GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN

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suits paraded before him and boxers growled and fought, and baseball players ran home safe and presidents and kings of countries that were only names to him moved briefly across the flickering square of light John thought of Hell, of his soul's redemption, and struggled to find a compromise between the way that led to life everlasting and the way that ended in the pit. But there was none, for he had been raised in the truth. He could not claim, as African savages might be able to claim, that no one had brought him the gospel. His father and mother and all the saints had taught him from his earliest childhood what was the will of God. Either he arose from this theater, never to return, putting behind him the world and its pleasures, its honors, and its glories, or he remained here with the wicked and partook of their certain punishment. Yes, it was a narrow way—and John stirred in his seat, not daring to feel it God's injustice that he must make so cruel a choice.

As John approached his home again in the late afternoon, he saw little Sarah, her coat unbuttoned, come flying out of the house and run the length of the street away from him into the far drugstore. Instantly, he was frightened; he stopped a moment, staring blankly down the street, wondering what could justify such hysterical haste. It was true that Sarah was full of self-importance, and made any errand she ran seem a matter of life or death; nevertheless, she had been sent on an errand, and with such speed that her mother had not had time to make her button up her coat.

Then he felt weary; if something had really happened it would be very unpleasant upstairs now, and he did not want to face it. But perhaps it was simply that his mother had a headache and had sent Sarah to the store for some aspirin. But if this were true, it meant that he would have to prepare supper, and take care of the children, and be naked under his father's eyes all the evening long. And he began to walk more slowly.

There were some boys standing on the stoop. They watched him as he approached, and he tried not to look at them and to approximate the swagger with which they walked. One of

them said, as he mounted the short, stone steps and started into the hall: "Boy, your brother was hurt real bad today."

He looked at them in a kind of dread, not daring to ask for details; and he observed that they, too, looked as though they had been in a battle; something hangdog in their looks suggested that they had been put to flight. Then he looked down, and saw that there was blood at the threshold, and blood spattered on the tile floor of the vestibule. He looked again at the boys, who had not ceased to watch him, and hurried up the stairs.

The door was half open—for Sarah's return, no doubt—and he walked in, making no sound, feeling a confused impulse to flee. There was no one in the kitchen, though the light was burning—the lights were on all through the house. On the kitchen table stood a shopping-bag filled with groceries, and he knew that his Aunt Florence had arrived. The washtub, where his mother had been washing earlier, was open still, and filled the kitchen with a sour smell.

There were drops of blood on the floor here too, and there had been small, smudged coins of blood on the stairs as he walked up.

All this frightened him terribly. He stood in the middle of the kitchen, trying to imagine what had happened, and preparing himself to walk into the living-room, where all the family seemed to be. Roy had been in trouble before, but this new trouble seemed to be the beginning of the fulfillment of a prophecy. He took off his coat, dropping it on a chair, and was about to start into the living-room when he heard Sarah running up the steps.

He waited, and she burst through the door, carrying a clumsy parcel.

"What happened?" he whispered.

She stared at him in astonishment, and a certain wild joy. He thought again that he really did not like his sister. Catching her breath, she blurted out, triumphantly: "Roy got stabbed with a knife!" and rushed into the living-room.

Roy got stabbed with a knife. Whatever this meant, it was sure that his father would be at his worst tonight. John walked slowly into the living-room.

His father and mother, a small basin of water between them, knelt by the sofa where Roy lay, and his father was washing the blood from Roy's forehead. It seemed that his mother, whose touch was so much more gentle, had been thrust aside by his father, who could not bear to have anyone else touch his wounded son. And now she watched, one hand in the water, the other, in a kind of anguish, at her waist, which was circled still by the improvised apron of the morning. Her face, as she watched, was full of pain and fear, of tension barely supported, and of pity that could scarcely have been expressed had she filled all the world with her weeping. His father muttered sweet, delirious things to Roy, and his hands, when he dipped them again in the basin and wrung out the cloth, were trembling. Aunt Florence, still wearing her hat and carrying her handbag, stood a little removed, looking down at them with a troubled, terrible face.

Then Sarah bounded into the room before him, and his mother looked up, reached out for the package, and saw him. She said nothing, but she looked at him with a strange, quick intentness, almost as though there were a warning on her tongue which at the moment she did not dare to utter. His Aunt Florence looked up, and said: "We been wondering where you was, boy. This bad brother of yours done gone out and got hisself hurt."

But John understood from her tone that the fuss was, possibly, a little greater than the danger—Roy was not, after all, going to die. And his heart lifted a little. Then his father turned and looked at him.

"Where you been, boy," he shouted, "all this time? Don't you know you's needed here at home?"

More than his words, his face caused John to stiffen instantly with malice and fear. His father's face was terrible in anger, but now there was more than anger in it. John saw now what he had never seen there before, except in his own vindictive fantasies: a kind of wild, weeping terror that made the face seem younger, and yet at the same time unutterably older and more cruel. And John knew, in the moment his father's eyes swept over him, that he hated John because John was not lying on the sofa where Roy lay. John could scarcely meet his father's eyes, and yet, briefly, he did, saying nothing, feeling in his heart an odd sensation of triumph, and hoping in his heart that Roy, to bring his father low, would die.

His mother had unwrapped the package and was opening a bottle of peroxide. "Here," she said, "you better wash it with this now." Her voice was calm and dry; she looked at his father briefly, her face unreadable, as she handed him the bottle and the cotton.

"This going to hurt," his father said—in such a different voice, so sad and tender!—turning again to the sofa. "But you just be a little man and hold still; it ain't going to take long."

John watched and listened, hating him. Roy began to moan. Aunt Florence moved to the mantelpiece and put her handbag down near the metal serpent. From the room behind him, John heard the baby begin to whimper.

"John," said his mother, "go and pick her up like a good boy." Her hands, which were not trembling, were still busy: she had opened the bottle of iodine and was cutting up strips of bandage.

John walked into his parents' bedroom and picked up the squalling baby, who was wet. The moment Ruth felt him lift her up she stopped crying and stared at him with a wide-eyed, pathetic stare, as though she knew that there was trouble in the house. John laughed at her so ancient-seeming distress—he was very fond of his baby sister—and whispered in her ear as he started back to the living-room: "Now, you let your big brother tell you something, baby. Just as soon as you's able to stand on your feet, you run away from *this* house, run far away." He did not quite know why he said this, or where he wanted her to run, but it made him feel instantly better.

