldn’t help myself. My body was responding to his closeness in ways I had never felt before.

“I enjoyed talking to you, Opal. I guess I better start cleaning up my ways so your granny will let me come over and sit with you on your front porch sometime,” he said. Then he kissed my cheek and hurried off into the peach tree orchard. I just stood there for a moment after he left, touching that spot on my face where he had kissed me. My first kiss. I felt like the sun had just dipped down low and grazed my face with its warmth.

“Opal! Opal, you out here?” a voice called out to me. It was my Uncle Little Bud. I didn’t want him to catch me standing around staring off into space.

“I’m here,” I said as I walked out of the orchard and onto the dirt road leading back home. “I’m here.”

Before I left for work at Miss Peggy's, I went out to feed my granny's chickens. I guess you could call them her pets. Other than giving us eggs, Granny's chickens never found their way on a platter. They always died from old age. Everybody teased her that she could knock a pig in the head with no problems during hog killings in the fall, but those chickens, she loved them like they were her babies. Anytime I couldn't find her, I knew to look out at the coop because she was probably out there talking to her feathery youngins, as she called them.

I greeted them as I threw dried corn into their chicken coop. "Morning, Daisy. Morning, Cleo. Morning, Bessie and Claudine. And Mr. Lincoln, how are you doing, you old ornery rooster? Y'all got anything out here for me?" Mr. Tote had built the coop for Granny several years ago, and it looked like a palace fit for royal chickens instead of a bunch of country chickens like ours. After I got them fed and watered, I collected five eggs. That was pretty good. I took them inside and laid them in a bowl

on the table, and then I crept out as quiet as I could so I wouldn't wake up Granny.

I loved walking to work, especially when the sky was still dark—right before the sun began to rise majestically above the horizon. I didn't hardly hear a peep from any of the houses as I passed by. Some of the farmers were probably already up and out getting the farm animals fed or watering their crops, but other than a few lamplights in some of the windows, I felt like it was just me and God awake this early on a Saturday. I loved walking late at night, too, when the moon was high above the trees and the stars would sometimes look so alive, it was like they were raining down from the heavens. This morning the moon was still holding on to its place in the sky, so it was in the moonlight that I passed through town.

Parsons didn't have the same sentimental feeling for me that Colored Town did. Even though, really, they were one and the same. Colored Town was my heart and soul. Parsons, on the other hand, was just buildings and businesses that belonged to the white folks whom I only really knew in passing. There was Mr. Monk Davis's gas station where Uncle Myron would stop for gas, but only he would have conversations with Mr. Monk. Me and Granny would sit and stare straight ahead, because even in 1936, it wasn't safe for Colored folks to look a white person in the eye, especially a white man. Somehow, Uncle Myron got away with it. I never understood how, but white folks seemed to respect him and give him a much wider berth than they did the rest of us. Maybe because he was a business owner. Or maybe just because he was Uncle Myron.

Farther down the street was Mr. Lowen's Drugstore where Jimmy Earl was going to work that summer and Miss Betty Powell's Dry Goods. I probably went to Miss Betty's more than any other place to pick up new sewing patterns and thread and cloth for Miss Peggy. Miss Betty didn't allow Colored folks into her store, so you had to tell your order to her helper, Baxter Lee, and then, after Miss Betty rounded it up, she would have him come collect the money and give it to her. You would have to stand there and wait while she counted up the money to make sure you didn't cheat her.

After Miss Betty's store was Doc Henry's house and office. Doc Henry would doctor on you no matter if you were Colored or white, rich or poor. One time my throat got so sore I was crying out in pain, or at least as much crying as I could do with a throat that was on fire. Granny had tried every trick she knew to help me. I gargled with cayenne, honey, and hot water. I sucked on cloves of garlic. I drank licorice root tea. You name it, and Granny gave it to me. But it wasn't until Doc Henry came by with some white powder that he poured into a small glass of whiskey (Granny allowed it because he said it was for medicinal purposes) that I started to feel better. As I passed his house, I noticed his car was gone. Knowing Doc Henry, he was probably out tending to some sick soul or delivering a baby.

Once I went past his house, there wasn't a whole lot to see besides farmland. Some of the farmers were already out lugging water buckets from the stream to their crops, trying desperately to save their bounty from the drought.

It was probably a good three miles to Miss Peggy's house,

but I didn't mind. I enjoyed the journey because it gave me time to think. I always felt safe going from Colored Town to Miss Peggy's. I had been making that walk since I was a little girl.

I walked by the Parsons Plantation where Jimmy Earl's best friend, Courtland, lived, and many of the Black Parsons who never left after slavery. And not too far from their house was Miss Lovenia Manu's place. Miss Lovenia was a root woman, and people went to her for anything as simple as the common cold to requests to get in touch with spirits that had already passed on to the other side. I looked up at her house as I walked by. I saw a single flickering light in the front window, but no sign of anyone being awake. I hurried on by. Miss Lovenia and her twin sons gave me the jitters.

Uncle Myron had started picking us up and driving us to Miss Peggy's because the walk was too hard on Granny now, but I didn't want to be in the car with him this morning. I was feeling too good to get drowned in his negative talk, and I knew without knowing that he would have just picked up the conversation where he had left it the night before.

Uncle Myron's wife, Aunt Josephine, died a few years back, and his bitterness toward the world seemed to get worse after her death. His only joy seemed to be centered around his children's successful lives. So I tried to be understanding, but sometimes I just needed to avoid him. And anyway, I was still feeling the excitement of my time with Cedric. When I got back to the house last night, I didn't tell anybody about meeting up with him, not even Lucille. I knew she wouldn't have told anybody, but I wanted that memory to be just mine—at least for a while.

