

*Just draft*

Chapter One

Blends of sounds from the crickets and locusts combine with the pungent scent of asphalt and the warmth rising from the sparkling pavement along the curving South Georgia road. Constant fragrance of wild yellow jasmine and pine make their contribution to the early spring surrounding the timberlands of this remote, rural section of the southeastern United States.

Tea colored, mussel-laden waters from the Alapha river travel their length of the visual boundary, leaving and yet remaining forever, to instill tranquility and restlessness through its cadence for those who daily view it either from the concrete bridge or from the sandy, willow-foliaged banks. Now and then a gar fish breaks the monotony striking at its unfortunate victim then disappearing into the depths of the water to wait its next prey. A mocassin lies sunning, unconcernedly, on the roots stretching into the amber liquid as occassional plunking of tupelo berries into the river punctuate the silence then float away to be replaced by others.

From the distance the song of a morning dove joins the cacophony of rythm with its statement of being, while the morning sun, later to be dreaded for its intensity, radiates its warmth over sun and sand and life. Mild vibrations from an approaching train create an awareness of the routine of living, and coming into view from around the curve, an old green, pickup truck confirms it with a big, muscular black arm resting on the window in the shape of a "V" appearing. Then as the truck slows, it reveals the tightly drawn, weathered face of

a man in his late prime. A gold-toothed, sardonic smile forms on the bearded face as the V-shape moves in motion towards the rear of the truck. In heavy gullah, he shouts, "Load up, we done running late." The woman on the bridge moves slowly towards the point of motion. With a complete lack of agility, the middle-aged, black woman, Lola, heaves her heavy bulk onto the truck which gives off shrieks of metal bending as she finds a seating place on the side.

The other occupants' eyes reach out to meet her as the truck jerks away almost unseating the riders. They take in her tattered, red kerchief hair covering, one plaited strand rebelling; brown torn and stained shirt, revealing glimpses of coffee colored skin; black britches, riding low over her immense belly, trailing down to black shoes of which the backs are crushed under the weight of her crusty, lighted-colored heels. The face, once beautiful, now lacking the glow of youth, gives the distinct impression of indifference and yet anticipation. Lines reflect a life of pain and frivolity, with occasional scars to give credence to the fact. Huge, black luminous eyes, red veins visible, dominate the round chocolate face; her mouth in constant motion chewing and occasionally spewing snuff from the truck.

The rigors of life in this underdeveloped, lower social-economic area often result in the need for immediate gratification rather than deferred, as is graphically displayed in Lola's general appearance.

Rollicking laughter beginning from Lola's heaving bosom sets the mood in motion. "I sure 'nuf dreads this day," says Lola, lamenting half-heartedly. Getting no response, she continues, coyly stiffling laughter, "but we sho' had fun last night." Then finally getting the attention of the younger woman sitting next to her, "What you do last night?" she asked, her face showing undisguised lack of concern. Undaunted by lack of interest, Lola continues, "I met "him" last night, and we went jookin." A sideways glance and a naughty expression forms on Lola's face as other faces register obvious disbelief. "Him" being the one always expounded upon by Lola, the forman and driver of the truck. Younger than she by five years, the egotistical Lem as Lola's lover, in the opinion of the others, was merely a figment of her vivid imagination.

Lola continues the tirade, leaning in closer towards the other field hands to be heard above the clamor of the truck. While still maintaining a secretive air, she gives explicit details of the previous nights events as proof of her enigmatic affair with Lem.

"Why'nt you just shut your mouth a spell," said the boy leaning against the cab, one tennis shod foot propped on the side, lean and immortal in his youth, "he ain't studying you, nohow."

Taken aback by the abrupt interruption, Lola arose swaggering with the trucks swaying motion. "Was you there?" "What you know anyhow bout my business?" "You ain't knowing nothing," she said, her feet planted apart and arms extended for balance; the mad stare wasted on the face averted, absently scanning the passing landscape

of glistening green pines fused with scrub oaks by yellow rays of sun.

Finally ignoring the lost member of her audience, she resumes her chattering oratory to the apathetic group, laughing resonantly about her own escapades, in spite of the unenthusiastic response marked by occasional rolling of the eyes.

Her laughter subsides only slightly as Lem swerves the pickup bearing the field hands into the shady road, overhanging branches slapping relentlessly at the passengers from all sides. Dog fennels flurry in the wind from the moving vehicle causing Lola to lapse into spasms of coughing from her asthma, an illness diagnosed by her which she claims to have had since childhood.