His father was saying, as John came back into the room: "I'm sure going to be having some questions to ask you in a minute, old lady. I'm going to be wanting to know just how come you let this boy go out and get half killed."

"Oh, no, you ain't," said Aunt Florence. "You ain't going to be starting none of that mess this evening. You know right doggone well that Roy don't never ask *nobody* if he can do *nothing*—he just go right ahead and do like he pleases. Elizabeth sure can't put no ball and chain on him. She got her hands full right here in this house, and it ain't her fault if Roy got a head just as hard as his father's."

"You got a awful lot to say, look like for once you could keep from putting your mouth in my business." He said this without looking at her.

"It ain't my fault," she said, "that you was born a fool, and always done been a fool, and ain't never going to change. I swear to my Father you'd try the patience of Job."

"I done told you before," he said—he had not ceased working over the moaning Roy, and was preparing now to dab the wound with iodine—"that I didn't want you coming in here and using that gutter language in front of my children."

"Don't you worry about my language, brother," she said with spirit, "you better start worrying about your *life*. What these children hear ain't going to do them near as much harm as what they *see*."

"What they *see*," his father muttered, "is a poor man trying to serve the Lord. *That's* my life."

"Then I guarantee *you*," she said, "that they going to do their best to keep it from being *their* life. *You* mark my words."

He turned and looked at her, and intercepted the look that passed between the two women. John's mother, for reasons that were not at all his father's reasons, wanted Aunt Florence to keep still. He looked away, ironically. John watched his mother's mouth tighten bitterly as she dropped her eyes. His father, in silence, began bandaging Roy's forehead.

"It's just the mercy of God," he said at last, "that this boy didn't lose his eye. Look here."

His mother leaned over and looked into Roy's face with a sad, sympathetic murmur. Yet, John felt, she had seen instantly the extent of the danger to Roy's eye and to his life, and was beyond that worry now. Now she was merely marking time, as it were, and preparing herself against the moment when her husband's anger would turn, full force, against her.

His father now turned to John, who was standing near the French doors with Ruth in his arms.

"You come here, boy," he said, "and see what them white folks done done to your brother."

John walked over to the sofa, holding himself as proudly

beneath his father's furious eyes as a prince approaching the scaffold.

"Look here," said his father, grasping him roughly by one arm, "look at your brother."

John looked down at Roy, who gazed at him with almost no expression in his dark eyes. But John knew by the weary, impatient set of Roy's young mouth that his brother was asking that none of this be held against him. It wasn't his fault, or John's, Roy's eyes said, that they had such a crazy father.

His father, with the air of one forcing the sinner to look down into the pit that is to be his portion, moved away slightly so that John could see Roy's wound.

Roy had been gashed by a knife, luckily not very sharp, from the center of his forehead where his hair began, downward to the bone just above his left eye: the wound described a kind of crazy half-moon and ended in a violent, fuzzy tail that was the ruin of Roy's eyebrow. Time would darken the half-moon wound into Roy's dark skin, but nothing would bring together again the so violently divided eyebrow. This crazy lift, this question, would remain with him forever, and emphasize forever something mocking and sinister in Roy's face. John felt a sudden impulse to smile, but his father's eyes were on him and he fought the impulse back. Certainly the wound was now very ugly, and very red, and must, John felt, with a quickened sympathy towards Roy, who had not cried out, have been very painful. He could imagine the sensation caused when Roy staggered into the house, blinded by his blood; but just the same, he wasn't dead, he wasn't changed, he would be in the streets again the moment he was better.

"You see?" came now from his father. "It was white folks, some of them white folks *you* like so much that tried to cut your brother's throat."

John thought, with immediate anger and with a curious contempt for his father's inexactness, that only a blind man, however white, could possibly have been aiming at Roy's throat; and his mother said with a calm insistence:

"And he was trying to cut theirs. Him and them bad boys."

"Yes," said Aunt Florence, "I ain't heard you ask that boy nary a question about how all this happened. Look like you

just determined to raise cain any*how* and make everybody in this house suffer because something done happened to the apple of your eye."

"I done asked you," cried his father in a fearful exasperation, "to stop running your *mouth*. Don't none of this concern you. This is *my* family and this is my house. You want me to slap you side of the head?"

"You slap me," she said, with a placidity equally fearful, "and I *do* guarantee you you won't do no more slapping in a hurry."

"Hush now," said his mother, rising, "ain't no need for all this. What's done is done. We ought to be on our knees, thanking the Lord it weren't no worse."

"Amen to that," said Aunt Florence, "*tell* that foolish nigger something."

"You can tell that foolish *son* of yours something," he said to his wife with venom, having decided, it seemed, to ignore his sister, "him standing there with them big buckeyes. You can tell him to take this like a warning from the Lord. *This* is what white folks does to niggers. I been telling you, now you see."

"*He* better take it like a warning?" shrieked Aunt Florence. "*He* better take it? Why, Gabriel, it ain't *him* went halfway across this city to get in a fight with white boys. This boy on the sofa went *deliberately*, with a whole lot of other boys, all the way to the west side, just *looking* for a fight. I declare, I do wonder what goes on in your head."

"You know right well," his mother said, looking directly at his father, "that Johnny don't travel with the same class of boys as Roy goes with. You done beat Roy too many times, here, in this very room for going out with them bad boys. Roy got hisself hurt this afternoon because he was out doing something he didn't have no business doing, and that's the end of it. You ought to be thanking your Redeemer he ain't dead."

"And for all the care you take of him," he said, "he might as well be dead. Don't look like you much care whether he lives, or dies."

"*Lord*, have mercy," said Aunt Florence.

"He's my son, too," his mother said, with heat. "I carried him in my belly for nine months and I know him just like I know his daddy, and they's just *exactly* alike. Now. You ain't got no *right* in the world to talk to me like that."

"I reckon you *know*," he said, choked, and breathing hard, "all about a mother's love. I sure reckon on you telling me how a woman can sit in the house all day and let her own flesh and blood go out and get half butchered. Don't you tell me you don't know no way to stop him, because I remember *my* mother, God rest her soul, and *she'd* have found a way."

