

They were brought in — brought the last part of the distance through the knee-deep flood. When they got to the rising ground and the house quarter the water was close behind them. Yellow now in the strengthening light, beneath a tempestuous morning sky, it washed and sucked and drew against the just-out-of-reach demesne.

When the crippled overseer had been laid in a wing of the house, and the lower-quarter people had been disposed of in the house quarter and the innumerable out-buildings, when the cattle Mingo Second brought in had been stalled and penned, when with great iron keys Désirée had opened smokehouse and storehouse and given out rations, when fires had been kindled on cabin hearths, and old Daddy Martin had taken his banjo, and the house servants had regained equanimity and importance, and "Missy" had lavishly praised everybody, even the piccaninnies who had n't cried — the plantation, so suddenly curtailed, settled under a stormy yellow sunrise into a not unpleasurable excitement and holiday feeling — much like that of an important funeral.

Désirée stood at last alone but for Edward, and for two or three house servants, hovering in the doorway. She had again about her the scarlet-lined cloak; her throat, face, and head were drawn superbly against the lighted east.

She pushed back her wind-blown hair and laughed. "It might have been worse! — which is my habitual philosophy! We will have fair weather now, and the water will go down."

"I am strange to this country," said Edward. "How can I find the road to Vidalia?"

He stood illumined by the morning glow, his rifle beside him where he had leaned it against the pillar. Now and again, through the past hours, his voice had been in her ear. In the first hearing it, in the moil and anxiety, she had at once the knowledge that this chance soldier possessed breeding. In this time and region the "private" before the "soldier" had the slightest of qualificatory value. University and professional men, wealthy planters, sons of commanding generals — all sorts and conditions were private soldiers. This one was, it appeared from his voice, of her own condition. But though she had noted his voice, by torchlight or by daybreak she had scarce looked at him. Now she did so; each looked into the other's eyes.