

perfunctorily
carefully, not because she dreaded Mattie and Zeke's disapproval but because it was simpler and she had nothing better to do. Lola never analyzed her feelings for others in her life. She just functioned and *accepted* ~~enjoyed~~ whatever happened to be available at the time.

Chapter 3

Just draft

The cotton harvesting season came to an end and with it came winter in south east Georgia. Increasing cold temperatures brought increasing responsibilities for Lola because Rosie had moved "on the hill" with George, and Lola was given the additional chores of cooking and caring for her two younger sisters and brother: Mattie, 2, Nollie, 4, and Abraham, five years old.

fall dry and refined mildness before succumbing to the ceaseless wetness tormented name

The weekly washing for the family was particularly difficult for Lola because she had to draw and carry water from the caving, brick well in the back yard under the chinaberry tree to the iron wash pot in the front yard. She had to build a fire under it to heat the water, after chopping and carrying wood from the woodpile near the well.

who were unaware of any significant change in the household because of their preoccupations with winter difficulties, reparations to those ministered to their needs or did not minister to their needs.

She stirred the clothes, almost buckling under the weight of the heavy paddles tangling in them.

stubborn garments unworthy of the effort exerted in the process of washing and drying only to become dirty again.

times barely escaping boiling itself as she nearly tumbled into the boiling brime. However, wash day was one of the few times that Lola was warm enough during the cold winter and the smaller children were an added burden also because drawn by the warmth of the fire, they would often wander dangerously close to be shoved back by Lola with the paddle, like the clothes within the pot, objects of strife and burden a wash day.

bubbling and hissing in its attempt to annihilate the filth only to permanently embed the dinge as in the dye former, like dye like grey dye.

Food was not only a problem to cook in the old wood stove which belched smoke so thick that the shanty was practically opaque at times and quickly devoured the small armloads of heavy wood brought in by Lola, but it was also, for the most part, her responsibility to find it.

locate and procure it

Frequently, Lola would sneak next door to Deke's garden and steal some scraggly, buggy turnips, hastily returning to a pot of already

turnips or collards, green and black alive in their neat rows or ruffled earth, tended and flourishing in contrast to pole mae's winter whipped surroundings. Hissed, snatching the plants from their secure beds, eyes fixed on the owners

house, she would dash back across the boundary of contrasting kept and unkept space and

(miggardly, winter-whipped surroundings)

boiling water and plop them in as they had been pulled ^{water} ^{then} ^{with} ^{and} ^{simmer} ^{many} ^{times} ^{they} ^{previously} ^{through} ^{her} ^{nose} ^{and} ^{smell} ^{many} ^{times} ^{she} ^{was} ^{finally} ^{caught} ^{times} ^{she} ^{was} ^{caught} ^{and} ^{scolded} ^{by} ^{Deke's} ^{daughter}, ^{Lucy}, ^{who} ^{was} ^{sixteen} ^{years} ^{old}. If Mr. Deke caught her it was no problem, he would just give her a firm shaking of his finger but feeling sorry for her he would do nothing more.

Nicknamed Deke because he had been a deacon of the church in good standing for nine years, he was a kind man, small in stature, with light colored skin. His toothless, friendly smile and shiny hairless head gave the impression of a beaming baby. His greatest delights in life were his daughter and languishing on the dapple-shaded banks of the river waiting for a fish to grab his hook.

Lucy's skin was even lighter than her fathers, emphasized by her full-bodied hair worn severly drawn into a bun on the back of her finely sculpted head, as if to eliminate any misconception of untidiness. Her delicately shaped body was concealed in a starched print shift, the crispness seeming to have been applied likewise to her full but drawn mouth. To Lola she was quite lovely, and to everyone else, although she was never quite accepted by the residents of Seymore because of her lofty attitude.

Lucy was employed as a maid for a white lady in Valdosta, traveling daily by train from the commissary depot. Her mother having died when she was ~~sten~~ years old, she and Deke had moved to Seymore because he could no longer find work in North Georgia and because Lucy was so grief stricken in her departed mother's surroundings.

Lucy was the product of a starch but loving home. Even as a small child, Lucy refused to participate in the uninhibited play of her black peers and secretly resented being a member of the negro race.

