

CAPE JESSAMINE

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clime, but sound at heart and of a right grain. When Private Edward Cary, gaunt, ragged, muddy, unshaven, asked what he could do, she considered him gravely, then gave him Mingo Second and thirty men, with whom he set to strengthening a place of danger not so imminent. From where he worked he heard at intervals her clear voice, now *insouciant*, now thrilling. There came a moment of leisure. He turned and saw her where she stood, her knee bent, her hand and arm outstretched against the river, the horseman's cloak blown backward and upward into a canopy, the red light over all, strong and clear upon her face and throat and bronze-sheathed body — saw her and loved her.

The December night, already well advanced, grew old. Always the river attacked, always the land opposed. The yellow current sucked and dragged, but the dyke held and the dyke grew stronger. The rain ceased; far up in the sky, through a small, small rift peered a star. The wind died into a whisper. By three o'clock there came a feeling that the crisis had passed. 'Rasmus, working well with Edward's detachment, gave it voice. "Cape Jessamine's done stood heah sence . . . flood, en' I specs dat's two hundred yeahs! Yaas, Lawd! En' when Gabriel blow he trump, Cape Jessamine gwine up en' say, 'Heah I is, sah!'"

And at that moment there came running through the fields a wild-eyed negro, panic in his outstretched hands. "De levee by de backwoods — de levee by de backwoods — de levee what nobody eber thinks ob, hit's so safe! De ribber done swing ergin hit — de ribber done gouge er hole big ez de debbil! De yerth's er-tumblin' in, en' de ribber's comin' out —"

Through the last half-hour of the night, up a broad avenue between water oaks, Edward found himself hurrying with Désirée. Before them raced the negroes, some upon the road, others streaming through the bordering fields. Désirée ran like a huntress of Diana's. Her soldier's cloak, blown by the wind, impeded her flight. She unclasped it as she ran, and Edward took it from her.

"Will the house go?" he asked. "How great is the danger?"

She shook her head. "I don't think we are in danger of our lives. I don't think the water can get to the house. It is not as though the levee had broken where we were working. What would happen then does n't stand contemplating. This other is but an arm of the river