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won't put no weights in his shoes. You kin see I need him bad to plow. I ain't makin' him."

"We're both grateful to you for that, Mr. Barnes."

"I don't know fer shore yuh oughta be. But hit's a free country—they say! As fer me, I don't know nuthin' but the erbaccer patch."

"You're a better father than I thought you were," America cried spontaneously. "You and I understand each other, Mr. Barnes. Good day to you, sir."

"And tuh you, ma'am. Follow that cowpath an' you'll come out on Tuckahoe at Foxden, below the tollgate."

America started up the trail. The footing was uneven, at times precarious. It took her mind off her encounter with the Barneses. Foxden was where Cousin Simmy Collier lived. For months she had intended to go call on her aged kinsman. He had not been to church since her arrival at Tuckahoe. He had fallen and hurt himself, to what extent even his sister, Margaret Amable, could not learn. He was being tended, Mrs. Annable reported, by old Mahalee, the one ex-slave whom he had permitted to remain at Foxden.

The cowpath entered a fine growth of virgin timber, chiefly black walnut. Beyond the woodland, a crescent of meadow had been cleared. On the highest point of the crescent, black against the setting sun, loomed Foxden.

As she approached the house, America studied the ancient log structure with keen interest. It was built in the form of an H. Each wing had been formed by erecting two twenty-foot log cabins together, with a common inside wall, making four spacious ground-floor rooms and lofts above. Between them was an open dog run, covered by a connecting bit under the common roof.

AMERICA knocked on the whitewashed door. No answer came. Pulling the latchstring, she stepped inside. The room was bright with firelight. In a Sheraton armchair an old man sat with his back to the room, his bushy hair spun silver above the carved chair top.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but may I come in? I'm cold."

"Come to the fire, then," pronounced a testy voice.

Without looking at her host, America stretched her chilled hands to the blaze. When she turned she received the surprise of her Kentucky experience.

"Has the cat got your tongue?"



"Do you have any with open toes?"

"Sir, you could be my grandfather sitting there!" cried America. Like Ephraim Collier, Cousin Simmy had ice-blue eyes that twinkled under thickly black brows. Spent as he was from long sickness, Cousin Simmy had the same formidable presence; he still wore the born look of command.

"Then why haven't you come to see me sooner?" he barked.

"Do you think I'd have waited a day if I'd known?"

"You sound as if you set a heap of store by your grandpap," chuckled the old man. "It's been seventy years since I saw Ephraim Collier in Virginia, but we were the spittin' image of each other as boys. Anybody could tell you're a Collier with that width between your eyes and the way you hold your head."

"Thank you, Cousin Simmy."

"Don't reach for bouquets where none's intended. You ain't half as purty as your maw."

"I've heard that all my life," she laughed.

He changed the subject. "Do you like Tuckahoe?"

"How could I when I'm little better than a servant here? And—"

"Finish your sentences, missy!"

She could not confess to this imperious old man that she had failed in the one consuming pursuit of her life.

"And Fant shows you no attention, eh?" Uncle Simmy went on. "The trouble with Fant is that he will try to live fifty years after his time. Hyenas 'n' bobcats, I've told him often enough the river-boat life went out with the railroads. Eh, but it was a fine, free life while it lasted. Maybe I'm to blame for filling his head full of my talk when he was a lad."

"What did you do that Fant enjoys so much, sir?"

"I floated rafts of prime Mason County leaf downriver in hogsheads, Ameriky. Ten to a raft, me an' my bravos floated 'em down the Ohio—and on down onto the Mississippi—and on down to New Orleans! There I cried 'em to the highest bidder on the Old Market wharves. When my business was done, we fought our way back on horseback over the Tennessee Trail. Many's the trip I brought seventy thousand gold dollars in those saddlebags in the corner. Sometimes I had commission lists long as your arm to fill."

"What you say interests me enormously. Fant said he was a river-boat man, but I didn't realize that meant being a commission merchant."

"Ho-ho! You're a sly mink."

"I beg your pardon, sir? Perhaps I don't entirely understand what Fant does on the river nowadays. When I ask, nobody seems to know exactly. Won't you tell me?"

The ice-blue eyes shot a shrewd glance to her. "From what Mahalee—she's the black woman who waits on me—hears, Fant's mostly sparkin' that bold-eyed girl of Taliaferro Drake's and you

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