"Honey Chile, whyn't you go on out and play with those chilluns yonder?" her mother asked, gently patting Lucy's tightly bound braids, pointing to the open door at the children rolling in the red clay ditch beyond.

"I don't want to play with them. They stink."

Now, chile, that ain't no way to be. You ain't never playing. Just sitting around with an old woman ain't no way for a little girl. Sides you ain't going to smell them out there in the spanking, clean air. You ain't got to 'sociate with them, just play."

"Mama, I ain't playing with them."

"O.K., baby, but you sure missing some fun."

Then she would go on about her business of cleaning and cooking in the kept cabin, while Lucy would watch the children playing and feel only a sense of revulsion for the clay-crusted black bodies. At times she even felt revulsion for her own brown tinted skin. She longed to be white and have straight hair like the white girls she saw at school, whom she would not have dared to approach for fear of rejection.

She caught the lost stitch on the doily she was crocheting; preferring the emptiness of being alone to the company of the black children; feeling that she belonged to neither side but

somewhere in between - alone in her own race.

Deke was painfully aware of his daughters resentment and after years of trying to draw her out of her inhibitions, had finally decided to accept her as the dour but beautiful person that she was. Her mother's teachings of dignity had been well intentioned but had some how been perceived as stringent warnings of integrating with her own race. Therefore, Lucy chose a life of solitude.

Lucy became the epitome of efficiency, and when she was not working in town, she was cleaning her own house and planting her even-rowed garden. Consequently, her surroundings were impeccable as was her appearance, even though her clothes were old and worn. The fact that her immediate surroundings and austere image were beyond reproach emphasized even more her uniqueness and isolated her from their neighbors.

One cold night as Lola was outside gathering firewood, she heard a car stop. Few cars passed through Seymore, particularly at night, and Lola was curious as she heard the car doors slam and two loud voices, laughing mischievously. Frightened at first, she hid close by the house and watched as Lucy's front door opened and the light from the kerosene lamps cast a glow on the white faces of two young boys. One was holding a whiskey bottle and leering at her standing in the door, while the other nearest her reached out and grabbed at her. Lucy tryed to move her rigid body backwards as her face remained unresponsive.

"Where's your old man? asked the other boy.

"He be out trapping," she said, trying to remain calm. Both boys laughed as they stepped bravely inside, slamming the door;

cutting off Lola's view. However, she could still hear bits of the conversation from her hiding place as she stood shivering from fear and cold.

"We been watching you prissing around Miss Martha's, cleaning and fixing, high falutin' and snotty; so we figured to teach you some manners and take you down a notch or two, nigger gal," said one of them. The sound of breaking glass followed and a muffled scream.

"Now that just ain't friendly a tall, gal. If you ain't wanting your old man hurt, you'll give us what we came for and we'll be on our way before he gets back and he won't be missing none nohow."

Fiendish laughter filtered through the hovel walls, causing Lola to press in closer to the familiar cold boards of her shanty. Silence and much scuffling followed, then familiar grunting sounds began and Lola knew from having heard them from Big Mo what was happening.

Trying to blot out the licentious episode in progress next door, she turned the corner of the house, still holding the firewood, and went inside. A short while later she heard the car drive quietly away. After that night Lucy became even more aloof, and Lola was to witness much of the same in the months to come.

Mama continued to work for Miz June even though her drinking increased and Big Mo still made his presence known with his loud guffaws and occasional scanty contributions to their limited fare. Lola, as partial provider, began more and more to welcome the provisions he supplied.

One night he walked in with a large hog slung over his massive shoulders, stuck and bleeding, plopped it on the floor,

and announced, "I done got a hoag for us." It had been a long time since that much meat had been in the house and everyone was quite excited, exclaiming over the huge carcass, never questioning the source of their good fortune. Scooping up the bristley animal once more, he headed for the back door and into the yard with Mama and all the kids in tow. He built a rolling fire under the wash pot with wood supplied by the children and filled the pot with water lugged to the site by the shivering young ones also. When the water began to boil, he extracted from his tar-stained pocket a snuff can of tar which he added to the water to make the hair of the hog eaiser to remove. He then threw the hog in, legs dangling out. After a time the hair was loosened and he removed it from the water with a hoe borrowed from Lucy's garden fence. Then he laid it out on the kitchen table and began the process of scraping the hog with his sharp pocket knife. After removing the hair and flinging it to the ground, before the bright eyes watching, he slit the middle of the hog open in our swift downward motion, discarding the insides, of the hog, saving the chitterlings and head, being careful to remove the burrough of the inner ear which was claimed to be poisonous. He also saved the liver and lights, considered to be delicacies, then proceded to cut the pork into sections.

