

Aunt Melanda.

Once while at home on Christmas vacation I went for an evening stroll. I had been walking for some time without taking particular notice of direction, when, chancing to look up, I saw the strapping form of old Aunt Melanda in her doorway.

"How you do Marso Geawge? You come home foh Christmas, I suppose. How all youh friends from Ma'yland? Youh muddah, well?" were the questions cheerily launched at me before I had a chance to answer anything for myself.

"Suppose you wouldnt cyar to come in an' see ole Abe? He ain't ben much use for anything sence de summah time. Says the rheumatiz been a crippin him. Abo, why'nt you get up off'n dat chaih. Doan' you see Marso Geawge come talk t'you."

Inside the old whitewashed, moss-roofed cottage sat the old darkey, toasting his shins at a roaring fire and plying an uncertain needle through some article of clothing.

As he tottered painfully in compliance with the commands of his wife, poor old Abe looked the picture of infirmity. As I forced him back into his chair, he exclaimed in an apologetic tone:

"Dat rheumatiz am de berry debble des yeah. Makes my bones mos' squeak."

"Guess youh muddah mighty glad foh see you, Eb, Marso Geawge?" puts in Aunt Melanda. "Some consolation to pore women when they's fambly come home, ef 'tis only once or twice a yeah. Dah's dat young Abe, now. He just like he daddy. Ain't good foh nothin' but bringin' trouble and tribulation on he old mammy. Fough yeahs ago he gone away, and ain't never come home yit. How youh muddah like it ef you do dat? Not much. Some dese days he come back an' find he old mammy gone to glory an' nobody take care of old Abe Gray. What you think he could do with he rheumatiz? Cyant move outside de house. Dat boy got sick down St. Louis way two yeahs ago. Had the fevah mighty bad I guess. One day he wrote a lettah; said he was converleson or sumpin like dat, an' he guessed he'd come home soon and see de old folks. Ain't never come though. Whyn't he come and git he's self nussed."

"Now look yere Melanda," broke in her lord and master, "doan you go for be pesterin' de young gemman 'bout dat boy. He come home all right. Some dese days he come drop right in on you. I knows how dey does. Why marse Geawge, dat 'ooman don't do nothin' 'cept talk 'bout dat boy Abe fum one end ob de yeah to de uddah. Jest so sure as de willow trees out yander begin to sprout in de spring time, she say somepin 'bout wen dat boy used to hab he swing inunder one ob 'em, wen he ony a li'l wee pickaninny. Dar's a rose-bush out in de yahd wat cyant git a dozen buds 'thout she gives 'em 'way to de neighbours, jest to git talkin' 'bout dat boy cause he done plant it. Dar's an ole weader-cock outside de bahn wat Abe made jes fore he went away; 'thes whittled a big rooster outen a shingle. 'Bout two days ev'y week hit faces 'round to de mawnin' p'int, an' den I gets de rheumatiz in mah bones libely. Bress me ef I doan' nail 'im up some dese days an' keep his baid to de souf. Aint no wind so bad foh old pussons as de east wind, an' they aint none so good as de souf wind. Melanda, doan you bodder de young gemman 'bout dat boy. Doan you 'membah how young marse Henry come home wen ole missis thought she wusn' never gwine see him no moah. Jes you set still, marse Geawge, 'twell I tole you how dat coma. Now, Melanda, nev' you mind tryin' stop me. I'se gwine tell dat story,

"Right down dar whar youh frien' O'Brien come from, down in ole Ma'yland, is whar Abe Gray was bohn, and whar he use to toddle round no bigger 'n dat Abe was wen he had de swing out dyah inunder de willows. An Melanda, why I mind wen she was a little bare logged pickaninny no bigger'n so 't'gh. Dat was wen ole Marso Butler was 'live. Nev' was anythin' went wrong 'long as ole Marso Butler was 'round. Nev' was anyone tried to run away fom dat plantation. No, suh.

Nev' was any whippin'. Nev' was much laziness—well, 'cept one or two cases dey wusn't, an' they didn' 'mount to much. Some folks ain't good for nothin' anyway.