I made it to Miss Peggy's house and stepped onto her porch but was startled when I saw Jimmy Earl sleeping in the porch swing. Back when we were children, he would sometimes sleep out on the porch with his cousin Skeeter and Courtland, but I hadn't seen him do that in years. Because he was so long and lanky, his legs spilled out over the edge. He had also grown a short beard. I wondered what Miss Peggy thought about that. I went on inside without waking him. He looked tired, so I just let him rest.

I went to the bathroom and collected the basket of dirty clothes and sheets that I had rounded up the day before. Jimmy Earl had come home with a ton of dirty laundry, I saw, because my wash load had doubled since the previous day.

Miss Peggy had a nearly brand-new Maytag washing machine, but Granny and I never used it more than once or twice. In my opinion, it was too rough on the clothes. I wasn't going to argue that it got things clean, but the clothes just didn't seem the same, so I used the washboard and tub that Granny had been using for years. It took a little more time to get the wash done, but some things ought not to be rushed. I was out on the back porch giving one of the towels a final soak when I heard someone clear his throat. I laughed and turned around.

"Good morning, Jimmy Earl Ketchums," I said. "Bout time you got up. You done turned city boy, getting up at seven in the morning?"

I tended to be shy around most boys, but not Jimmy Earl. He was like a brother or one of my cousins, so I didn't feel awkward around him—even though looking at him then, he didn't look like the same gangly boy who had gone off to college a few years

ago. He was still thin as a rail, but his features looked manlier. If the truth be known, he favored his daddy, Mr. Earl Ketchums. Of course, I never would have said that in front of Miss Peggy. She couldn't stand one thing about Jimmy Earl's daddy except that if there hadn't been an Earl Ketchums, there wouldn't be a Jimmy Earl.

"Well, if it ain't Stringbean the Washing Queen," he said, grinning at me like always. After I hit puberty, Jimmy Earl started calling me Stringbean. I got tall but I didn't get very big. "When are you and Birdie going to enter into the 1930s and use the washing machine? Washing by hand has to take three times the energy, not to mention the time. What's wrong, you scared of the Maytag?"

"You let me worry about the washing, Jimmy Earl, and you just worry about that scruffy mess on your face. I'm surprised Miss Peggy hasn't made you shave it off already," I said, flicking some bubbles from the wash at him. He laughed.

"Surprisingly, she didn't say a word about it," he said. Suddenly his face grew serious. "Opal, is Gran okay? She's lost a ton of weight since last Christmas, and she seemed like she was having difficulty breathing last night."

I wrung out the last of the towels and put them in the basket with the other wet sheets, towels, and pillowcases. I wiped my hands on my apron before answering him. "I don't know, Jimmy Earl," I said honestly. "She hasn't said anything to me, and if she told Granny, Granny hasn't shared, but then, you know those two. They are closemouthed when it comes to each other's secrets."

"Well, I'm going to take her in to see Doc Henry on Monday,"

he said. "A woman her age can't be too careful, and I doubt she's seen Doc Henry in years."

"Actually, Doc Henry stops by to check on her every so often, but it might be wise for you to take her to his office," I said. "Listen, you might want to go check on the livestock, since there ain't no telling when Mr. Tote will come in to work. Mr. Tote is probably feeling"—I cleared my throat and smiled—"a little poorly this morning, I imagine."

Jimmy Earl shook his head. "Poorly my foot. Hungover, you mean. Tote's getting too old to be carrying on like that. Birdie just needs to go on and make an honest man of him. Maybe he'll stop some of that cattin' around and drinking."

I put my hands on my hips. "Don't be wishing Mr. Tote off on my granny. She's doing just fine, thank you very much. And anyway, Mr. Tote don't believe in God. Or at least not how Granny does. That wouldn't work if the Lord himself came and joined them together."

"I'm just teasing," he said, laughing. "I know as good as you that Tote and Birdie wouldn't last ten minutes. Let me get on out there and check on things. Do you know if the other fellows are coming today to water the crops?"

Along with Mr. Tote, there was Mr. Jimbo, Mr. Laz, and Mr. Montgomery Lee, and when things really got hectic in the fall, Mr. Silas Griffin would come and help out. He was this poor white man who lived out near Jimmy Earl's daddy's house. The both of them sold moonshine, but when harvesttime came around, both would go and do some work on the local farms.

I shook my head. "No, I don't know if they're coming. I

handle the indoors and Mr. Tote is in charge of the outdoors. But you might go on out there and see if they're already working. Sometimes they just start doing things without coming up here to the house first. I'll have breakfast ready when you get back," I said.

"Thanks, Bean," he said, returning to his old nickname. He grabbed a hat from the hook by the door. He started to walk away and then stopped. "It's good seeing you. I've missed all of you. Thanks for taking care of Granny and Mama. I couldn't do what I'm doing if I didn't have you here to manage things for me."

"You're welcome," I said, feeling my cheeks get hot. I wasn't used to this grown-up Jimmy Earl who paid me compliments. "Don't forget about breakfast. I'll make poached eggs for you." I knew that was his favorite.

"You are all right, Opal Pruitt. For an ugly, old, skinny stringbean," he teased, sounding like the Jimmy Earl I had grown up with again.

I splashed him good with some of the soapy water as he hurried past me. I was happy to have my childhood friend home for the summer. I could tell Jimmy Earl was more mature, if one could imagine that, because he was already mature before he left. Oh, he was a prankster and a jokester, but he was always making sure the women in the house were happy, and that included me and Granny.

