

[Will and Julia Stembridge]

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Stembridge, Will & Julia

807 Florence Ave

Lakeland, Florida

Will and Julia Stembridge

At the end of this sandy street lives Will and Julia Stembridge, 807 North Florence Avenue, in a weather-boarded house that is unpainted - The steps entering the house are out of line and are badly in need of repairing. The front porch was covered with running vines, and there were pots of flowers sitting around the edges, with several large ferns in standing vessels. A swing was on the north end, and a green rocking chair on the south end. The flooring on the porch was old and very loose.

On knocking, Will answered from the kitchen where he was eating. He said, "come in brother, come back and have something to eat." Through an apology this courtesy was declined; and the purpose of the visit was explained. Will laughed and said, "if I can see it

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in print I will tell all about myself if it will be of any use. Well he said," as long as it is you I will try to satisfy you."

"You see I am just camping in this ranche (meaning his house). Good houses are scarce here in Lakeland, and I don't know when I will be able to own one through these hard times."

You have to pass through the front room which is expensivey expensively furnished. A large fire place sits in the center of the housed painted white, which separates the front room from the kitchen. The same flue is used for the large wood stove. There was a bed room adjoin-the front room with a lovely suit of furniture in it. The windows all had shades and curtains to them, they were neatly arranged and clean. The kitchen was very large. It served two purposes, to cook, and [his?] dining room. The furniture in the kitchen was not modern [as?] that in the front room and bedroom. Entering from the kitchen was another bed [room?] which contained one double bed, and [a?] single bed. The rest of the furniture was modern, with [a?] new late model oil burner sitting in the middle of the floor. His stepdaughter Annie [was?] asleep in bed in this room.

Will [was?] dressed in the uniform of the Firestone Company for whom he works. It was greasy from the many cars he serviced during the day. His wife came in from out of the yard and spoke very plesently. She took a seat and listened while will continued to talk. Noticing the [well?] laundred shirts on the sofa when I came in, Julia was asked who did the nice work, she replied that she did. Stating that she takes in laundry in order to assist her husband, "I have been doing that for years."

"Will continued, "well I know that Christmas was good to you, I had [a?] nice time working, and riding around seeing my friends. I was proud that I was living."

"Well I know it means business when ever you call, what's big about me that you want to know where I come from and about my people. I ain't nothing but a poor working man,

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been with on company ten years. "Will talks with a pleasant smile [at?] all time. At this point Julia said, "tell him what you know it may be worth something to us."

He stated that he was five feet and eleven inches in height, weighted two hundred and nine pounds. Light brown in complexion, and forty years old. "I was born in a log cabin two miles out from Fort Valley, Georgia. The log cabin only had four rooms, there were five of us in the family. My parents were John and [Leathy?] 3 Stembridge. My mother has been married four times since the death of my father. She is now a Candy."

" I lived in Georgia until I was twenty years old. My parents were sharecroppers. They had charge of [a?] thirty acre farm with fourteen mules on it. While on this farm I worked hard with my brother James, the only one who stayed on the old place. My other brother ran around from place to place. My two sisters, Mary and Mattie died. My father later moved to Fort Valley and opened a merchandise store, this store he fran for three years. Later he died, and my mother married again. My step daddy made me git' it on this farm. I did everything a man was big enough to do. Hoe, plowing ditches, plant cotton, pick it, built fences, and looked after the animals. My step daddy did not believe in any thing but work."

" I never knew what money was during them times. I left there and came to Lakeland, Florida in [1918]. You see I have only lived two places in my life up there and down here. When I first came to Lakeland, I found a job with the [Standard oil?] Company, on [Lake?] Weir Drive, I stayed with them until 1919. I was getting three dollars and fifty cents [a day?] unloading large tanks tank cars filled with gasoline and oil." [??]

"I left thiscompany and went to work for Mr. [B.M.] Coniber, who was at that time located on Main Street, near Tennessee avenue. I stayed with him until [1935?], there I changed tires. While working for Mr. Coniber I married to my wife sitting over there. She was Julia Hall. She has three children- James, who lives in Washington, D.C. and works at the Pennsylvania Railroad Station; Marian, works at Futch Funeral Home, [?], S. Florida avenue, and Annie, works at the Paramount [?] Cleaners -8 [?] S. Florida 4 Avenue.

