

MRS. TILDEN: Cissie! (It is the mistress of the plantation. Four long years have aged her. She has a wrap thrown over a thin dress. She looks at the group with troubled eyes.)

AUNT SUE: Missie!

FESS: (Jumping up) Yo' wan' something, missie?

GRANNIE: (Severely.) How come yo' runnin' round lak dis at night? You'll cotch yo' death o' cole!

MRS. TILDEN: I—I couldn't sleep—I heard music—Cissie, I was sure I heard—Millie—singing— (Cissie turns away.)

ROSE: We's jus' havin' a lil' New Year pahty, missie.

MRS. TILDEN: A party!

AUNT SUE: Yassum—Fess here wen' huntin' today an' Cissie—

MRS. TILDEN: (Turning to her.) Cissie—(Outside there is a bust of laughter and the banjo sounds again.)

GRANNIE: Come to da fiah, an' warm yo'self.

MRS. TILDEN: (Walks slowly to the window and looks out.) They're dancing—Millie's—dancing!

AUNT SUE: Yessum—dat chile sho is a caution!

MRS. TILDEN: (Slowly) Cissie, do they know?

CISSIE: (Very low) No—missie.

MRS. TILDEN: Oh—Cissie! But—I don't understand—you—a party—They're dancing and singing.

CISSIE: Yassum—dancin' an' singin'—so Millie'll be happy—*one time mo'*. (The others look from one to the other, not understanding.)

MRS. TILDEN: (Sinking into a chair.) Oh, dear God, have mercy on us!

ROSE: (Alarmed) Missie, what is it?

AUNT SUE: What's da mattah, missie? Tell us!

MRS. TILDEN: (After a pause) Millie's going away—She's going away early in the morning.

WOMEN: Away!

MRS. TILDEN: They're coming for her at daybreak.

FESS: (Slowly) Yo' sole—huh?

MRS. TILDEN: I had to. The war's beat us down—our cotton's worthless—there's nothing else.

FESS: (Softly) Yo' sole huh to dat man—he'll take huh down da ribbah! (A shudder passes over the group. Only Cissie sits like a stone.)

MRS. TILDEN: I'm an old woman—My heart is breaking with your pain—but I'm helpless. Oh! If this war would only end—if our men would only come back—they don't know what it's doing to us—they don't know.

ROSE: No—dey don' know.

MRS. TILDEN: It must end soon... There's nothing to go on... Cissie, I'll buy her back—I promise, as God is my judge, we'll get her back.

CISSIE: (Dully.) Yes, missie.

MRS. TILDEN: (Getting up) I—must go now. I—(She stops, realizing there's nothing more to say.)

FESS: (Taking lantern from mantle) Ah'll light yo' to da house. (Cissie does not lift her head. Mrs. Tilden lays her hand on Cissie's should and says softly)

MRS. TILDEN: I'm glad she's happy—tonight—Cissie.