

^{SANDY BLACK} dirt. No grass or weeds were allowed to grow here. A perfectly square yard was made around the house with weeds being allowed to remain outside the boundary. Walking up the immaculate door steps which creaked with Mattie Lou's bulk they trailed. Rust speckled cans and worn out pots contained various flowers and plants along the porch ledges. Two old worn rockers with cow hide bottoms sat amidst the forray of planters. Entering the house each child imitated Mattie Lou's brushing of the feet on the multi-colored, braided rag rug. A hot breeze gently stirred the ~~homespun~~ ^{homespun} curtains at the open wooden windows. Against the walls were three more chairs with cowhide bottoms and a long narrow cot-like bed with a patch work quilt covering. On the floor was another circular braided rug. The ^{WOODEN} mantel above the small brick fireplace contained a clock like Deaks. Also like ^{MA-}Deaks were several calendars, spaced ~~at~~ ^{at} equal distances apart with similar scenes, except for one larger one which was a print of two happy smiling white children playing on an old wooden swing.

Bustling on through the house to another room separated by more clean, sunny smelling ^{white} homespun curtains, Mattie Lou proceeded with the children bringing up the rear. Not another word had been spoken but there was no doubt about who was the authority figure here. The smell of ginger bread and other good things made the children stop as they entered through the parted curtains. They stood and sniffed deeply as they watched Mattie Lou deposit the box containing their few belongings on the floor. With much ado Mattie Lou started lifting lids on the old wood stove which emitted smells Lola hadn't smelled since Mrs. June's Christmas dinner. Above the stove against the wall hung several ^{BLACK} iron pots of various shapes and sizes. A wood scaffold hung out side the window and Mattie Lou reached through and easily grabbed a couple of pieces ^{OF WOOD} with her big, capable hands and opening the door of the stove placed them carefully. Stirring once more then replacing the lids she turned to the hypnotized

youngsters. "I bet yall is hongry", she stated. Getting no response from the three, she spoke louder, "Has yall et today?" "No mam', we ain't ^{it}" replied Lola feeling more than a little apprehensive but too hungry not to speak up for some of that wonderful food bubbling in the pots. "Git yo'se'ves clean fi'st, den we ken eat". "Out on 'de po'ch", she pointed to the screen door leading out the back of the house. Opening the screened door upon which was attached a piece of cotton to keep flies out, she went. The children quietly tiptoeing behind. On the back porch was a long shelf containing ² buckets of water. One held a goard dipper, the other without. She easily lifted and poured a nearby ^{tin} pan halfful. Beside the bucket was a bar of foul smelling soap which she handed to Lola. "Now you wash up good, ya hear. I don't take kin'ly to nast'ness.;" Mattie warned. Lola started rubbing the soap over her dark, dry hands leaving ~~x~~ white ~~fixx~~ ^{traces} tracks. Mattie Lou ^{roughly} took ~~her~~ Lola's hands and dunked them into the water, lathering with the soap again and again. When Lola thought her hands might have no skin left Mattie Lou turned her towards the wall to a clean white towel hanging from a nail and dried the clean flesh roughly. Continuing this process until ^{the other two} ~~all three~~ were clean, ^{also} they then followed her back towards the delicious ^{aroma} as she continued her lecture about cleanliness. Taking three plates from the old safe in one corner of the kitchen she bid the children to sit ^{at} the table on a long smooth, hewed bench. They obeyed without question with feet dangling and eyes large as Mattie Lou heaped generous steaming portions of acre peas, squash, boilded red skinned white potatoes, all vegetables she proudly ^{paid} came from her own garden. Then she added large scoops of pork and rice and fluffy biscuits onto the plates. Placing a plate in front of each child with the scents rising to their noses they continued sniffing. When Mattie Lou released each plate the children moving the forks out of the plates, ^{out the table} dug in with their fingers. "Woe, ya' onery mules," shouted Mattie holding her white palmed hands towards them

"yall might be hungry, but yall ain't animals". Now move yo' hands away til I sez grace," she ordered. Having no idea of the meaning of grace they sat hands in laps until Mrs. Mattie Lou finished talking to "'de Good Lawd". Still unsure they waited for her signal. "Now yall ken eat, but not wif' yo fingers, with ~~the fork~~ ^{she demonstrated, picking a fork up then changing it noisily down on the table.}". Lola now starved beyond endurance, began first with the others watching. Now they followed losing more in their laps than went into their mouths. Soon Mattie Lou turned away, cleaning, washing and stirring ^{efficiently,} glancing discreetly back occasionally at the three. ^{they began} Sneakily, eyes on her back, eating once again with their fingers of one hand, holding the utensil with the other. When they were stuffed to their limit Mattie Lou turned around with a pan of ginger bread and placed a large square on each child's licked-clean plate. They immediately dug in again as Mattie purposely turned her back busily cleaning again and smiling. It had been so long since she had had small children in her home and she missed that. Her own children grown ^{now} except Zeke who was now fifteen and away most of the time. Mattie had missed the mothering which was instinctive to her by nature. She loved fussing over these young children whom she had watched for so long in their horrible house across the way never daring before to step in ^{there} because Willie, her husband, said it was none of her business. Well, now there ~~was~~ ^{was} no one else to look after them. Their older sister Rose had moved away with George and no one had heard from her since. ^{Willie} He couldn't refuse, being the gentle man that he was. Except for his drinking, which he mostly did away from ^{the house} ~~the house~~ because Mattie Lou didn't allow liquor in her house, Willie was a fine man and an excellent worker and she loved him dearly but as most of the ~~homes~~ homes in the quarters of Seymore theirs was matriarcal, for the most part, the strong woman as head of the house. Her two older daughters now were married and living in N. Ga. in the same town. Zeke had started drinking also and keeping bad company as she called ~~ix~~ Jim