He was still the good-natured boy I used to play hide-and-seek with as a child, but I could tell he was different. We both were. This growing-up thing was not all fun and games. I remember as a little girl always wishing I was older. The day after my birthday, I started throwing in the "half." If someone

asked how old I was, I would respond, “I am twelve and a half” or “fifteen and a half.” As the childhood days became faint, sweet memories, I found myself longing for them. Afternoons at the pond fishing with Jimmy Earl and his mama, Miss Corinne. Playing house with my cousins, or explorers, where we pretended like we had discovered new lands and new people. But now, everything was changing. Jimmy Earl didn’t sound as much like home as he did before. But I guess that’s what happens when you leave. You never come back the same again.

“Hey there, Opal,” Granny said from the door. “You need help getting the wash out on the line?”

I turned and smiled. I hadn’t even heard Uncle Myron drive up. I guess he let her off and kept going, which was fine with me. I was still feeling a tad bit salty about the things he had said the previous night. I didn’t want to have an argument with him this early in the morning.

Granny was a big woman who carried herself like royalty, or at least how I imagined a queen might walk and move about. Even with arthritis, she still forced her body to retain its dignity and height, which I got from her. So where others might be stooped, Granny continued to walk proud and tall. I knew how much it took out of her to always keep her body straight and unbent. Not a day went by that I didn’t thank God for her and her strength.

“I’m fine, Granny. I just need to wash out these pillowcases and then I’ll be done with this load. If you want to get started on breakfast, that would be good. I promised Jimmy Earl poached eggs, though. You mind making them?” I asked.

“No, honey. I don’t mind at all,” she said and came over and hugged me.

“You’re gonna get yourself all wet,” I chided, but I melted into her embrace. Granny was a stern woman, but she never short-changed me on hugs and kisses. I always knew I was wanted by her, even if I couldn’t say the same about my own mother and father.

“Wouldn’t be the first time I got all wet,” she said and then backed away and gave me a serious look. “Opal, you listen to me, and you listen to me good. You are just fine the way you are, and there is no shame in the work we do. Don’t you never let nobody make you feel less than what you are because of what you do. You hear me?”

I nodded. “Yes ma’am.” I knew she was talking about what Uncle Myron had said.

She patted my cheek. “I better get in there and start working on poaching eggs. It’s been a good hot minute since I’ve cooked them that way. You’re much better with all that fancy cooking than I am.”

I watched as she walked back into the house. I finished washing the pillowcases and then picked up the heavy basket and carried it out to the clothesline. Jimmy Earl’s dog, who had become my shadow after Jimmy Earl went off to college, followed behind me.

“Levi, did you get fed this morning?” I asked as he rubbed up next to my leg. I put the basket of wet clothes onto the little bench that I’d gotten Mr. Tote to make for Granny in case she got tired while we were out putting up the laundry. “Poor thing. Your boy is back home and he ain’t paying you no never mind, is he?”

Levi looked up at me with that lopsided grin that always

seemed to be on his face. If he was hurt by the slight from Jimmy Earl, he didn't show it.

"Well, don't you worry. I'll see that you get fed soon as I finish hanging up these wet things," I said. Almost like he understood, Levi lay down by the bench and watched me hang up my wash. But before I could get to the towels, I heard the loud roaring of a car engine. I groaned. I knew that sound. Levi raised his head at the sound of the motor, and when Jimmy Earl's cousin Skeeter got out, he started a low growl.

"Shh," I said in a soft voice. "It's okay." I didn't want Skeeter to notice me. Levi got up and stood next to my leg. He was usually playful and loving toward everybody, but now he was standing rigid and at attention. They say dogs recognize evil, and Skeeter was just that.

Skeeter was always being hauled away by the law for fighting or just plain intimidating folks. He was big and muscular and loved to throw his weight around. Skeeter was heavy into making and selling moonshine with Jimmy Earl's daddy, Mr. Earl Ketchums, but more than that, Skeeter was in the Klan and made no secrets about it.

Though the Klan had been on the decline, Skeeter and his daddy, Mr. Rafe, along with a handful of other no-account white men, were determined to keep it alive. As far as I knew, Jimmy Earl's daddy wasn't part of it, but he let them meet out in the woods where he lived from time to time, or at least that's what I heard.

The Klan would sometimes ride around late at night and try to spook folks. So far, other than getting into a few fights here

and there with some of the local Colored boys and men, they hadn't done too much more than put on their white robes and hoods and march up and down Main Street in Parsons and yell at any Colored person who might be walking by, until the sheriff would ride through and tell them to go on home. The last time they marched was last year, a few days before Founder's Day.

Some of the Colored boys had wanted to play baseball with the whites on Founder's Day, and the Klan had marched through downtown Parsons over into Colored Town to let us all know that wasn't going to happen. Not on their watch. And Skeeter had led the procession. Needless to say, there was no baseball between the Coloreds and whites.

Everybody, including Jimmy Earl, knew that Skeeter, Skeeter's daddy, and Skeeter's brothers were mean, ornery men, but Jimmy Earl loved Skeeter like a brother, and in his eyes, Skeeter could do no wrong.

"Skeeter's harmless," Jimmy Earl said one day when I mentioned how much Skeeter scared me. "He and them boys are just a bunch of backwards hillbillies trying to flex their muscles. They aren't going to hurt anybody. Not really."

I had just looked at Jimmy Earl. He was blind to anything Skeeter did. When they were younger, Skeeter took up for him when nobody else would. Folks used to tease Jimmy Earl about not having a real daddy, and Skeeter would blacken an eye and bloody the nose of anyone who would dare say such a thing about Jimmy Earl. Jimmy Earl never forgot that, and one thing about Jimmy Earl, he valued family above everything else, even if they were in the wrong.