"She was my mother, too," said Aunt Florence, "and I recollect, if you don't, you being brought home many a time more dead than alive. She didn't find no way to stop *you*. She wore herself out beating on you, just like you been wearing yourself out beating on this boy here."

"My, my, *my*," he said, "you got a lot to say."

"I ain't doing a thing," she said, "but trying to talk some sense into your big, black, hardhead. You better stop trying to blame everything on Elizabeth and look to your own wrongdoings."

"Never mind, Florence," his mother said, "it's all over and done with now."

"I'm out of this house," he shouted, "every day the Lord sends, working to put the food in these children's mouths. Don't you think I got a right to ask the mother of these children to look after them and see that they don't break their necks before I get back home?"

"You ain't got but one child," she said, "that's liable to go out and break his neck, and that's Roy, and you know it. And I don't know how in the world you expect me to run this house, and look after these children, and keep running around the block after Roy. *No*, I can't stop him, I done told you that, and you can't stop him neither. You don't know *what* to do with this boy, and that's why you all the time trying to fix the blame on somebody. Ain't nobody to *blame*, Gabriel. You just better pray God to stop him before somebody puts another knife in him and puts him in his grave."

They stared at each other a moment in an awful pause, she with a startled, pleading question in her eyes. Then, with all his might, he reached out and slapped her across the face. She crumpled at once, hiding her face with one thin hand, and

Aunt Florence moved to hold her up. Sarah watched all this with greedy eyes. Then Roy sat up, and said in a shaking voice:

"Don't you slap my mother. That's my *mother*. You slap her again, you black bastard, and I swear to God I'll kill you."

In the moment that these words filled the room, and hung in the room like the infinitesimal moment of hanging, jagged light that precedes an explosion, John and his father were staring into each other's eyes. John thought for that moment that his father believed the words had come from him, his eyes were so wild and depthlessly malevolent, and his mouth was twisted into such a snarl of pain. Then, in the absolute silence that followed Roy's words, John saw that his father was not seeing him, was not seeing anything unless it were a vision. John wanted to turn and flee, as though he had encountered in the jungle some evil beast, crouching and ravenous, with eyes like Hell unclosed; and exactly as though, on a road's turning, he found himself staring at certain destruction, he found that he could not move. Then his father turned and looked down at Roy.

"What did you say?" his father asked.

"I told you," said Roy, "not to touch my mother."

"You cursed me," said his father.

Roy said nothing; neither did he drop his eyes.

"Gabriel," said his mother, "Gabriel. Let us pray. . . ."

His father's hands were at his waist, and he took off his belt. Tears were in his eyes.

"Gabriel," cried Aunt Florence, "ain't you done playing the fool for tonight?"

Then his father raised his belt, and it fell with a whistling sound on Roy, who shivered, and fell back, his face to the wall. But he did not cry out. And the belt was raised again, and again. The air rang with the whistling, and the *crack!* against Roy's flesh. And the baby, Ruth, began to scream.

"My Lord, my Lord," his father whispered, *"my Lord, my Lord."*

He raised the belt again, but Aunt Florence caught it from behind, and held it. His mother rushed over to the sofa and caught Roy in her arms, crying as John had never seen a woman, or anybody, cry before. Roy caught his mother around the neck and held on to her as though he were drowning.

His Aunt Florence and his father faced each other.

"Yes, Lord," Aunt Florence said, "you was born wild, and you's going to die wild. But ain't no use to try to take the whole world with you. You can't change nothing, Gabriel. You ought to know that by now."

John opened the church door with his father's key at six o'clock. Tarry service officially began at eight, but it could begin at any time, whenever the Lord moved one of the saints to enter the church and pray. It was seldom, however, that anyone arrived before eight thirty, the Spirit of the Lord being sufficiently tolerant to allow the saints time to do their Saturday-night shopping, clean their houses, and put their children to bed.

John closed the door behind him and stood in the narrow church aisle, hearing behind him the voices of children playing, and ruder voices, the voices of their elders, cursing and crying in the streets. It was dark in the church; street lights had been snapping on all around him on the populous avenue; the light of the day was gone. His feet seemed planted on this wooden floor; they did not wish to carry him one step further. The darkness and silence of the church pressed on him, cold as judgment, and the voices crying from the window might have been crying from another world. John moved forward, hearing his feet crack against the sagging wood, to where the golden cross on the red field of the altar cloth glowed like smothered fire, and switched on one weak light.

In the air of the church hung, perpetually, the odor of dust and sweat; for, like the carpet in his mother's living-room, the dust of this church was invincible; and when the saints were praying or rejoicing, their bodies gave off an acrid, steamy smell, a marriage of the odors of dripping bodies and soaking, starched white linen. It was a storefront church and had stood, for John's lifetime, on the corner of this sinful avenue, facing the hospital to which criminal wounded and dying were carried almost every night. The saints, arriving, had rented this abandoned store and taken out the fixtures; had painted the walls and built a pulpit, moved in a piano and camp chairs,

ONE

Florence's Prayer

Light and life to all He brings,
Risen with healing in His wings!

FLORENCE raised her voice in the only song she could remember that her mother used to sing:

"It's me, it's me, it's me, oh, Lord,
Standing in the need of prayer."

Gabriel turned to stare at her, in astonished triumph that his sister should at last be humbled. She did not look at him. Her thoughts were all on God. After a moment, the congregation and the piano joined her:

"Not my father, not my mother,
But it's me, oh, Lord."

She knew that Gabriel rejoiced, not that her humility might lead her to grace, but only that some private anguish had brought her low: her song revealed that she was suffering, and this her brother was glad to see. This had always been his spirit. Nothing had ever changed it; nothing ever would. For a moment her pride stood up; the resolution that had brought her to this place tonight faltered, and she felt that if Gabriel was the Lord's anointed, she would rather die and endure Hell for all eternity than bow before His altar. But she strangled her pride, rising to stand with them in the holy space before the altar, and still singing:

"Standing in the need of prayer."

Kneeling as she had not knelt for many years, and in this company before the altar, she gained again from the song the meaning it had held for her mother, and gained a new meaning for herself. As a child, the song had made her see a woman, dressed in black, standing in infinite mists alone, waiting for the form of the Son of God to lead her through that

white fire. This woman now returned to her, more desolate; it was herself, not knowing where to put her foot; she waited, trembling, for the mists to be parted that she might walk in peace. That long road, her life, which she had followed for sixty groaning years, had led her at last to her mother's starting-place, the altar of the Lord. For her feet stood on the edge of that river which her mother, rejoicing, had crossed over. And would the Lord now reach out His hand to Florence and heal and save? But, going down before the scarlet cloth at the foot of the golden cross, it came to her that she had forgotten how to pray.

