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[My Ups and Downs]

MY UP's AND DOWN's

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[Kert Shorrow?] (Negro)

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It was just a small Negro shanty, just off the highway. I went up to the front door. I noticed it was open, but I found the screen door shut and latched.

I came back down off the porch and walked around the house. I saw an old Negro woman coming down a little grassy lane. I walked up to meet her. She looked a little tired. She had a white cotton sack on her back where she had been picking cotton and a big sun hat on. She looked up and appeared very much surprised to see me.

“Good morning, Aunty. Do you live here?” She said, “Good morning, Miss. Yes, man, I lives here. I aint been here so long though. Is der something I can do for yo?”

I told her that I wanted to talk to her a little while if she had time. She said, “Yes'um, but you see I don't want to be [empolite?] cause I won't raised dat way. But if you will come in I will talk to you while 2 I fix a little dinner. I works in the field all I can.”

About that time I saw a small boy coming around the house with his cotton sack.

“My name is [Sadie?],” she said, “and dis is my great grandson here. I'se got seventeen chillun, Honey.”

“How did you manage with so many children, Aunty?” I asked. “By the help of the Lawd. We didn't have much, but you know what the old frog said when he went to the pond and found jus a little water, don't you? Well, he said, “A little is better than none.’ Dat's de way I all'ers felt about things.

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"I was born and raised in Walton County. But dey is done changed things back over der so much. I was over der to see my daughter while back and, Lawdy mussy, chile, dey is done built a new bridge ah didn't know nothing about.

"Here, Sammy, make mama a fire in de stove while I gits a few things ready to cook."

The little boy had a kerosine lamp over the blaze and, before I could stop myself, I had yelled at him to get it away from that blaze. Aunt Sadie said, "Dat's right, Miss. Correct him. Chillun des days don't see no danger in nothing.

"Back in my day as far back as I can remember 3 my mother and father was [Marse?] Holt and Mistess Holt's slaves. 'Case we chilluns wus too, but slavery times wus over fo I wus big nuf to know very much 'bout hit.

"But I do know about [Marse?] Holt and Mistess Holt. Lawd, child, dey wus de best people in de world I do think. Ole Mistess use to make us go to bed early. She would feed us out under a walnut tree. She wouldn't let us eat lak chilluns do now. We would have milk and bread, and dey would always save pot liquor left over from the vegetables. They put corn bread in it. We little Niggers sho' injoyed hit though. Sometimes we would get syrup and bread and now and then a biscuit.

"[Marse?] and Mistess died, but Ma and Pa and we chillun just stayed on and waked hard. Pa and Ma both wus good farmers. But, Honey, talk 'bout slavery times, hit's mor lak slavery times now with chillun dan it wus den. 'Cause us didn't have to go to de fields til we wus good size chillun. Now de poor things has to go time dey is big nuf to walk and tote a cotton sack.

"Miss Ruth is [Marse?] and Mistess Holt's daughter. I wus fortunate to know Miss Ruth. She larnt me to say my A B C's. If I didn't know them or say them fast nuf she would slap me and make me do hit right". She got up and went over to an old washstand and got an

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old blue 4 back speller. "Here," she said, "look at dis and you will see whut she taught me wid. You can see why I loves dat book. I don't let nobody bother wid dat.

"I sits and looks at my little book lots of times and think of dem good old days. I went to regular school two months in my life.

"I thought I wus grown when I hopped up and married." She stopped talking a moment to wash her hands. "I'se jus gwine fry some meat and make some corn bread. I'se got plenty of good milk and butter. See, der is two churns. I got to churn to-night when I comes in from de field. I canned up a good bit of berries and all de peaches and apples I could git off of dem trees in de yard. I'se got a little garden too.

"I bile vegetables when I has time. Yes, Honey, I married the nigger dat is coming to eat dis dinner I'se got to cook. He went to de [gin?] for de white folks dat own's dis place. He'll be back in alittle while. 'Cause he has gotta git in dat field. I'se believes we is gonna have a rain in a few days.

"I'se always been a hard wuker. Ah had to wuk and I'se been blessed all along by de Lawd with [good?] health. My chillun's all healthy too. Why, Honey, ah got some sons dat looks lak boxers. Dey is men. Me and Tom tried to raise our chillun right, but some of dem has been 5 mighty mean and have got into lots of trouble. Hit looked lak anything some of dem tetched would stick to dey hands. The girls was all good girls 'cept one. She was so fast. Lawdy me, I couldn't do nothing with dat girl. She would run way and stay for days at the time. We worried so much 'bout her. Hit twent long after one of dem trips dat she had her fus chile. Well, I tried to look over dat. But in a little over a year she had another one. And, Honey, hit looked lak she was jus going to run me crazy about having dem babies.

"So her Pa got tired of hit and told her next time she had a baby she had to git out of our house. You know hit is hard for a mother to tell her own chile to get out. Well, anyway, hit twont long fo we say she wus going to have another baby. But she went off one day and didn't come back for three weeks. When she did, she brung in a man and said hit wus

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her husband. Dat nigger was scared to death though. She said she and her husband had come after the other chilluns. Yes, me and Tom kept dem chilluns and fed and clothed 'em. Dey wus fine healthy youngsters.

“Yes, Rose has done made her a good home now. She is nigh fifty herself, too. And has twelve chilluns. Dey all smart and don't worry her likes she did me and her pa. Atta all, she got more now than the other chilluns.

“My life, Honey, is jus been ups and downs. Me and 6 pa and the chilluns always jus had to stay home and work 'cept on Saddays. We would always go to town and church on Sundays. We would fix a big box of oats and get up soon Sadday morning, and Tom and the boys would hitch up old Buck to the cart. Yes, dat old ox wus jus as fast as anybody's mule. He would take us to town and bring us back safe.

“I never will forget one Sadday we wus in town. It wus a treat to jus go to town for us, the lights wus so pretty, but coming home dat day a man stopped us. Me and Tom had most of the chilluns with us. He said he wanted to take our pictures, so he could save it and show it ot his grandchilluns.

“We jus sold old Buck in 1934. He wus gitting old and couldn't plow and git 'bout lak he used too. And we needed a mule too.

“Lawdy, dere's Tom now. He come in the back door, a little man not much older looking than I is.”

“Lawdy, gal, it sho has been a hot day. I thought I would never git dat cotton ready to git away from dat gin.”

Looking around, he saw me and said, “Good morning, Miss. I didn't know we had a visitor. I sho was [talking?], won't I.”

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“The lady here jus wanted me to tell her about our life history, but I didn't think dat we poor Niggers wus 7 important nuf for dat, but I have told her anyway bout all I knows.”

Uncle Tom was very hungry, so I asked them to go ahead and eat. While they were eating I walked around a little to rest myself.

The little house had three rooms, all the walls had newspapers pasted on them to make them look brighter. They had two iron beds in each room, an old washstand and dresser in one, a table and trunk in the other, but no rugs. Aunt Sadie had put up some fresh homespun curtains at the windows.

I came back in the kitchen. It was the largest room they had. There was a long table in one end, a cupboard in one corner, and over in another corner sat a large range. Aunt Sadie saw me looking at it and said, “Honey, I value dat stove more den anythings I'se got, cause I sho' laks to have a good stove to cook on.”

They had finished their meal by now and said they would have to go back to the field.