After trimming away the fat, he told Mama and the children to empty the water from the pot. With the buckets slinging water left and right, the pot quickly emptied and he tossed the fat into the pot using his large hands as a double scoop, the traces glistening in the glow of the blue-red flame. It soon began sizzling and frying leaving the greasy lard to be stored and later used for cooking and making soap, which they never seemed to get around to.

Smelling the frying cracklings, the childrens mouths began to water. They begged as much as they dared, and Mo generously scooped out a hoe full of the cracklings, emptying them on the table beside the bloody remains congealed from the crisp cold air. The children began eating, munching and scrunching close to the fire, and continued eating until they were almost ill.

Then entering the house once more, they hung the meat sections in the kitchen from nails on the wall, making the floors slippery from the dripping grease and blood. The children began curling up on the mattresses, cold and nauseus but satisfied. Mo beamed broadly as he wiped the blood from his hands on his grimy britches, then took a long slug of well deserved whiskey from the bottle nearby on the table and lowered his heavy bulk onto one of the mattresses where the others gladly made space.

For the next few months, Lola cooked the meat daily with the usual hoecakes made from the flour purchased at the commissary with Mama's money. She also cooked the pork with greens taken from Lucy's garden and compared to their usual fare, it seemed to be a varitable feast.

Lola's asthma worsened with the cold symptoms which she and the others always seemed to have in the winter. She coughed so much that she could hardly breathe but still worked without complaint. The younger children often ran high fevers during the winter and cried more frequently than usual. Mama made them a sugar tit out of a lump of sugar tied in a rag ^{for them} to suck on and even then that didn't always soothe and keep them quiet at night.

During the early part of winter Lola and Jim frequently worked for the local farmer who grew sugar cane.

Rising before dawn on the cold winter mornings, they would walk barefoot with other children from Seymore along the dirt roads, sleepy, cold, and as usual hungry; across the wooden bridge over the Alapha river always stopping to pay tribute to the ominously high swirling waters by tossing a stick or spitting and waiting for a reply.

The boys would tease the girls by trying to toss them over the sides of the bridge; Lola kept her distance, fearful of the raging current as she watched the playful attempts of the agile adolescent boys to loosen the screeching girls grips from the weathered, wooden rails. Ernest pleas served only to hieghten the pleasure for the boys, and the girls would finally relinquish their grips on the rail in exchange for a nearby arm or leg which had been the object of the game from the onset.

In good humor, they would begin walking again increasing their pace with the smaller children trailing.

Upon reaching the farm, the older boys ~~would go~~^{went} to the fields and begin hacking down the stubborn cane stalks, which were no match for their fresh morning strength. The felled stalks were piled onto the mule drawn cart which was then carried to the site of the cane mill. It was here that Lola and the others worked, feeding the stalks of cane into the mill energized by a mule attached to a pole who pulled it around in a circle. Standing on a block of wood, in order to attain the necessary height for reaching the mill, below the sweeping pole, while feeding the cane into the grinder at a continuous pace was quite a feat for Lola but worth it when the sweet cane juice was emptied from the barrels into the vat for cooking, yeilding a sweet syrup to be bottled and corked and used to sop hot busciuts or stored to

crystalize into sugar in a few months. Lola inhaled the syrupy scent, aware that as part of her pay she would fall heir to a bottle of her own. After the juice was squeezed from the stalks, the cane leavings were removed by cart from the mill and piled later to be burned. But to Lola the best part of all was the "pole cat" candy, the sticky substance which formed around the sides of the vat during the cooking process.

When Lola had all that could endure of the arduous work, she would be replaced by one of the other children and would dash off, merry black eyes twinkling, to the cane syrup kettle.