Her mother had taught her that the way to pray was to forget everything and everyone but Jesus; to pour out of the heart, like water from a bucket, all evil thoughts, all thoughts of self, all malice for one's enemies; to come boldly, and yet more humbly than a little child, before the Giver of all good things. Yet, in Florence's heart tonight hatred and bitterness weighed like granite, pride refused to abdicate from the throne it had held so long. Neither love nor humility had led her to the altar, but only fear. And God did not hear the prayers of the fearful, for the hearts of the fearful held no belief. Such prayers could rise no higher than the lips that uttered them.

Around her she heard the saints' voices, a steady, charged murmur, with now and again the name of *Jesus* rising above, sometimes like the swift rising of a bird into the air of a sunny day, sometimes like the slow rising of the mist from swamp ground. Was this the way to pray? In the church that she had joined when she first came North one knelt before the altar once only, in the beginning, to ask forgiveness of sins; and this accomplished, one was baptized and became a Christian, to kneel no more thereafter. Even if the Lord should lay some great burden on one's back—as He had done, but never so heavy a burden as this she carried now—one prayed in silence. It was indecent, the practice of common niggers to cry aloud at the foot of the altar, tears streaming for all the world to see. She had never done it, not even as a girl down home in the church they had gone to in those days. Now perhaps it was too late, and the Lord would suffer her to die in the darkness in which she had lived so long.

In the olden days God had healed His children. He had caused the blind to see, the lame to walk, and He had raised dead men from the grave. But Florence remembered one phrase, which now she muttered against the knuckles that bruised her lips: "Lord, help my unbelief."

For the message had come to Florence that had come to Hezekiah: *Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live.* Many nights ago, as she turned on her bed, this message came to her. For many days and nights the message was repeated; there had been time, then, to turn to God. But she had thought to evade him, seeking among the women she knew for remedies; and then, because the pain increased, she had sought doctors; and when the doctors did no good she had climbed stairs all over town to rooms where incense burned and where men or women in traffic with the devil gave her white powders, or herbs to make tea, and cast spells upon her to take the sickness away. The burning in her bowels did not cease—that burning which, eating inward, took the flesh visibly from her bones and caused her to vomit up her food. Then one night she found death standing in the room. Blacker than night, and gigantic, he filled one corner of her narrow room, watching her with eyes like the eyes of a serpent when his head is lifted to strike. Then she screamed and called on God, turning on the light. And death departed, but she knew he would be back. Every night would bring him a little closer to her bed.

And after death's first silent vigil her life came to her bedside to curse her with many voices. Her mother, in rotting rags and filling the room with the stink of the grave, stood over her to curse the daughter who had denied her on her deathbed. Gabriel came, from all his times and ages, to curse the sister who had held him to scorn and mocked his ministry. Deborah, black, her body as shapeless and hard as iron, looked on with veiled, triumphant eyes, cursing the Florence who had mocked her in her pain and barrenness. Frank came, even he, with that same smile, the same tilt of his head. Of them all she would have begged forgiveness, had they come with ears to hear. But they came like many trumpets; even if they had come to hear and not to testify it was not they who could forgive her, but only God.

The piano had stopped. All around her now were only the voices of the saints.

"Dear Father"—it was her mother praying—"we come before You on our knees this evening to ask You to watch over us and hold back the hand of the destroying angel. Lord, sprinkle the doorpost of this house with the blood of the Lamb to keep all the wicked men away. Lord, we praying for every mother's son and daughter everywhere in the world but we want You to take special care of this girl here tonight, Lord, and don't let no evil come nigh her. We know you's able to do it, Lord, in Jesus' name, Amen."

This was the first prayer Florence heard, the only prayer she was ever to hear in which her mother demanded the protection of God more passionately for her daughter than she demanded it for her son. It was night, the windows were shut tightly with the shades drawn, and the great table was pushed against the door. The kerosene lamps burned low and made great shadows on the newspaper-covered wall. Her mother, dressed in the long, shapeless, colorless dress that she wore every day but Sunday, when she wore white, and with her head tied up in a scarlet cloth, knelt in the center of the room, her hands hanging loosely folded before her, her black face lifted, her eyes shut. The weak, unsteady light placed shadows under her mouth and in the sockets of her eyes, making the face impersonal with majesty, like the face of a prophetess, or like a mask. Silence filled the room after her "Amen," and in the silence they heard, far up the road, the sound of a horse's hoofs. No one moved. Gabriel, from his corner near the stove, looked up and watched his mother.

"I ain't afraid," said Gabriel.

His mother turned, one hand raised. "You hush, now!"

Trouble had taken place in town today. Their neighbor Deborah, who was sixteen, three years older than Florence, had been taken away into the fields the night before by many white men, where they did things to her to make her cry and bleed. Today, Deborah's father had gone to one of the white men's houses, and said that he would kill him and all the other white men he could find. They had beaten him and left him for dead. Now, everyone had shut their doors, praying and waiting, for it was said that the white folks would come tonight and set fire to all the houses, as they had done before.

In the night that pressed outside they heard only the horse's hoofs, which did not stop; there was not the laughter they would have heard had there been many coming on this road, and no calling out of curses, and no one crying for mercy to white men, or to God. The hoofbeats came to the door and passed, and rang, while they listened, ever more faintly away. Then Florence realized how frightened she had been. She watched her mother rise and walk to the window. She peered out through a corner of the blanket that covered it.

"They's gone," she said, "whoever they was." Then: "Blessed be the name of the Lord," she said.

Thus had her mother lived and died; and she had often been brought low, but she had never been forsaken. She had always seemed to Florence the oldest woman in the world, for she often spoke of Florence and Gabriel as the children of her old age, and she had been born, innumerable years ago, during slavery, on a plantation in another state. On this plantation she had grown up as one of the field workers, for she was very tall and strong; and by and by she had married and raised children, all of whom had been taken from her, one by sickness and two by auction; and one, whom she had not been allowed to call her own, had been raised in the master's house. When she was a woman grown, well past thirty as she reckoned it, with one husband buried—but the master had given her another—armies, plundering and burning, had come from the North to set them free. This was in answer to the prayers of the faithful, who had never ceased, both day and night, to cry out for deliverance.

