

CAPE JESSAMINE

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beyond the rising ground and the house gleaming from the trees, the encroaching backwater, the two horns of that sickle all but touching the main levee. When they came upon this, out of the long avenue, the cypresses behind them were black against the lit west, unearthly still and dark against the gold. The river, too, was gold, a red gold, deep and very wide and swift.

They stood upon the levee, and even his unaccustomed eye saw that the danger and strain of the other night was much lessened, but that always there was danger. — "The price of safety hereabouts is vigilance."

"Yes. To keep up the levees. Now and then, before the War, we heard of catastrophes — though they were mostly down the river. Then, up and down, everything would be strengthened. But now — neglect because we cannot help it, and tremor in the night-time! Below Baton Rouge the Yankees have broken the levees. Oh, the distress, the loss! If Port Hudson falls and they come up the river, or Vicksburg and they come down it, Cape Jessamine will be as others." She drew her cloak close for a moment, then loosened it, held her head high and laughed. "But we shall win, and it will not happen! . . . If we walk to the bend yonder, we shall see far, far! — and it is lovely."

At the bend was a bench beneath a live-oak. The two sat down and looked forth upon vast levels and shining loops of the river. From the boughs above hung Spanish moss, long and dark, like cobwebs of all time, like mouldered banners of some contest long since fought out. The air was an amethyst profound.

For some minutes she kept the talk upon this and that, then with resolution he made it die away. They sat in a silence that soon grew speech indeed. Before them the golden river grew pale, the vast plain, here overflowed, there seamed with huge, shaggy forests, gathered shadow; above day at its latest breath shone out a silver planet.

Désirée shivered. "It is mournful, it is mournful," she said, "at Cape Jessamine."

"Is it so? Then let me breathe mournfulness until I die."

"The water is going down. Mingo says it is going down fast."

"Yes. I could find it in my heart to wish it might never go down."