And I think being close to Skeeter was his way of being connected to his daddy's side of the family. He needed so badly to love and be loved by the Ketchums. Mr. Earl hadn't done right by Jimmy Earl or Miss Corinne. That's why Miss Peggy and Mr. Cecil went and got them shortly after Jimmy Earl was born. Granny said when they got to Mr. Earl's house, Miss Corinne didn't even have shoes to wear, and poor Jimmy Earl was looking yellowish in the face. He didn't have a stitch of clothes on beyond his diaper, even though it was freezing cold outside.

Mr. Rafe and Skeeter tried to make up for how bad Mr. Earl had been as a daddy. Mr. Rafe would come by and pick up Jimmy Earl and take him hunting and fishing with his boys. When Christmas or birthdays would roll around, Mr. Rafe brought gifts, claiming they were from Mr. Earl, but everybody knew Mr. Earl drank and gambled away every nickel he ever made.

I watched as Skeeter walked out toward the fields where Jimmy Earl was. I made sure I stayed out of sight behind the large crape myrtle tree. I didn't want to relive the last time Skeeter and I had been in the same space together.

One day a few months ago, Uncle Myron picked up Granny from Miss Peggy's, but I wanted to get some wild strawberries to make us a strawberry shortcake that night. I was headed out near the Colored cemetery where they grew the best, when Skeeter drove up in his old jalopy. He used to pick on me around Jimmy Earl, but Jimmy Earl always teased him into stopping. But this day, there was nobody in sight to protect me.

Skeeter blocked the road, so I just stopped. Scared to death. I

looked left and right, and there was nothing but wide-open fields and not a single person in shouting distance. I was all alone.

“Well, if it ain’t Jimmy Earl’s Negress,” he said, getting out of his car and walking toward me.

“Leave me be, Skeeter,” I said, trying not to act afraid. They say an angry dog will attack you if you act scared. Looking at Skeeter and his hateful eyes, in that moment I would have rather faced down a dog with rabies.

“That’s Mr. Ketchums to you,” he said, walking up on me so close, I felt like I was caged in like Granny’s chickens in their coop. I could smell the liquor on his breath and the faint odor of chewing tobacco. I looked all around to see if I could find something to hit him with to give me time to run, but there was nothing. I was trapped.

Skeeter reached out and grabbed my arm. I flinched and then knocked his hand away. He laughed and grabbed my arm again, tighter this time, almost willing me to strike at him once more. My instincts told me not to fight. Not then. I couldn’t believe he was doing this to me in the middle of the road in broad daylight.

“Please leave me alone, Skeeter . . . I mean, Mr. Ketchums. Please,” I begged.

“I like the sound of that,” he said. “From now on, you make sure you call me Mr. Ketchums.”

I nodded, feeling tears welling up in my eyes.

“Maybe you and me ought to take a little walk out into the woods,” he said, smiling, most of his teeth dark from all the tobacco he chewed. He spat out a big wad of it and then put his arm around my waist. I struggled but he held on tighter. Just when I thought the worst was about to happen, I heard another

car coming up the hill behind us. Skeeter quickly let me go, and I turned around to see it was Doc Henry. He was coming from Miss Peggy's house. He stopped his car just behind us and then got out and stood by his car door.

"You having car trouble, Skeeter?" he asked. I could tell by the look on his face that he knew what was happening in the middle of the road that day.

"No sir. Not at all," Skeeter said. "Just making small talk with Opal here."

"Well, I'm going to give Opal a ride home, so we're going to be needing you to move your car," he said and motioned for me to come get in the car with him. I ran and got in the passenger side. I sat there, breathing hard the whole way, tears streaking my face. Doc Henry just acted like nothing was wrong and talked about the weather. Neither one of us ever talked about what had been going on between me and Skeeter, not to each other, and I definitely never told any of my kin. But seeing Skeeter again brought all of those memories flooding back to me. Thoughts of what happened, and what could have happened if Doc Henry hadn't come along.

I finished hanging up the last towel and then took my basket and hurried back to the house. Levi ran behind me. I burst into the kitchen like hellhounds were chasing me.

"Girl, what you running for?" Granny asked, looking surprised and worried all at the same time. She was taking the biscuits out of the oven and putting Jimmy Earl's poached egg on a plate.

"Nothing, Granny. I was just . . . I was just playing with Levi," I said, and almost like he was agreeing, he barked from outside the screen door.

“Well, don’t you be running like that in this heat. It’s already hot and it’s not even nine o’clock yet,” she said.

“Yes ma’am,” I said. Then I heard Skeeter’s car roar off. A few minutes later, Jimmy Earl came in, and he looked worried.

“Birdie, I need to talk to you about something,” he said.

Granny smiled. “You came in just in time, Jimmy Earl. ’Course, you always did growing up. You seemed to have an inside clock to let you know when I was done cooking. Come sit down and—”

“Birdie, we need to talk now,” he said, his face more serious than I recalled it being in a long while. Normally, that look was reserved for his concern over his mama or something stressful going on with the farm or his schooling.

“What is it?” she asked, her eyes intense and serious.

“I need to talk to you outside,” he said. He didn’t even look at me but stared straight at Granny.

Granny wiped her hands on her apron. “Okay,” she said. She turned to me. “Everything is done. Just go get Miss Peggy and Miss Corinne and let them get started eating. We won’t be long.”

“Yessum,” I said and watched them both go out the screen door. I walked over to it as they walked out toward the barn. Jimmy Earl put his arm around Granny’s shoulder and talked quietly in her ear. I tried to see the expression on Granny’s face, but Jimmy Earl’s arm had her face shielded from my sight.

Levi, who was still standing by the door, looked up at me as if to say, “What’s going on with them?”

“I don’t know what’s going on, Levi,” I said. “But whatever it is, it can’t be good.”