For it had been the will of God that they should hear, and pass thereafter, one to another, the story of the Hebrew children who had been held in bondage in the land of Egypt; and how the Lord had heard their groaning, and how His heart was moved; and how He bid them wait but a little season till He should send deliverance. Florence's mother had known this story, so it seemed, from the day that she was born. And while she lived—rising in the morning before the sun came up, standing and bending in the fields when the sun was high, crossing the fields homeward while the sun went down at the

gates of Heaven far away, hearing the whistle of the foreman and his eerie cry across the fields; in the whiteness of winter when hogs and turkeys and geese were slaughtered, and lights burned bright in the big house, and Bathsheba, the cook, sent over in a napkin bits of ham and chicken and cakes left over by the white folks—in all that befell: in her joys, her pipe in the evening, her man at night, the children she suckled, and guided on their first short steps; and in her tribulations, death, and parting, and the lash, she did not forget that deliverance was promised and would surely come. She had only to endure and trust in God. She knew that the big house, the house of pride where the white folks lived, would come down: it was written in the Word of God. They, who walked so proudly now, had not fashioned for themselves or their children so sure a foundation as was hers. They walked on the edge of a steep place and their eyes were sightless—God would cause them to rush down, as the herd of swine had once rushed down, into the sea. For all that they were so beautiful, and took their ease, she knew them, and she pitied them, who would have no covering in the great day of His wrath.

Yet, she told her children, God was just, and He struck no people without first giving many warnings. God gave men time, but all the times were in His hand, and one day the time to forsake evil and do good would all be finished: then only the whirlwind, death riding on the whirlwind, awaited those people who had forgotten God. In all the days that she was growing up, signs failed not, but none heeded. "Slaves done ris," was whispered in the cabin and at the master's gate: slaves in another county had fired the masters' houses and fields and dashed their children to death against the stones. "Another slave in hell," Bathsheba might say one morning, shooing the pickaninnies away from the great porch: a slave had killed his master, or his overseer, and had gone down to Hell to pay for it. "I ain't got long to stay here," someone crooned beside her in the fields, someone who would be gone by morning on his journey north. All these signs, like the plagues with which the Lord had afflicted Egypt, only hardened the hearts of these people against the Lord. They thought the lash would save them, and they used the lash; or the knife, or the gallows, or the auction block; they thought

that kindness would save them, and the master and mistress came down, smiling, to the cabins, making much of the pickaninnies and bearing gifts. These were great days, and they all, black and white, seemed happy together. But when the Word has gone forth from the mouth of God nothing can turn it back.

The word was fulfilled one morning, before she was awake. Many of the stories her mother told meant nothing to Florence; she knew them for what they were, tales told by an old black woman in a cabin in the evening to distract her children from their cold and hunger. But the story of this day she was never to forget; it was a day for which she lived. There was a great running and shouting, said her mother, everywhere outside, and, as she opened her eyes to the light of that day, so bright, she said, and cold, she was certain that the judgment trumpet had sounded. While she still sat, amazed, and wondering what, on the judgment day, would be the best behavior, in rushed Bathsheba, and behind her many tumbling children and field hands and house niggers, all together, and Bathsheba shouted: "Rise up, rise up, Sister Rachel, and see the Lord's deliverance! He done brought us out of Egypt, just like He promised, and we's free at last!" Bathsheba grabbed her, tears running down her face; she, dressed in the clothes in which she had slept, walked to the door to look out on the new day God had given them.

On that day she saw the proud house humbled; green silk and velvet blowing out of windows, and the garden trampled by many horsemen, and the big gate open. The master and mistress, and their kin, and one child she had borne were in that house—which she did not enter. Soon it occurred to her that there was no longer any reason to tarry here. She tied her things in a cloth that she put on her head, and walked out through the big gate, never to see that country any more.

And this became Florence's deep ambition: to walk out one morning through the cabin door, never to return. Her father, whom she scarcely remembered, had departed that way one morning not many months after the birth of Gabriel. And not only her father; every day she heard that another man or woman had said farewell to this iron earth and sky, and started on the journey north. But her mother had no wish to go

North where, she said, wickedness dwelt and Death rode mighty through the streets. She was content to stay in this cabin and do washing for the white folks, though she was old and her back was sore. And she wanted Florence, also, to be content—helping with the washing, and fixing meals and keeping Gabriel quiet.

Gabriel was the apple of his mother's eye. If he had never been born, Florence might have looked forward to a day when she would be released from her unrewarding round of labor, when she might think of her own future and go out to make it. With the birth of Gabriel, which occurred when she was five, her future was swallowed up. There was only one future in that house, and it was Gabriel's—to which, since Gabriel was a man-child, all else must be sacrificed. Her mother did not, indeed, think of it as sacrifice, but as logic: Florence was a girl, and would by and by be married, and have children of her own, and all the duties of a woman; and this being so, her life in the cabin was the best possible preparation for her future life. But Gabriel was a man; he would go out one day into the world to do a man's work, and he needed, therefore, meat, when there was any in the house, and clothes, whenever clothes could be bought, and the strong indulgence of his womenfolk, so that he would know how to be with women when he had a wife. And he needed the education that Florence desired far more than he, and that she might have got if he had not been born. It was Gabriel who was slapped and scrubbed each morning and sent off to the one-room schoolhouse—which he hated, and where he managed to learn, so far as Florence could discover, almost nothing at all. And often he was not at school, but getting into mischief with other boys. Almost all of their neighbors, and even some of the white folks, came at one time or another to complain of Gabriel's wrongdoing. Their mother would walk out into the yard and cut a switch from a tree and beat him—beat him, it seemed to Florence, until any other boy would have fallen down dead; and so often that any other boy would have ceased his wickedness. Nothing stopped Gabriel, though he made Heaven roar with his howling, though he screamed aloud, as his mother approached, that he would never be such a bad boy again. And, after the beating, his pants still down around his knees and his face wet with tears and mucus, Gabriel was made to kneel down while his mother prayed. She asked Florence to pray, too, but in her heart Florence never prayed. She hoped that Gabriel would break his neck. She wanted the evil against which their mother prayed to overtake him one day.

