

MARSTOM ASHLEY

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

"Mars' Tom Ashley,"

"And is it long that they have lived here?"

"Reckon dey hab, sah. De Ashleys hab heah ever since a long time before de wah. De oldes' son ob de oldes' son allus growed up to drap into de ole man's shoes. Dey come might' nigh 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' fine man."

"Mars' Pape he went norf to college an' somehow or udder he got no'tern notions in his head. Dat were a few yen's befo' de wah. Mars' Pape get de 'dientus' idee dat all de niggers in de souf had oughten be free. Was'n dat, he fel in lub wid a no'thern lady an' married her."

"I recommember might' well when

all dat happen. Mars Pape he come down heah an' he talk wid de ole man Ashley until he make him believe dat he oughter gib all us niggers on dis heah plantation free papers, an' de ole man ought to stick u 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 disinherit 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 Yankees.'

"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 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 uggers was free, de plantation was all pulled to pieces by firs' de north-e'n troops, an' dar wa'n't a bit o' fencin' anywhar. All che 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 maw'nin' while I war down at de erick 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 wife an' liddle boy to get 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 tak' de place by storm. He tell me dat he got plenty money fo' his fadder an' no use he lib'n' all alone an' de ole home gwine more an' more to rack."

"I th'nk it might' fine t'ing fo' de ole man, an' I say I help 'em all I kin. So one maw'nin' early I let 'em all in. Mars' Pape and Missy Ashley dey git

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in a closet in de dinin' room an' pretty nigh shut de do.' I put de liddle boy on de fambly chillen's high chair, an' he wait dar fo' he grandfadder to come down to breakfast. When de ole man come into de room an' see de liddle fellah sittin' up on de udder side o' de table he stood still wid he mouf 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 coudn' stand dat. He jis went to Mars' Tommy an' put he arm around him an' hugged him. When I see somepin shinin' in de gin'l's eye I jis open de closet do' an' 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 fine a man not to tak' a lady's han'. He took it an' bowin' lak a southe'n gen'leman, very low down, he kissed it. She put de gin'l han' in dat ob Mars' Pape. De gin'l leab it dar, but he turns away his head, an' I see de tears runnin' down he cheeks. I wonder if 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 instead ob de co'n pone dat gin'l war used to. Missy Ashley poured the coffee, an' dat war de happiest breakfas' eber happen on dis plantation.
"Dey all daid now but Mars' Tom."
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