Sunday morning had always been one of my favorite days of the week. We got to rest from work and we got to fellowship at church with all of our friends and relatives in Colored Town. The white folks had two churches: “Big Bethel” Methodist Episcopal Church South and St. Stephens Baptist Church. But there was only one Colored church, and that was “Little Bethel” AME. Some folks were dressed up in store-bought clothes, and others wore hand-me-downs or hand-stitched clothing, but no matter how anybody dressed or looked, we all came for the same purpose, and that was to praise God and show love to one another.

Granny’s people had worshiped at Little Bethel since it first opened its doors in 1873, when Granny was just a toddler. According to church history, the Parsons family had donated the land, the lumber, the pews, and the stained-glass windows for the church. For a time, they even paid the preacher’s salary.

Granny said it was a great day when the church was able to

take over all of its finances. “We finally felt like we could serve God exactly the way we wanted to without worrying about them white folks breathing down our necks,” she said.

Granny and I walked to church this morning. Uncle Myron was running late, and Granny did not believe in walking into the church after the service had begun, so she and I had set off on foot. We weren’t alone. Most folks in Colored Town didn’t have cars. There was a chorus of “Good mornings” and “Bless the Lords” as we all walked to church together.

Granny was quiet, but then, that wasn’t unusual. For her, Sundays were always a time for reflection and communion with God, but this morning I wondered if some of her quietness was due to her conversation with Jimmy Earl the day before. After he took her off to the barn to talk, the two of them stayed in and out of conversation the rest of the day; whenever I tried to ask either of them what was going on, they both said, “Not now,” or they would tell me “later.”

I had planned on talking to her about her and Jimmy Earl’s secret on the way to church, but when we got to the peach orchard, Cedric was there. I tried not to let my face split open with a smile that he was there waiting. I hoped for me.

“Good morning, Brother Perkins,” Granny said, greeting Cedric with a head nod.

Cedric was dressed in a fine-looking tan suit with a matching straw bowler. Cedric tilted his hat at Granny, not even looking at me. That startled me a bit, but I didn’t say anything.

“Good morning to you, too, Sister Pruitt,” he said. “On your way to church, ma’am?”

Granny smiled a tight smile. “Well, of course, Brother Perkins. Where else would two God-fearing women be heading this time of day on a Sunday? The better question is, where are you headed?”

“Oh, to church, ma’am. Of course,” he said. “And if you wouldn’t mind, I would love it if I could walk with you and your granddaughter.”

“You are welcome to walk with us,” Granny said, and she took my arm as we continued walking down the road. Cedric got on the other side of Granny and matched his pace to ours.

Well, I wondered. Is this courting? I wasn’t sure because Cedric never said anything to me directly. By the time we got to church, he and Granny had talked about the weather, the peach orchard, some verse in Deuteronomy, and whether Cedric felt he might someday become a preacher.

“Ma’am, I can’t rightly say,” he replied. “But right now, my heart is set on playing baseball. I want to be a pitcher for one of the Negro League teams like Satchel Paige or ‘Bullet Joe’ Rogan.”

“I see. Well, may God bless you,” Granny said. Although by the look on her face, her blessing seemed more like a curse. Granny didn’t hold much stock in baseball players. “They are a bunch of fast men, and I don’t just mean on the baseball field,” she had once said. She turned to me. “Let’s get inside before service starts.”

“Thank you for letting me walk with you and Opal,” Cedric said.

I looked at him and smiled and he smiled back, but Granny almost pushed me up the stairs of the church. As soon as we got

inside, Granny went straight to Reverend Perkins and to Brother Clark, one of the deacons. I wondered if what they were discussing had to do with Jimmy Earl's secret. I couldn't imagine anything being so important that Granny would have to take it to the church leadership. I tried not to worry, but when Granny came to her seat beside me, she took my hand and held it. I looked at her, trying to will her to tell me what was wrong. She just shook her head, and we both turned our attention to the services that were just beginning.

Church dragged by. Normally, I could throw myself into the worship service and enjoy the singing and the preaching, but all I could think about was Granny's secret and Cedric sitting over in the Amen Corner with the other men. Every so often he glanced at me and smiled, and my heart turned over. The hands on the clock showed it was already eleven thirty in the morning. I couldn't believe it. We were just now repeating the Decalogue, which is a fancy name for the Ten Commandments. The preacher read and then the congregation answered him in unison: "Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law."

And it went on and on.

My cousin Lucille, who was sitting on the other side of me, leaned over and whispered in my ear, "Your boyfriend is shore gazing at you all lovey-dovey today."

I punched her in her ribs. I almost regretted telling her about Cedric and me at the peach orchard. I had planned on keeping it a secret, but Lucille was my favorite cousin and my best friend. So I broke down and told her last night, pulling her to my bedroom from the front porch, where everyone was sitting.

“He said what?” she had asked, sitting on my bed, grinning from ear to ear.

“He said, ‘I guess I better start cleaning up my ways so your granny will let me come over and sit with you on your front porch sometime,’” I said down low, careful not to speak too loud just in case Granny happened to walk past my door.

“Oh, Opal,” she said, almost swooning with excitement. “That’s like something out of a movie.” For Lucille, saying something was like a movie was the highest compliment. Nearly every Saturday afternoon I went with Lucille and her mama, Aunt Shimmy, to the matinee. We would sit up in the balcony that was the Coloreds’ section, watching some new movie that Lucille was excited to see. Half the time I fell asleep during the movie, so tired from a week of hard work, but Lucille always poked me during the good parts.

“I don’t know if it’s quite a movie, but it’s special, isn’t it?” I asked last night. I needed validation that the words I had heard were really as amazing as I believed them to be.

“Girl, Hazel Moody is going to come for you,” she said with a laugh.

“She need not worry about me none,” I said, trying to be as modest as I could. “I can’t compete with somebody like Hazel.”