Not much taller than the round, black kettle bubbling the thick, greeish-black substance over the sides, Lola would stand wistfully, practically lost in the stickey steam, watching the skimmer circle the surface of the syrup, then withdraw to empty with a clank into a nearby charred oak barrell to await the preparations for home-made buck. Her attention was drawn to the white, hairy arm holding the handle of the skimmer. Dreading the inevitable unpleasantness, but more eager for the reward, she remained watching the rotund belly of the farmer through the heavy haze, finally allowing her gaze to travel upwards to the heavy jowls folded over the grey, stiff collar. His green eyes scowled at her through puffy flesh, finally acknowledging her presence. She continued her vigil, shifting from one foot to the other.

"Why ain't you working, gal?"

"I's done gotten too tired, suh."

"Tired, huh? Bet you done gotten hungry, too. Huh?"

"Yasuh," said Lola, nearing her goal, glancing from the anogant face to the kettle.

"Ain't gonna get a lick of work out of you nohow. Might as well feed you."

Lola eagerly watched the slow progression of scraping with a makeshift paddle of cane peel around the edge of the kettle and moved forward as he plopped the pole cat into the can, carefully scrapping the stick on the side to loosen the remains. Then he leisurely blew the stick and stuck it into his mouth, savoring the taste while Lola's eyes begged for the can. She was eventually handed the can of freshly skimmed, although premature, polecat, her cold hands grateful for the warmth. She then hurriedly found a place to sit, resting her tired back against the wall of an old corn crib and waited impatiently for the candy to cool enough so that she could put it into her mouth. Toes wriggling, happily she would hum a tune of unknown origin. After finishing off the last bite she would rush back for seconds, repeating the same sequence of events. Being unable to resist, she would eat at intervals, and when permitted, until her stomach signaled her with a loud rumble, then run for the old wooden outdoor toilet, and upon the open hole she would sit until she was able to return to the mill.

By the end of the day the children, weak not only from the exertion of work but from the debilitating diarehea caused by the pole cat, would begin their weary trek back to Seymore. Crossing the river again, heavy drops of rain pelted the cold youngsters causing them to quicken their slow pace. Upon reaching their homes they were drenched and shivering.

Entering the yard, Lola and Jim grabbed some fire wood, went inside and threw it into the iron stove. They began striking

matches but to no avail - the wet wood would not start. They finally gave up and huddled on the bare mattress and fell asleep.

The following morning, having slept the entire night without waking, Jim awakened Lola who was feverish and coughing. Struggling against the body threatening to stay in bed, she dragged herself back to the farm to begin the incessant feeding of the cane mill. While standing on the wooden block, blackness claimed her, later to awaken in her own bed where she had been carried by the obviously unconvinced farmer. She was quite ill with what Miz. June called pneumonia. Miz. June nursed her, placing mustard poltices on her chest daily, for the next two weeks, during which she dozed in and out of feverish sleep, missing the culmination of the cane grinding season and the pole cat.

After the crisis, Lola, in her weakened condition, resumed her daily chores collapsing at night onto the bed to wait for another day. One night as she lay there while Mama was away at "Abe's", the children had just gone to sleep when she heard the usual car's whirring engine leaving from Lucy's house. She had dozed off after a bout of fitful coughing when she heard screaming from the direction of Mr. Deke's house. Without thinking, she jumped up and ran outside, freezing. When she got to the front porch of the house next door, she stopped abruptly. The front door was open and Mr. Deke was standing over a white and red bundle of clothing. He was wailing in a heart rending pitch and lamenting, "Oh Lawd have mercy, somebody done gone and kilt my baby." As Lola stepped closer to the door she saw that the white cloth was Lucy's gown and the red on it was blood. A knife was laying

beside the still form and it too was red. Lola turned and ran faster than she had ever run in her life, back to her house, not even closing her front door as she flew through, flinging herself on her bed and shaking so hard that her small body could not still itself. Soon she could hear other voices from the nearby houses talking and trying to comfort Deak and find a solution to the hideous deed. She heard them saying that Lucy had been knifed. Lola just lay there for the remainder of the night shivering and coughing and gasping for air, but she never ~~spoke~~ spoke of what she knew to anyone concerning the two white boys' visits.

Lola was aware of the arrangements for the funeral because Mama kept talking about it and saying that everyone wondered who could have done it.