Together they worked and visited "Abe's" almost nightly where Mattie Lou had heard that a prostitute exhibited her charms frequently. Living on the hill, the prostitute, which was labelled Jezabel by the other women, ~~had~~ been said to perform various unnatural acts in exchange for money, earning more than she ever could have while working in the fields. The woman of low character created quite a ~~fa~~ss by the good women of Seymore. Not only did some their men squander their hard-earned money on liquer but also on Jezabel. Mattie Lou had heard that she accomadated more than one at the time also which seemed quite absurd to her who had long ago decided sex was quite disgusting aside for the purpose of ~~pe~~creation. There had been a time when she and Willie were much y younger that she had enjoyed his caresses but seeing the carnal nature of the act she had ~~ax~~ laid down the law to Willie and after Zeke was born refused to be a party any longer. Years of hard work and mothering had taken the place of affection for Willie. She still loved him but it was more maternal than lustful.

After the kitchen was spotlessly clean, Mattie dashed the pan of greasy dishwater out the window onto the lucious blooms of ^{the} purple hydrangers, wiped out the bottom ^{until the pan gleamed} and hung it on a nail above the wooden shelf covered below by hanging curtains of pink cotton material. ^{She} Signaled the still seated urchins to follow, grabbed the box of clothes and went out the back door into the clean yard. Under a large ^{crepe myrtle} ~~mimosa~~ tree filled with frilly pink flowers she placed the box on an ~~ax~~ old wooden bench and took her position of command. Looking like a big general she ordered the small troups to gather firewood from the nearby pile and placed ~~it~~ it under the ~~big~~ black wash kettle. Taking a box of matches from her apron pocket ~~she~~ she lit the fire under the pot which the little ragged troups had filled with water from the brick walled well next to the ^{boiling} ~~boiling~~ pot. Next she dumped the clothes into the water stirring with a long

pole until the steam was rising. Then she lifted one by one onto the bench, after they had cooled she began scrubbing them vigorously after rubbing soap on a metal ribbed rubbing board held upright against the tree. Then she tossed them back into the steaming water, stirring them and then removing them she placed them in a bent tin tub. Trudging off to the clothes line, staunch and ready hung between two sturdy poles, she wrung the hot water out, flapped them ceremoniously in the wind, taking wooden clothes pins she proceeded to hang the tattered, abused garments. When the last was hung she took a long fence rail with a slit in the top, placed the wire between the slit and raised it. Clothes now saluting to her in the gentle summer breeze she wiped her hands on her apron and then turned to face the little troup standing at attention. "Git dat dere wash tub and put it on da po'ch". Obeying the orders immediately, wondering what next, all three grabbed the empty tub and hoisted it up over the side of the porch. Mattie Lou began bringing buckets full of the now warming water from the wash pot and filling it. When it was filled almost to the top she again commanded, "Follow me". The little black soldiers obeyed, marching ~~xxxxxxx~~ up the porch steps over to the tin tub. "Now you strip down", she ordered Lola. Lola looked at her, then down at her filthy shift. "Off wid' it and de bretches", shouted Mattie Lou. Lola, without hesitation, took the dress off and the dirty cotton panties. "Now git into de water", directed Mattie Lou. "Yes 'um", replied Lola and stepped into the tin tub of water. "Set yo se'f down", ordered the officer and the little soldier sat. Mattie Lou grabbed the bucket and scooped up half a bucket full of water from between Lola's out stretched knees and poured it over her head without warning. Lola sputtered and started to get up and make a run for it, but Mattie Lou stayed her with her strong hands, picked up the foul smelling soap and a rough rag and lathered it until bubbles stung Lola's

eyes. She then started scrubbing Lola from head to foot. Every inch was scrubbed until the skin threatened to peel. Pouring more water from the bucket over Lola's head, she allowed her to immerge to the floor where she started vigorously drying her with a fresh towel. Lola now doned her old uniform to wait as Mattie said til the others on the line had dried. The younger children having witnessed the process of "washing" began to scurry away when Mattie Lou looked at them and commanded, "into de water". She easily and gently grabbed them, shucking their clothes aside and plopped them both into the tub together. They started to cry but then seeing ~~xx~~ Lola none the worse for the wear and tear of the scouring, they squealed delightfully as Mattie poured water on them also. Bath time over, the small platoon was marched back inside and put down on patchwork quilted pallets for a nap. Lola was amazed at the complicated procedure of what Mattie Lou called "decent liv'in". She quickly became ~~awake~~ drowsy, her skin tingling and her stomach full. Mattie Lou sitting nearby in the old rocker watching ~~ed~~ over her troupes as they slept. *ANTICIPATING "NUSSING" THE ~~SMALLER~~ LITTLE ONES SOON.*

Mattie Lou thrived in her role as surrogate mother paying particular attention to the smaller girls. The ten year old Lola too large to be rocked and cuddled was quite often put to work in the small garden patch out back. Picking the peas, squash and digging the potatoes. She scrubbed floors, washed clothes and dishes constantly under the scrutiny of Mattie. She didn't mind at all, she had a full stomach and wasn't accustomed to affection anyway. The following week Mattie announced that Lola must once again go to the cotton fields so she wouldn't "git spoiled by easy livin'". Lola was glad to return although now the summer heat was at it's peak. In much ~~better~~ *physical* condition than before Lola hoed the cotton each day exdept Sun on which she still helped Mrs. June. Mattie would attend church with the other children proudly preening them on the short walk to the hill.