“It don’t sound like you are going to have to compete. It sounds like Cedric Perkins has already made his choice,” she said.

She and I had continued to talk about me and Cedric until Uncle Lem and Aunt Shimmy were ready to go home. But now, here in church, she was still acting silly. Times like this was when I realized how much older I was than my cousin. I looked over

at her and shook my head. She stifled a laugh by putting her hand over her mouth. I tried to keep my eyes focused on Cedric's daddy, who was kneeling in the pulpit, preparing himself to get up and preach. But I couldn't help but sneak a peek at Cedric again, and sure enough, he was still looking at me. I turned my attention back to the choir, who were just standing up to begin song service—my favorite part of church. I prayed I could keep my mind focused and keep my eyes looking forward instead of across the church at Cedric.

This may be the last time

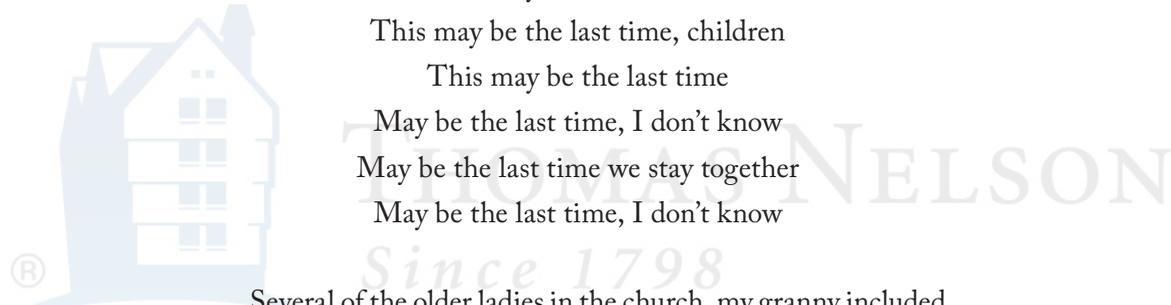
This may be the last time, children

This may be the last time

May be the last time, I don't know

May be the last time we stay together

May be the last time, I don't know



Several of the older ladies in the church, my granny included, stood up and swayed and clapped along as they sang. They were a beautiful sight, donned in their white dresses, with white handkerchiefs pinned to their heads. As much as I wanted church to end that day, I couldn't help but notice how they looked like angels.

Brother Clay was playing the piano, and the choir—seeing that the spirit was high that morning—continued to sing, adding their clapping to the now growing clapping of the congregation. I stood and pulled up Lucille with me. We knew better than to stay seated when the Holy Ghost was riding, as Granny would

say. Neither one of us had ever felt it for ourselves, but according to Granny, the Holy Ghost never caught somebody who was sitting down daydreaming. So I opened my mouth and started singing and clapping with the rest of the people.

I looked over and saw my Aunt Shimmy waving her hand and singing. My Uncle Little Bud was sitting, but he was clapping and patting his foot. His new wife, Cheryl Anne, sat beside him, her hand lightly touching his shoulder. She was smiling, yet quiet as always. All around the church was my family. My twin cousins, Emma and Eveline, had come home to visit, and they had two nice-looking fellows sitting next to them. Then, of course, there was Brother and Sister Walker, who had been like second grandparents to me. They didn't have any children of their own, so Sister Walker would tease Granny and tell her she had to share me with them. Sitting next to the Walkers was my Sunday school teacher, Sister Mattie Lee Freeman, who had taught me since I was nine or ten. And then all throughout the sanctuary was the rest of our family and friends I'd grown up around since I was in diapers.

As I continued to clap and sing, I caught a glimpse of Cedric still looking at me. He and my cousin M.J. were sitting together. Cedric leaned over and whispered something to M.J., and M.J. grinned but shook his head. I wondered what in the world they were talking about. I got so deep into my thoughts, I stopped singing and clapping. I was just standing there like some silly girl.

"Opal. Opal." A loud whisper pulled me out of my daydreaming. I glanced over and my Aunt Shimmy had reached over Lucille to talk to me. "You better focus yourself."

Lucille giggled, but Aunt Shimmy pointed her finger at Lucille, and she immediately stopped. We both started singing and clapping again.

This may be the last time
 This may be the last time, children
 This may be the last time
 May be the last time, I don't know
 May be the last time we ever shout together
 May be the last time, I don't know
 This may be the last time
 This may be the last time, children
 This may be the last time
 May be the last time, I don't know

The choir sang several more songs, and after what seemed like an eternity, we finally got to the preaching part of the service. Reverend Perkins took his time standing up. Once everybody had settled down, he finally spoke.

“Good morning, saints.”

“Good morning, Reverend Perkins,” we all said in unison. This was what we did every Sunday: greet one another. Usually after we spoke to Reverend Perkins, we would then walk around and say hello to one another and any visitors who were there that day, but Reverend Perkins held up his hand to stop us.

“Saints, I come to you this morning with a heavy heart,” he said, and then he went silent, like he was trying to figure out exactly what to say next.



THOMAS NELSON
 since 1798

Reverend Perkins was an older man, nearly my granny's age, but his wife, Sister Perkins, was young, in her thirties. They say Reverend Perkins spoiled her and Cedric so much because he was grateful to even have a family at such an old age. Preachers in the AME church spent a lot of years moving from one congregation to another. He didn't want to get a family until he could come back home to Parsons. The bishop over our area assured Reverend Perkins he would let him stay at Little Bethel until he was ready to retire.

I looked over at Sister Perkins. She didn't have her usual smile. She looked solemn—scared even. I was afraid of what Reverend Perkins was going to say. I knew it had something to do with Granny. She was sitting with her head bowed and her hands folded. I wondered if this moment was why I was feeling funny the other day—before Jimmy Earl even had his talk with Granny. I hoped that whatever it was, it wasn't going to be nearly as bad as what my feeling was telling me.

