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## MARS' TOM ASHLEY

By F. A. MITCHEL

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"Uncle," I said to an old darky sitting on a barrel, "who owns this plantation?"

"Mars' Tom Ashley."

"Have the Ashleys always lived here?"

"Rackon dey hab, sah. De Ashleys lib heah ever since a long time before de wah. De oldest son ob de oldest son alius growed up to drap into de ole man's shoes. Dey come might' aigh bein' a break once, though."

"How was that?"

"Hit was Mars' Tom's father, Mars' Pape Ashley. He father, Mars' Tom's grandfather, Thomas Ashley, war might' sne man."

"Mars' Pape he went norf to college, an' somehow or odder he got no'thern notions in de head. Dat war a few yea's befo' de wah. Mars' Pape get de 'dicious idee dat all de niggers in de souf had oughten be free. Wus'n dat, he fell in tub wid a no'thern lady an' married her."

"I remember might' well when all dat happen. Mars' Pape he come down heah an' he talk wid de ole man."

"An' he try to mak de ole man believe dat he oughter gib all us niggers on dis heah plantation free papers, an' de ole man ought to stick up fo' de Union an' all dat kind o' talk."

"Yo' know what Mars' Thomas say? He say: 'My son, yo' hab disgrace yo' ancestors. Yo' onworthy to be called my son. I'm gwine to disherit yo' an' leab dis plantation to yo' cousin Ernest Crane.'"

"An' yo' know wha' Mars' Pape say? He say: 'De plantation won't be worf a bale o' cotton. Yo' niggers 'll all be free, an' de souf 'll be no' count.'"

"Den yo' know wha' Mars' Thomas say? He say: 'One southe'n man kin whip five Y-nkees.'"

"Mars' Pape he go norf, an' nobody didn' see him no mo' in dis yere kentry till atter de wah. He didn' lak to fight agin his southe'n friends, so he go to speculatin'. He had some money ob his own, an' he buy all de cotton he kin get his hands on. Mars' Thomas he raise a regiment o' southe'n troops, and he fight lak de debble. He come back a big gin'l, but he only got one leg an' one eye. All his niggers was free, de plantation was all pulled to pieces by firs' de northe'n troops, den de southe'n troops, an' dar wa'n't a bit o' fencin' anywhar. All the niggers go off 'cept me. I stay heah to tak' car' o' de ole man when he come back."

"Mars' Thomas he wa'n't so proud as he war when he went away, all dress' up in his new sojer clo'es. He wouldn't nebber talk to a nigger den, but when he foun' me heah all alone an' saw how de plantation look he seem might' sorry. He say to me, 'Julius, ma boy, yo' worf 500 or'nary white men.'"

"Atter dat he talk to me 'bout eb-eryting. One day he come to me an' say: 'Jule, I got a letter from Pape today. He say he bought cotton at 8 cents a pound an' sold it at a dollar a pound. He got all de money he want. He offers me plenty to restock de plantation.' An' I say, 'Gwine tak' it, mars?' An' he say: 'Tak' it! Yo' s'pose I gwine to tak' money from my son what stay in de norf all through de wah instead o' bein' heah an' fightin' fo' de souf? No, sah. Ma son daid to me. I gwine to leab dis heah plantation to Ernest Crane.'"

"One mawnin' while I war down at

de crick crossin' who I see but Mars' Pape. He tak' my han' an' might' glad to see me. He ask me all 'bout de ole man an' say he come down wid his wife an' lectle boy to git a reconciliation. He ask me to let 'em all in de house when de gin'l ain't dar. He say dey gwine to try to take de place by storm. He tell me dot he got plenty money fo' his fadder an' no use he libin' all alone an' de old home gwine more an' more to rack."

"I tink it might' see t'ing fo' de ole man, an' I say I help 'em all I kin. So one mawnin' early I let 'em all in. Mars' Pape and Missy Ashley dey git in a closet in de dinin' room an' pretty aigh shut de do'. I put de little boy on de fambly chillen's high chair, an' he wait dar fo' be grandfadder to come down to breakfast. Wheu de ole man come into de room and see de little fellab settin' up on de udder side o' de table he stood still wid be most an' eyes wide open."

"'Howde, grandpa?' said de chille."

"'Who are yo'?' axed de gin'l."

"'Tom Ashley, de nex' owner ob de plantation atter yo' an' papa.'"

"'Yo' see, Mars' Pape tell him what to say. Mars' Thomas war so lonesome an' de chille war so purt dat de ole man couldn't stand dat. He jis went to Mars' Tommy an' put he arms around him an' bugged him. When I see somepln shinin' in de gin'l's eye I jis open de closet do' and out steps Mars' Pape an' he wife.'"

"'Missy Ashley she went up to de gin'l an' put out her han'. De gin'l too see a man not to take a lady's han'. He took it an' bowin' lak a south'n gen'leman, very low down, he kissed it. She put de gin'l's han' in dat ob Mars' Pape. De gin'l leab it dar, but he turn away he head, an' I see de tears runnin' down he cheeka. I wonder ef he cryin' fo' de los' cause or de wreck ob de plantation.'"

"'Dey all sot down to breakfas'. Mars' Pape had sent in chicken an' potatoes an' lots fine tings insread ob de co'n pone dat de gin'l war used to. Missy Ashley poured de coffee, an' dat war de happiest breakfas' eber happen on dis heah plantation.'"

"'Dey all daid now but Mars' Tom.'"

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