"Sure 'nuf, a bad deed done been done right here. Sure nuf bad to kill that gal, her so friendly and all 'dat," Mama said to no one in particular, sighing and up ending the bottle she was holding as if to alleviate her grief. "I sure wonders who done it."

Lola stiffly continued prying the burning hoe cake from the iron frying pan, her hands trembling, not daring to turn her face towards Mama who was sitting behind her at the table.

"Weren't a bad deed what she ever done neither," Mama said.

Lola could hear Mama sniveling, drunkenly, and her hands were shaking for fear of revealing her secrets, which she now felt a party to. She burned her hand while turning the charred bread but didn't even flinch for fear of being noticed by the intoxicated woman at her rear.

"They's talk that the sherriff's gonna be vestigating, but ain't no murderers what lives in these parts, I ain't reckoning, leastwise not to my recollecting. Is they?" asked Mama.

Lola was now forced to reply and steeled herself to answer.

"Sho ain't now," Lola said, suddenly feeling more apprehensive than ever, since her newly found knowledge about the sherriff.

The death had occurred on a Tuesday night and the burial would not take place until the next Sunday, as was the custom. All burials were on Sundays.

The neighbors came all week to Deke's bearing dishes of food for the bereaved father and offering consolation and also easing their conciences for not accepting the girl. The curious came also as if they might find some clue of what had occurred on that fateful night just by entering the house.

Superstition ran rampant and Lola felt that she, most of all, would surely be visited by Lucy's ghost for having taken her greens and for having known of her night visitors. Although the sherriff never came to investigate the crime, Lola lived with that fear also of a stern personage which she could not quite picture. ✓ She suffered terribly for the weekly interval before the burial and on that day was forced to go to the funeral by Mama who got off work because Miz. June and Mr. Lee would attend also.

The service was extremely long and the coughing, frightened Lola sat as still ^{hedging hosts} and small as posible as if the ghost of Lucy might not notice her presence if she didn't move. People were weeping and praying out loud; singing and clapping all during the service with words spoken by the preacher only heard by Lola since she never saw him ^{FROM HER SHELTERED, ENTOMBED POSITION OF FECOND} BLACK SURROUNDINGS, RUSTLING AND SWAYING AND MURMURING IN THEIR SUNDAY BEST CLOTHES; ANGLED HATS PERCHED, OBSCURING HER VIEW AND LIKE WISE SHIELDING HER FROM THE ~~UNFAVORABLE~~ INAUSPICIOUS GHOST.

Start here

After the service, Lucy's burial took place in the small square graveyard behind the little block church; the procession including Deke's friends and piously weeping mourners following at a respectful distance behind the wooden coffin with the preacher leading the way beside Deke, ^{bent and beaten; reverent feet timely tapping the cold, ~~hard~~ naturally cemented earth; black-grey as the worn shoes which had taken the form of the tiny feet through years of Sundays past.} Lola was relieved when the last song was sung and the dirt was flung into the grave. Even if the spirit could still wander among them, at least the body could no longer be observed.

Mama had gone on to "Abe's" with Big Mo after the service and Lola returned to the house with the three smaller children and assailed the many chores with eagerness, glad for the normalcy of routine which would help squelch the morbidness of the presence of death. Out back gathering firewood, Lola saw Deke returning home from the graveyard. She stood behind the chinaberry tree and watched him with his shoulders slumped, ambling up the door steps, looking shorter than ever with his strange posture. The guilt returned to Lola as she watched the forelorn figure from her hiding place, and she knew she had to make some sort of retribution. She decided to do what she had seen the neighbors do. She took the firewood inside, made a fire in the stove, put some water in the old metal pot, hacked off a hunk of the rancid hanging pork, and put it into the boiling water. After it had cooked for a few minutes, she removed it with a fork and carefully placed it in a cloth flour sack. Her heart was racing and she felt she might faint as she carried it up the clean but shackly steps to Deke's house. She finally mustered the courage to knock on the door. She knocked lightly and as

she heard approaching steps, she quickly laid the parcel in front of the door and ran. Looking back, as she neared her own porch, she saw Deke holding her offering . He waved to her, smiling, and she felt relieved and assured that the ghost's father at least held no ill will towards her.

A few days after Lola's generous offering, Deke came by and gave her three catfish, which he had caught in the river; a ritual which continued for many years, bonding a relationship between the two.