"'Member once w'en we wus growed up putty big. Melandy, li'l M'landy, we used to call her den, she wus out pickin' cotton wif us. Ole Marso Butler had hired a new man what came fom down New Orleans way. No fine manners 'bout him. Rathoh use de whip any time. Didn' look that-a-way's w'en ole Marso hired him, but hit soon came out. Cyant git a bad temper outen de blood no-how. Ole Marso says ter him, 'See heah, Lesage, we doan' practise the whip on dis fahm. Keep 'em workin' well's yoh kin, but w'en things goes too fah yoh come let me know'. Well he said ev'rything gwine be all right, but hit didn't 'groo' 'ith him. One day M'landy 'fended 'im some way. He 'gan to scol' her, an' she, boin' a little thing gave back good's she got. Then he gave her a blow 'side de head, an' ovah she went.

"I wus lookin' on, kin' stupefied like, but seen me not wohkin, an' havin' 'is mad up he wan' to know wy I stan' gapin' like dat. Den I wak' up. 'Mistah Lesage,' I says, 'dat kin' ob treatment ain' practiced on dis fahm'. Den he flow at me an' cussed an swore, an' fin'ly shook he fist in mah face.



Plying an uncertain needle.

Dat de worse ting he ever done. De next second he was on he's back, and a big bruise on he's face. W'en he picked hisself up, dyah wus ole Marso Butler standin' side of 'im. 'Mistah Lesage,' says ole Marso, 'hyah's yoh wages. I 'vise you to git offen dis fahm, for I tells Abe to put yeh off'. He didn't say nuthin, but wen things came 'round, as they did afterwards, I 'membered the look he gave ole Marso.

"Well, ev'thing went on all right foh w'ile twell presn'ly de wah came 'long. Ole Marso Butler was berry mad foh good will befo' hit came. 'Dyaha Gen'l Lee standin' up fer ole Virginny, an' I call'ate Henry Butler ain' gwine back on Ma'yland' he say one day. Nex' day he call young Marso Henry, what were zactly same age as me, an' he say, 'Henry, I'se got to go and jine Gen'l Lee. Youse got to stay hyar wis yoh muddah. Doan let de fahm run down ef yeh kin help it.' So putty soon he go off with he neighbor Marso Carroll. Young Marso Henry was mighty sweet on Miss Carroll, I tole you. Ben sweethearts ev' since they wus six yeahs ole. 'Spect dey'd ben married in 'bout a yeah of twasn't foh de wah comin' up t' interfesh wif ev'body's business. Ole Missus, she was just as spunky as de men folks. Didn' ketch her goin' mopin' roun' de house. No sah? She wen' ev'y day 'long o' young Marso Henry an' kep' de fahm in good ohdah. Kep' sendin' money to ole Marso, fas' as she could get et.

Ole Marso didn' seem to min' bein' in battles. Used to send wohd home ev'y time, nem'mind, I aint got a scratch. We's gwine win dis wah an' be home foh de fall, shuah. He wus wrong 'bout dat. Ole Marso nev' come home hisself. Jes wus cyar'd home to de missis plumb daid one mawnin' jes wen Gen'l Lee hed druv de Yanks back to nowhar's. Ole Missis bore up wonderful. Wen de fun'ral wus ovah, she jes call Marso Henry an' say: 'Henry,

now youse de head ob dis family, you knows yoh duty. Youse gwine to take yoh place in de ahmy. You ole muddah kin git erlong well 'nuff, an Abo hyar, he'll keep de wohk goin'. Novah twell young Marso hed gone jined Gen'l Lee ded Ole Missis shed on' teah. Den she broke down, an didn' show she-se't on de fahm foh a whole week.

"Tinge wen' putty badly affer dat. Twant ve'y long 'fore ole missis hed mortgaged de whole fahm. All the negroes hed to go. Things wus gettin' desprat'. Wusn't nobody to do anythin' foh de fahm 'cept Abe. Miss Carroll used to come ovah pretty often an' stay wif Ole Missis. Dey seemed to kin' ob revive each othah.

"Gittin' 'long 'bout Chris'mas ole missis fell sick. Jes' worried she'self to deff. Den Miss Carroll came and stayed and nussed ole missis. 'Bout two weeks affah she took sick 'long came a rij'ment ob Yankoo soldiers an' took up dar quat-tahs on de fahm. Nex' day de officers came up an wan' see Ole Missis. 'Coso Ole Missis couldn' see nobody but wen Melanda wen' to de doah, who you tink she see? Dat Yankoo captain wus de same Lesage, whah ole marse drovo off de fahm.