In those days Florence and Deborah, who had become close friends after Deborah's "accident," hated all men. When men looked at Deborah they saw no further than her unlovely and violated body. In their eyes lived perpetually a lewd, uneasy wonder concerning the night she had been taken in the fields. That night had robbed her of the right to be considered a woman. No man would approach her in honor because she was a living reproach, to herself and to all black women and to all black men. If she had been beautiful, and if God had not given her a spirit so demure, she might, with ironic gusto, have acted out that rape in the fields forever. Since she could not be considered a woman, she could only be looked on as a harlot, a source of delights more bestial and mysteries more shaking than any a proper woman could provide. Lust stirred in the eyes of men when they looked at Deborah, lust that could not be endured because it was so impersonal, limiting communion to the area of her shame. And Florence, who was beautiful but did not look with favor on any of the black men who lusted after her, not wishing to exchange her mother's cabin for one of theirs and to raise their children and so go down, toil-blasted, into as it were a common grave, reinforced in Deborah the terrible belief against which no evidence had ever presented itself: that all men were like this, their thoughts rose no higher, and they lived only to gratify on the bodies of women their brutal and humiliating needs.

One Sunday at a camp-meeting, when Gabriel was twelve years old and was to be baptized, Deborah and Florence stood on the banks of a river along with all the other folks and watched him. Gabriel had not wished to be baptized. The thought had frightened and angered him, but his mother insisted that Gabriel was now of an age to be responsible before God for his sins—she would not shirk the duty, laid on her by the Lord, of doing everything within her power to bring him to the throne of grace. On the banks of a river, under

the violent light of noon, confessed believers and children of Gabriel's age waited to be led into the water. Standing out, waist-deep and robed in white, was the preacher, who would hold their heads briefly under water, crying out to Heaven as the baptized held his breath: "I indeed have baptized you with water: but He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost." Then, as they rose sputtering and blinded and were led to the shore, he cried out again: "Go thou and sin no more." They came up from the water, visibly under the power of the Lord, and on the shore the saints awaited them, beating their tambourines. Standing near the shore were the elders of the church, holding towels with which to cover the newly baptized, who were then led into the tents, one for either sex, where they could change their clothes.

At last, Gabriel, dressed in an old white shirt and short linen pants, stood on the edge of the water. Then he was slowly led into the river, where he had so often splashed naked, until he reached the preacher. And the moment that the preacher threw him down, crying out the words of John the Baptist, Gabriel began to kick and sputter, nearly throwing the preacher off balance; and though at first they thought that it was the power of the Lord that worked in him, they realized as he rose, still kicking and with his eyes tightly shut, that it was only fury, and too much water in his nose. Some folks smiled, but Florence and Deborah did not smile. Though Florence had also been indignant, years before when the slimy water entered her incautiously open mouth, she had done her best not to sputter, and she had not cried out. But now, here came Gabriel, floundering and furious up the bank, and what she looked at, with an anger more violent than any she had felt before, was his nakedness. He was drenched, and his thin, white clothes clung like another skin to his black body. Florence and Deborah looked at one another, while the singing rose to cover Gabriel's howling, and Deborah looked away.

Years later, Deborah and Florence had stood on Deborah's porch at night and watched a vomit-covered Gabriel stagger up the moonlit road, and Florence had cried out: "I hate him! I hate him! Big, black, prancing tomcat of a nigger!" And Deborah had said, in that heavy voice of hers: "You know, honey, the Word tell us to hate the sin but not the sinner."

In nineteen hundred, when she was twenty-six, Florence walked out through the cabin door. She had thought to wait until her mother, who was so ill now that she no longer stirred out of bed, should be buried—but suddenly she knew that she would wait no longer, the time had come. She had been working as cook and serving-girl for a large white family in town, and it was on the day her master proposed that she become his concubine that she knew her life among these wretched had come to its destined end. She left her employment that same day (leaving behind her a most vehement conjugal bitterness), and with part of the money that with cunning, cruelty, and sacrifice she had saved over a period of years, bought a railroad ticket to New York. When she bought it, in a kind of scarlet rage, she held like a talisman at the back of her mind the thought: "I can give it back, I can sell it. This don't mean I got to go." But she knew that nothing could stop her.

And it was this leave-taking that came to stand, in Florence's latter days, and with many another witness, at her bedside. Gray clouds obscured the sun that day, and outside the cabin window she saw that mist still covered the ground. Her mother lay in bed, awake; she was pleading with Gabriel, who had been out drinking the night before, and who was not really sober now, to mend his ways and come to the Lord. And Gabriel, full of the confusion, and pain, and guilt that were his whenever he thought of how he made his mother suffer, but that became nearly insupportable when she taxed him with it, stood before the mirror, head bowed, buttoning his shirt. Florence knew that he could not unlock his lips to speak; he could not say yes to his mother, and to the Lord; and he could not say no.

"Honey," their mother was saying, "don't you *let* your old mother die without you look her in the eye and tell her she going to see you in glory. You hear me, boy?"

In a moment, Florence thought with scorn, tears would fill his eyes, and he would promise to "do better." He had been promising to "do better" since the day he had been baptized.

She put down her bag in the center of the hateful room.

"Ma," she said, "I'm going. I'm a-going this morning."

Now that she had said it, she was angry with herself for not

having said it the night before, so that they would have had time to be finished with their weeping and their arguments. She had not trusted herself to withstand the night before; but now there was almost no time left. The center of her mind was filled with the image of the great, white clock at the railway station, on which the hands did not cease to move.

"You going where?" her mother asked sharply. But she knew that her mother had understood, had indeed long before this moment known that this time would come. The astonishment with which she stared at Florence's bag was not altogether astonishment, but a startled, wary attention. A danger imagined had become present and real, and her mother was already searching for a way to break Florence's will. All this Florence knew in a moment, and it made her stronger. She watched her mother, waiting.

But at the tone of his mother's voice Gabriel, who had scarcely heard Florence's announcement, so grateful had he been that something had occurred to distract from him his mother's attention, dropped his eyes and saw Florence's traveling-bag. And he repeated his mother's question in a stunned, angry voice, understanding it only as the words hit the air:

"Yes, girl. Where you think you going?"

"I'm going," she said, "to New York. I got my ticket."

