

CAPE JESSAMINE

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He turned upon his side and drifted to the University, and then turned again and dreamed of a poem which it seemed he was writing, — a great poem, — a string of sonnets, like Petrarch or Surrey or Philip Sidney. The sonnets were all about Love. . . . He woke fully and his mind filled at once with the red torchlight, the wild river beyond the levee, and the face and form of Desirée Gaillard.

The door gently opened and Simon entered the panelled room, behind him two boys bearing great pitchers of heated water. The lightwood fire was burning brightly; through the jalousies stole the slant rays of the sinking sun; the magnolia, pushed by the evening wind, tapped against the window frame. Simon had across his extended arm divers articles of wearing apparel. These he laid with solemnity upon a couch by the fire, and then, having dismissed the boys and observed that Edward was awake, he bowed and hoped that the guest had slept well.

"Heavenly well," said Edward dreamily. "Hot water, soap, and towels."

"I hab tek de liberty, sah," said Simon, "ob extractin' yo' uniform from de room while you slep'. De mud whar we could clean off, we hab cleaned off, en' we hab pressed de uniform, but de sempstress she say 'scuse her fer not mendin' de tohn places better. She say dat uniform sut'n'y seen hard service."

"She's a woman of discernment," said Edward. "The tatters are not what troubles me. No end of knights and poets have appeared in tatters. But I do feel a touch when it comes to the shoes. There's nothing of the grand manner in your toes being out. And had it ever occurred to you, Simon, before this war, how valuable is a shoestring?" He sat up in bed. "At this moment I would give all the silken waistcoats I used to have for two real shoestrings. — What, may I ask, could you do for the shoes?"

"King Hiram de cobbler, sah, he hab de shoes in han'. He shake he haid, but he say he gwine do all he kin. De sempstress, too, she say she gwine do her natchul bes'. But Miss Désirée, she say dat perhaps you will give Marse Louis, what am at Grenada wif Ginerall Van Dorn, de pleasure ob sarvin' you? She say de Mississippi River all 'roun' Cape Jessamine fer three days, en' nobody gwine come heah less'n dey come in gunboats, en' you kin wear yo' uniform away de third day —" Simon, stepping backward, indicated with a