"Affer dat, tinge wus wuss an wuss, I tole you. Dat presumphus brute nev' hed no mercy on ole Missis, an fust ting we know wanted Miss Carroll, Marso Henry's sweetheart to marry him. Wat you tink ob dat. Didn' git much 'courage-ment from young Missis, I tole yuh. Gittin nigh Chris'mas. Ole Missis got berry lonesome. Ebery-body saw she gwine die. Young Missis nevah left her. Duhin de night time ole Missis would cry out loud, she wan see heh son. Somehow dat Lesage heah 'bout dat. Didn' nevah heah 'bout it fom Ole Missis. Noh 'nevah fom Young Missis neider. One day he meet Young Missis an ask her 'bout Ole Missis. 'She wan see she son, eh?' he said. 'Jes you make yoh min' easy Miss, ef he come hyah, he nevah go way.'

"Chris'mas eve came 'long, an ole Missis gettin wuss an wuss. Kep' cryin' out de whole time foh she son. Young Missis wus sittin' up wif her. Ole clock out in de hall struck de hours one affah turrer. 'Leben 'clock came, den twelb; Young Missis nevah close she eyes. 'Den she heah 'il rap on de windah, den nurrer one. She go ovah an look out. Den she open de windah, and in come Marso Henry he'self, all wite an famished. Young Missis wait 'il wile, den she go out on de verandah and keep watch. Presn'ly up come dat rascal Lesage. Ah! ha! he say, 'So de young man come home, eh? You mine wat I tole yoh. He come home; but he nevah go way 'live. Lesage have eyes, Miss. Now see hyah, Miss. Ev sence we've come hyah I've loved you. Say you'll marry me, an' much as I hate him and he's muddah foh de wrong done me, I let him go. No one else knowe he is heah. You kin say de word dat means he's life or deff. Wich will it be?'

Young Missis badly broken up sho' nuff. But she jes look at him hard an' she say, 'No. Better he daid, den live to see me youh wife.' So he laff, an' say he give her ten minutes to make up she min', an' den he sat down on de rail ob de verandah an' kep' he's eye on Young Missis an' de balcony windah. Young Missis nevah move.

Lesage tink he eyes putty sharp. But he didn' know Melanda saw jes much as he did. Wen she saw him go up on de verandah an' speak to young Missis, she come 'long were I be, an' tole me all 'bout young Marso Henry comin' home to see Ole Missis as wus callin', callin' foh him all de time. Den we crep up quiet side w're dey sat. Didn' have no rheumatiz in dese bones dem days. I crep' up quiet behin' him, w'ile he sat dyah smokin' he's cigaw, an' befo' he knew wha's mattah, I took him by de throat an' clapped my othah hand over he's mouth, an' befo' two minutes had him bound an' gagged in de collah, fast tied an' couldn' make no sound. Ob co'se Marso Henry got away all right. But nex' mawnin' dar was awful times. De cunnel ob de rij'ment came lookin' foh Captain Lesage. Couldn' fin' 'im nowhars. Den young Miss up an' tole 'im de whole story. He was a onnable man dat cunnel, ef he was a Yankoo, an' he jes say, 'Miss, you'll heah no more of this.' Nex' day Lesage wus sent to de front, an' got shot in he's first battle. Serve him right.

Ole Missis didn' last long. She died 'fore spring time. Wen the wah wus ovah, young marse came back, but he wouldn't stay dyah. Didn' hab much interest left in de fahm, so he sold out an' he an' young Missis got married an' came up heah. Young Missis 's Ole Missis now. Dat's her libe up on de hill w're Melanda goes ev'y week foh washin'. Maybe you thought we wus runaways, eh? Not much we want. Jes' come 'long ob Marso Henry an' Young Missis. Dat's how we come to be de cn'y culled persons in de chu'ch. Runaways! Bress my heart, I'se been playin' "Way down Souf in Dixie" evah sence I came heah, jes' to show wich way my feelin's."

Kxx.