And her mother watched her. For a moment no one said a word. Then, Gabriel, in a changed and frightened voice, asked:

"And when you done decide that?"

She did not look at him, nor answer his question. She continued to watch her mother. "I got my ticket," she repeated. "I'm going on the morning train."

"Girl," asked her mother, quietly, "is you sure you know what you's doing?"

She stiffened, seeing in her mother's eyes a mocking pity. "I'm a woman grown," she said. "I know what I'm doing."

"And you going," cried Gabriel, "this morning—just like that? And you going to walk off and leave your mother—just like that?"

"You hush," she said, turning to him for the first time, "she got you, ain't she?"

This was indeed, she realized as he dropped his eyes, the bitter, troubling point. He could not endure the thought of being left alone with his mother, with nothing whatever to put between himself and his guilty love. With Florence gone, time would have swallowed up all his mother's children, except himself; and *he*, then, must make amends for all the pain that she had borne, and sweeten her last moments with all his proofs of love. And his mother required of him one proof only, that he tarry no longer in sin. With Florence gone, his stammering time, his playing time, contracted with a bound to the sparest interrogative second, when he must stiffen himself, and answer to his mother, and all the host of Heaven, yes or no.

Florence smiled inwardly a small, malicious smile, watching his slow bafflement, and panic, and rage; and she looked at her mother again. "She got you," she repeated. "She don't need me."

"You going north," her mother said, then. "And when you reckon on coming back?"

"I don't reckon on coming back," she said.

"You come crying back soon enough," said Gabriel, with malevolence, "soon as they whip your butt up there four or five times."

She looked at him again. "Just don't you try to hold your breath till then, you hear?"

"Girl," said her mother, "you mean to tell me the Devil's done made your heart so hard you can just leave your mother on her dying bed, and you don't care if you don't never see her in this world no more? Honey, you can't tell me you done got so evil as all that?"

She felt Gabriel watching her to see how she would take this question—the question that, for all her determination, she had dreaded most to hear. She looked away from her mother, and straightened, catching her breath, looking outward through the small, cracked window. There, outside, beyond the slowly rising mist, and farther off than her eyes could see, her life awaited her. The woman on the bed was old, her life was fading as the mist rose. She thought of her mother as already in the grave; and she would not let herself be strangled by the hands of the dead.

"I'm going, Ma," she said. "I got to go."

Her mother leaned back, face upward to the light, and began to cry. Gabriel moved to Florence's side and grabbed her arm. She looked up into his face and saw that his eyes were full of tears.

"You can't go," he said. "You can't go. You can't go and leave your mother thisaway. She need a woman, Florence, to help look after her. What she going to do here, all alone with me?"

She pushed him from her and moved to stand over her mother's bed.

"Ma," she said, "don't be like that. Ain't a blessed thing for you to cry about so. Ain't a thing can happen to me up North can't happen to me here. God's everywhere, Ma. Ain't no need to worry."

She knew that she was mouthing words; and she realized suddenly that her mother scorned to dignify these words with her attention. She had granted Florence the victory—with a promptness that had the effect of making Florence, however dimly and unwillingly, wonder if her victory was real. She was not weeping for her daughter's future, she was weeping for the past, and weeping in an anguish in which Florence had no part. And all of this filled Florence with a terrible fear, which was immediately transformed into anger. "Gabriel can take care of you," she said, her voice shaking with malice. "Gabriel ain't never going to leave you. Is you, boy?" and she looked at him. He stood, stupid with bewilderment and grief, a few inches from the bed. "But me," she said, "I got to go." She walked to the center of the room again, and picked up her bag.

"Girl," Gabriel whispered, "ain't you got no feelings at *all*?"

"Lord!" her mother cried; and at the sound her heart turned over; she and Gabriel, arrested, stared at the bed. "Lord, Lord, Lord! Lord, have mercy on my sinful daughter! Stretch out your hand and hold her back from the lake that burns forever! Oh, my Lord, my Lord!" and her voice dropped, and broke, and tears ran down her face. "Lord, I done my best with all the children what you give me. Lord, have mercy on my children, and my children's children."

"Florence," said Gabriel, "please don't go. Please don't go. You ain't really fixing to go and leave her like this?"

Tears stood suddenly in her own eyes, though she could not have said what she was crying for. "Leave me be," she said to Gabriel, and picked up her bag again. She opened the door; the cold, morning air came in. "Good-by," she said. And then to Gabriel: "Tell her I said good-by." She walked through the cabin door and down the short steps into the frosty yard. Gabriel watched her, standing frozen between the door and the weeping bed. Then, as her hand was on the gate, he ran before her, and slammed the gate shut.

"Girl, where you going? What you doing? You reckon on finding some men up North to dress you in pearls and diamonds?"

Violently, she opened the gate and moved out into the road. He watched her with his jaw hanging, and his lips loose and wet. "If you ever see me again," she said, "I won't be wearing rags like yours."

All over the church there was only the sound, more awful than the deepest silence, of the prayers of the saints of God. Only the yellow, moaning light shone above them, making their faces gleam like muddy gold. Their faces, and their attitudes, and their many voices rising as one voice made John think of the deepest valley, the longest night, of Peter and Paul in the dungeon cell, one praying while the other sang; or of endless, depthless, swelling water, and no dry land in sight, the true believer clinging to a spar. And, thinking of tomorrow, when the church would rise up, singing, under the booming Sunday light, he thought of the light for which they tarried, which, in an instant, filled the soul, causing (throughout those iron-dark, unimaginable ages before John had come into the world) the new-born in Christ to testify: Once I was blind and now I see.

And then they sang: "Walk in the light, the beautiful light. Shine all around me by day and by night, Jesus, the light of the world." And they sang: "Oh, Lord, Lord, I want to be ready, I want to be ready. I want to be ready to walk in Jerusalem just like John."

To walk in Jerusalem just like John. Tonight, his mind was

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vain sorrow—feeling himself to have been, once more, most foully robbed, having spent his holy seed in a forbidden darkness where it could only die. He cursed the betraying lust that lived in him, and he cursed it again in others. But: "I remember," he was later to say, "the day my dungeon shook and my chains fell off."

And he walked homeward, thinking of the night behind him. He had seen the woman at the very beginning of the evening, but she had been with many others, men and women, and so he had ignored her. But later, when he was on fire with whisky, he looked again directly at her, and saw [illegible] that she had also been thinking of him. There [illegible] was as though she had

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THE FIRE NEXT TIME

"Searing . . . brilliant . . . masterful."