During the quiet, various ones said, "Bless him, Lord," and "Have mercy, Father." The entire congregation could sense that all was not well.

Finally, Reverend Perkins began to speak. "This morning, the Lord led me to a bit of news that I need to share with you all. The devil is going to be sending his legion of demons into our community this evening. Brothers and sisters, the Klan will be riding the countryside tonight, and from the report I received, they have said they won't stop riding until they have somebody strung up in a tree. We don't know what has set them off, but today, Church, we must pray and prepare."

I looked around at the faces of the people who had just been glowing from the Spirit of God. Now their faces ranged from fear to anger, and when I looked at Cedric, his face looked like a storm cloud about to burst. He and one of the boys sitting next to him began to mutter to each other. I tried to catch his eye, but this time he didn't look my way.

"Saints, I know these are scary times. And in a while, we will dismiss service and talk about what we can do to make sure we all survive this night. But right now, I want to talk to you about faith and trust. I want to talk to you about even if this is the last time we all congregate together here on earth, we don't have to fear."

"Yes, Lord. Preach!" someone called out.

"No, we don't have to fear because we know that as the devil rides the highways and byways tonight, we've got a God that sits high and looks low."

I found myself clapping with everyone else. I reached over and grabbed Lucille's hand. She was shedding tears and shaking.

"It's gonna be all right. Don't be scared," I said, even though I was scared too. In that moment, I truly felt like the older cousin. We reached our arms around each other, holding each other tight like we used to when we were little girls. As I looked around, I saw other folks holding each other too. I also saw M.J. and Cedric looking like they could explode into little pieces from the anger that was nearly consuming them. I finally caught M.J.'s eye and shook my head. He just turned away. Cedric still wouldn't look at me.

"I'm going to read you all something from the Scriptures, but first we're going to have a little talk with the Master," Reverend

Perkins said. “After that, the menfolks and I are going to hold a meeting and talk about what we all need to do tonight to stay safe. This is not the first time the Klan has rode through our part of town, and sadly, it probably won’t be the last. But even still, and no matter what, God will be with us tonight. That much I can attest to, saints.”

I heard a loud noise and looked over at Cedric, who had pushed a chair out of his way so he could get out of the pew. Several folks gasped. His mama called out to him, but he came and stood in front of the congregation.

“If our plan ain’t involving us putting some bullets through those crackers’ heads, then we’re just wasting breath,” Cedric yelled. “All this singing and praying alone ain’t gonna change what they plan for us tonight.” Several of the boys his age, including M.J., yelled out in agreement.

“Cedric Alowishus Perkins, you are out of line,” Reverend Perkins bellowed, the veins in his face looking like they might burst. “Singing and praying is what got us through slavery.”

“But this ain’t slavery times, Daddy,” Cedric said. “And the last time they rode through Colored Town, y’all didn’t do nothing to stop them, and here they come again. When we gonna be men? When we gonna fight for our families . . . for our women?” And this time he did look over at me. I turned away. My cheeks were on fire. I didn’t like hearing Cedric talk like that. I had never seen him so angry before.

One of the older deacons tried to come up and lead Cedric away, but he snatched his arm from the man.

“I ain’t gone hush, Daddy,” he yelled. “We all know who them

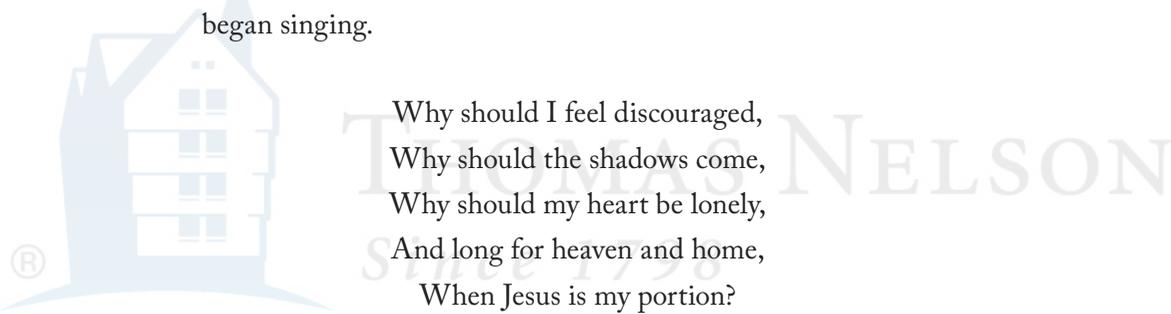
white ghosts is. They the same white trash that's always causing trouble for Colored folks. The Ketchums, the Suttons, the—”

Uncle Lem rushed up to help grab Cedric and lead him out. “Boy, respect the Lord and your daddy,” Uncle Lem said.

“Let him speak. Let him speak,” somebody yelled out, but by this time, several of the men were dragging Cedric out of the sanctuary.

He kept right on shouting, “Y'all know who they are. Y'all know. Y'all know.”

The room was in chaos. People were yelling and crying and fussing. And then, what seemed like out of nowhere, Granny began singing.



Why should I feel discouraged,
 Why should the shadows come,
 Why should my heart be lonely,
 And long for heaven and home,
 When Jesus is my portion?
 My constant friend is he,
 His eye is on the sparrow,
 And I know he watches me.

At first she was singing by herself, but by the time she got to the chorus, most everybody was singing with her, including me and Lucille.

I sing because I'm happy,
 I sing because I'm free,

For his eye is on the sparrow,
And I know he watches me.

Granny pulled me into her arms and hugged me tight.

“That was just what we needed,” she said, tears falling down her face. I felt my own tears falling as well.

