



JChap 7

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Victory might remember. He was Joe's best friend, and they hunted through and worked in that whole county. Not even a police map would show the walnut tree Joe fell out of, but Victory would remember it. It could be there still, in somebody's backyard, but the cotton fields and the colored neighborhood around them were churned up and pressed down. One week of rumors, two days of packing, and 900 Negroes, encouraged by guns and hemp, rode out of town on wagons or walked on their feet to who knew (or cared) where. With two days notice? How can you plan where to go and if you do know of a place you think will welcome you, where is the money to arrive?

They stood around at depots, camped in fields on the edge of the road in clusters until shooed away for being the blight that had been visited upon them--for reflecting like still water the disconsolateness they certainly felt, and for reminding other about the wages sin paid out to its laborers.

They burnt the canefield where Wild hid, or watched, or laughed out loud, or stayed quiet. The sugar smell lingered in the smoke--weighting it. Would she know? Would she understand that fire was not light or flowers moving toward her, or flying golden hair? That if you tried to touch or kiss it, it would swallow all your breath away?

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The little graveyards, with hand made crosses and sometimes a stone marker pleading for remembrance in careful block letters, never stood a chance. hedges and hedges of wild hibiscus.

Hunter refused to leave; he was more in the woods than in his cabin anyway, and seemed to look forward to spending his last days in the places he felt most comfortable. So he didn't haul the gear he collected to a wagon. Or walk the road to X as Joe and Victory did to look for a workplace. Some farm that gave you space to sleep and food in return for clearing brush. Or a mill that had a bunkhouse. Joe and Victory walked the road along with the others and knew they were near Crossland when they passed the walnut tree where they used to sleep on nights when, hunting far from home, cool air could only be found high in its branches. And when they looked back down the road, they could still see smoke lifting from what was left of the fields and the cane of Vernonsville.

They both found work at a sawmill, then at x, then x, x. Then one spring the southern third of the county erupted in fat white cotton balls, and Joe left Victory at X for the lucrative crop picking outside Crossland. But first, first he had to know if the woman he believed was his mother was still there--or had she confused fire with hair and lost her breath to it.

[1. Joe goes back, tracks back to see if Wild is still there. that encounter depletes him.

2. Later when he meets Violet, by falling out of the walnut tree, he is content to marry her and leave the area.

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3. "He could feel Victory..." tracking Dorcus in the city.
and 4. Details of his meeting with Wild: deep blue evening sky
and her hiding behind hedges and hedges of wild hibiscus.

5. "So when he closed in..." Arriving at Dorcus' party.]
As he tracks Dorcus, he could almost feel Victory by his side
or Hunter, even, applauding when he got the scent; chuckling and
shaking their heads when he lost it.

[Joe's meeting with Wild is ambiguous: did she acknowledge
that she was his mother?]

When he closed in, there was neither blue water nor flowers
of any kind.

Violent invited her in, and the girl,
went, smiling, eager even, to see the photograph of the girl
she was so much prettier than.

Violent and Joe lived 2J. Two bedrooms, a big dining room,
and situated as it was in the middle of the hall the windows gave
no view. The bathroom has the best light, since it jutted out past
the kitchen and caught the afternoon light anyway. Still it was one
of the nicest in the building. Cozy. And the two of them had
arranged their things in a way that might not have reminded anybody
of those color pictures in (tk) magazine, but it suited the habits
of the body: the way a person walked from one room to another, and
what he wanted to do when he sat down. You know how some people
put a chair or a table in a corner where it looks nice but nobody
in the world is ever going to go over to it, let alone sit down
there? Violent didn't do that in her apartment. Every thing was