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“ I left Mr. Coniber and worked for Hendrick and Nicholson Tire Company. I held this job down until 1928.”

“ I left this job and started working for the Firestone Company in 1925. My boss man is Mr. Joe Daniels. He gives me thirteen dollars a week since they cut our salary. I go to work at seven oclock in the morning and quit at eight oclock at night I have seen many men come and go since I have been on this job. One good thing I don't owe anybody, all of my furniture is paid for.

“ What I have learned has been from having good [compections?]. You see my people only allowed me to go as far as the second grade in school. I have picked up more since that time. I hardly ever forget anything. I check all of the tires around the place and keep tabs on everything that comes my way. They trust me with my work.

Will was asked if he owned his home. He said, “that he rented the house from Mr.G.O.Conack, paying [one?] dollar and one half per week. He further stated that people will take your money, but they [?] not fix up the [property?]. He hopes to buy a house some day. He said he ownes his car. It was a [19?] Ford, and it was sitting in the back yard and looked to be in farily good condition. There was a [del picated?] shed built to house it not far from the back door. Banked around the back door were many potted flowers. In the yard were lots of lumber. There was no fence around their yard. It [eaten ed?] out to the [alley?].

[When?] approached about voting. Will stated that he has never voted in his life. “ But I do think it [is?] half way right to vote. One can get what he ask for if he votes.

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I [din'nt?] didn't have to [chance?] when I was on the farm to [learn anything?] about this thing called politics. I would vote for President if I had the chance. A few weeks ago I paid [one dollar?] to the Red Cross. You see I have my cross [in?] the front window. A fellow

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never knows when he [will? holy?]. [When?] I am on the job I hear my white [folks?] talking about who is a good man and who is not. I pick up a lot by listening.

“ When I was in Georgia I was a member of the missionary Baptist Church, since I have been in Florida I ain't nothing. It is a shame to say it, but I don't even go to church. I live [a pretty good?] life, never been in any trouble in my life. Thats a pretty good record don't you think. I think it is about time [that I?] make my peace with the Lord. He don't like ugly.”

“ I am pretty healthy now but a fellow never knows when he will get sick. I never [had a?] doctor to me in my live. My old lady has had one. I think she [washing?] too much. Julia said that the washing don't worry her much anymore. When she first started it cause [pulis?] in her wrist and arms. Some time I get a scratch or bruise from changing tires [ar un the?] place. When [I ? cars?] I always wear boots. I know lots of boys who suffer from rheumatism from not [taking care of?] themselves. Some time I work around the battery department and the acid from them cause me to cough. [?] [from?] that nothing hurts me.

In this home whose furnishings [was?] modern, there was evidence of [cleanliness?] all around. Julia takes lots of pride in keeping a good home. Although the [? hid?] the beauty of the furniture. The [beds?] were made [up?] except the one Annie [was?] [sleeping?] in. The [spreads?] were of [loud?] colors and clean. Julia she [was?] neatly dressed in a gingham dress. Will is above the average in his line of 6 work, and delights to talk about what he can do around cars. he has lived in this community for a number of years and is well liked by both races.

“ Will said, “ I am able to get what I want, with the assistance of my wife's children who gives [a?] little [of?] their earning towards food. [We send?] around five dollars a week for food. You see I have a good cook in my old lady. She [knows?] how [to?] make them biscuits and corn bread like a [fellow?] likes them. “That brought a smile to Julia's face. She stated that she like to cook. And [??] of the good things she prepares for the [family?]. Saying that they all come home hungry, and they always find good hot food on the stove.”

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“ Will said, “ that his greatest trouble was [eating?] too much [sweets?], [?? my coney?]. Home time I like my tardy too. But I never drink on the job.

“ Well it is time for me to get back on the job, when I get a [place?] of my own where I can have things like I use to [on?] the farm, I want you to come to see us. In riding around I see lots of places I would like to own if I [had?] the money. Thats the biggest thing I [do?] when [on?] the job. I [find a?] friend [amd to ride to [some small?] town and take a [nip?] (he meant a drink) and I get lots of pleasure out of that.

“ Well I wish I could tell you [more?] about myself and the family this time. [One?] thing [?] of my [people?] here are grown and able to [look out?] for themselves. We get along nicley together. [And?] thats the way people should live. He [laughed?] and said, “Well after all I believe I will amount to something.