Reverend Perkins’s face had tears too. I watched as Sister Perkins left her seat to go outside to see about Cedric, I guessed.

After a minute or two, Reverend Perkins cleared his throat. “Brothers and sisters, I apologize for my son’s behavior. I understand where his anger and frustration is coming from, but we cannot fight evil with evil. The Lord teaches us that he will move in his time, not ours. So even if the Klan becomes violent tonight, we must not become like them. I would rather see my Maker tonight with a pure heart and no blood on my hands, than to try and stand before him and explain how I became like the very ones we are speaking against.”

Some of the older folks said, “Amen,” but I could tell the young folks, in particular the young men, weren’t exactly agreeing with him. Reverend Perkins didn’t let that stop him. He kept right on talking.

“Saints, I ask you all to come forward to the altar and bow down with me and pray for ourselves and the souls of those who wish harm on us. Let’s pray that the good Lord will fix the hearts of these evil men so that the Death Angel will not stop at anyone’s doorpost this night.”

Granny took me and Lucille by the hand and guided us up to the altar with her. Everyone knelt together, and out of the corner

of my eye, I saw Cedric walking slowly toward the altar too. His mama was beside him. They went over to where Reverend Perkins was kneeling and knelt beside him. Reverend Perkins put his arms around both of them.

Everybody prayed in their own way. Some folks called on God in a real loud voice. Others quietly moved their lips, but you could tell their prayers were just as earnest. After a moment, I closed my eyes tight and asked God to just take care of us all. To not let anybody get hurt. To do what Reverend Perkins asked, which was to change the hearts of the men who wanted to do harm to us. As painful as it was, I prayed a special prayer for Skeeter Ketchums. I prayed that somehow his heart would be softened. It felt like a wasted prayer, but I prayed it anyway. I also prayed for Jimmy Earl, because I then knew it was he who gave the warning to Granny. Evidently Skeeter was boasting about it yesterday, and Jimmy Earl chose us over his family. I prayed he would not pay for his actions.

I also prayed for the boys and men who wanted to fight back. I understood their rage. As a woman, I didn't feel like there was much I could do, but I prayed that the men and boys would keep their heads and not retaliate, because that would only make things worse.

Soon after the group prayer, the service ended and the women and children made their way outside, while the men and boys stayed inside the church to talk about what they were going to do tonight.

I went over and sat near Granny, who was sitting underneath her favorite tree. I didn't go stand over with the young folks my

age. I needed to feel Granny's strength. She stroked my hair as I leaned against her.

"You a good girl, Opal," she said and continued stroking my hair. "God is going to test us today, but I feel that we all are going to make it through this night, if we keep our heads. But some of these wet-behind-the-ear boys have me worried."

I knew she was talking about Cedric.

"Granny, Cedric is just—"

She put her finger to my lips to stop me. "Listen, I know that boy Cedric is sweet on you, and you're almost grown, so I can't stand in your way when it comes to who you choose. But choose wisely. Choose prayerfully. Don't let your feelings overrule your common sense."

I didn't reply. There was nothing I could say. I had feelings for Cedric and I wasn't sure what to do with those feelings. So I just leaned back against Granny as we waited.

Finally, the men finished with their meeting. All of the uncles came over to where we were sitting, and Uncle Myron said he wanted me and Granny to come over and stay at his house tonight.

"I ain't leaving my home, Myron," Granny said. "I ain't letting them ghosts run me off my property. Your daddy worked too hard to buy that piece of land and build that house. Ain't no sheet-wearing cowards gone make me leave tonight."

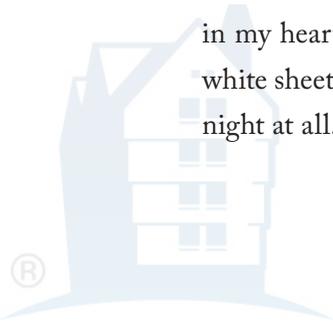
"Mama—"

She held up her hand. "Myron, I done spoke. Now, I know every one of them redneck boys, and they know me. They ain't gone do me no harm if'n I'm in my house, minding my own business."

“Mama, then we’ll stay with y’all,” Uncle Myron said, mopping his face with a handkerchief. “I ain’t leaving you alone.”

Granny shook her head. “You know they’ll take a head count of the menfolks at every house. If’n you ain’t where you s’pose to be, them drunk scoundrels will think you out there somewhere plotting and planning against them. No, everybody need to go to they own place and pray till this night is over.”

I could tell Uncle Myron was about to say something else, but I sat up. “I’ll be there with Granny, Uncle Myron. We’ll be all right. Won’t no harm come against us,” I said, trying to sound brave. Granny looked at me and smiled. I tried to smile back, but in my heart, I was frightened. I knew the danger behind those white sheets and I also knew tonight was not going to be an easy night at all.



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

TAP OR CLICK TO PURCHASE FROM YOUR
FAVORITE BOOKSELLER AND CONTINUE READING

amazon

The Amazon logo consists of the word "amazon" in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font. Below the text is a curved orange arrow that starts under the letter 'a' and points to the right, ending under the letter 'n'.

BARNES & NOBLE

B Bookshop

About the Author



Ankh Productions LLC - Photography by: Chandra Lynch

Angela Jackson-Brown is an award-winning writer, poet, and playwright who teaches creative writing and English at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. She is a graduate of the Spalding low-residency MFA program in creative writing. She is the author of the novel *Drinking from a Bitter Cup* and the poetry collection *House Repairs*.



angelajacksonbrown.com

Instagram: [@angelajacksonbrownauthor](https://www.instagram.com/angelajacksonbrownauthor)

Twitter: [@adjackson68](https://twitter.com/adjackson68)