—*The New York Times*

"God gave Noah the rainbow sign,
No more water, the fire next time!"

MY DUNGEON SHOOK

Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation

Dear James:

I HAVE BEGUN this letter five times and torn it up five times. I keep seeing your face, which is also the face of your father and my brother. Like him, you are tough, dark, vulnerable, moody—

with a very definite tendency to sound truculent because you want no one to think you are soft. You may be like your grandfather in this, I don't know, but certainly both you and your father resemble him very much physically. Well, he is dead, he never saw you, and he had a terrible life; he was defeated long before he died because, at the bottom of his heart, he really believed what white people said about him. This is one of the reasons that he became so holy. I am sure that your father has told you something about all that. Neither you nor your father exhibit any tendency towards holiness: you really *are* of another era, part of what happened when the Negro left the land and came into what the late E. Franklin Frazier called "the cities of destruction." You can only be destroyed by believing that you really are what the white world calls a *nigger*. I tell you this because I love you, and please don't you ever forget it.

I have known both of you all your lives, have carried your Daddy in my arms and on my shoulders, kissed and spanked him and watched him learn to walk. I don't know if you've known anybody from that far back; if you've loved anybody that long, first as an infant, then as a child, then as a man, you gain a strange perspective on time and human pain and effort. Other people cannot see

what I see whenever I look into your father's face, for behind your father's face as it is today are all those other faces which were his. Let him laugh and I see a cellar your father does not remember and a house he does not remember and I hear in his present laughter his laughter as a child. Let him curse and I remember him falling down the cellar steps, and howling, and I remember, with pain, his tears, which my hand or your grandmother's so easily wiped away. But no one's hand can wipe away those tears he sheds invisibly today, which one hears in his laughter and in his speech and in his songs. I know what the world has done to my brother and how narrowly he has survived it. And I know, which is much worse, and this is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it. One can be, indeed one must strive to become, tough and philosophical concerning destruction and death, for this is what most of mankind has been best at since we have heard of man. (But remember: *most* of mankind is not *all* of mankind.) But it is not permissible that the authors of devastation should also

be innocent. It is the innocence which constitutes the crime.

Now, my dear namesake, these innocent and well-meaning people, your countrymen, have caused you to be born under conditions not very far removed from those described for us by Charles Dickens in the London of more than a hundred years ago. (I hear the chorus of the innocents screaming, "No! This is not true! How *bitter* you are!"—but I am writing this letter to *you*, to try to tell you something about how to handle *them*, for most of them do not yet really know that you exist. I *know* the conditions under which you were born, for I was there. Your countrymen were *not* there, and haven't made it yet. Your grandmother was also there, and no one has ever accused her of being bitter. I suggest that the innocents check with her. She isn't hard to find. Your countrymen don't know that *she* exists, either, though she has been working for them all their lives.)

Well, you were born, here you came, something like fifteen years ago; and though your father and mother and grandmother, looking about the streets through which they were carrying you, staring at the walls into which they brought you, had every reason to be heavyhearted, yet they were not. For here you were, Big James, named for me—you were

a big baby, I was not—here you were: to be loved. To be loved, baby, hard, at once, and forever, to strengthen you against the loveless world. Remember that: I know how black it looks today, for you. It looked bad that day, too, yes, we were trembling. We have not stopped trembling yet, but if we had not loved each other none of us would have survived. And now you must survive because we love you, and for the sake of your children and your children's children.

This innocent country set you down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should perish. Let me spell out precisely what I mean by that, for the heart of the matter is here, and the root of my dispute with my country. You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and *for no other reason*. The limits of your ambition were, thus, expected to be set forever. You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being. You were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to make peace with mediocrity. Wherever you have turned, James, in your short time on this earth, you have been told where you could go and what you could do (and *how* you could do it) and where you could live

and whom you could marry. I know your countrymen do not agree with me about this, and I hear them saying, "You exaggerate." They do not know Harlem, and I do. So do you. Take no one's word for anything, including mine—but trust your experience. Know whence you came. If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go. The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you. Please try to remember that what they believe, as well as what they do and cause you to endure, does not testify to your inferiority but to their inhumanity and fear. Please try to be clear, dear James, through the storm which rages about your youthful head today, about the reality which lies behind the words *acceptance* and *integration*. There is no reason for you to try to become like white people and there is no basis whatever for their impertinent assumption that *they* must accept *you*. The really terrible thing, old buddy, is that *you* must accept *them*. And I mean that very seriously. You must accept them and accept them with love. For these innocent people have no other hope. They are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it. They have had to believe

for many years, and for innumerable reasons, that black men are inferior to white men. Many of them, indeed, know better, but, as you will discover, people find it very difficult to act on what they know. To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger. In this case, the danger, in the minds of most white Americans, is the loss of their identity. Try to imagine how you would feel if you woke up one morning to find the sun shining and all the stars aflame. You would be frightened because it is out of the order of nature. Any upheaval in the universe is terrifying because it so profoundly attacks one's sense of one's own reality. Well, the black man has functioned in the white man's world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations. You, don't be afraid. I said that it was intended that you should perish in the ghetto, perish by never being allowed to go behind the white man's definitions, by never being allowed to spell your proper name. You have, and many of us have, defeated this intention; and, by a terrible law, a terrible paradox, those innocents who believed that your imprisonment made them safe are losing their grasp of reality. But these men are your brothers—your lost, younger brothers. And if the word *integration* means anything, this

is what it means: that we, with love, shall forc our brothers to see themselves as they are, to ceas fleeing from reality and begin to change it. Foı this is your home, my friend, do not be driven from it; great men have done great things here, and will again, and we can make America what America must become. It will be hard, James, but you come from sturdy, peasant stock, men who picked cotton and dammed rivers and built railroads, and, in the teeth of the most terrifying odds, achieved an unassailable and monumental dignity. You come from a long line of great poets, some of the greatest poets since Homer. One of them said, *The very time I thought I was lost, My dungeon shook and my chains fell off.*

You know, and I know, that the country is celebrating one hundred years of freedom one hundred years too soon. We cannot be free until they are free. God bless you, James, and Godspeed.

Your uncle,
James