

The Black Cat

By Virginia Frazer Boyle

Daddy Mose had been counsellor, soothsayer, and leading exhorter to the whole of the dusky population of Piney ever since the close of the war. It was said that in emergencies the white people themselves could not do without him; for the year that the worms were so bad in the bolls even Colonel Preston had sent for Daddy Mose and had a private consultation with him, and the result was that the Colonel's was the only cotton in the Bend that was worth picking in the fall. Then, on an other occasion, the old cherry-tree in the Colonel's orchard, that had never even blossomed before, had to be propped to keep it from breaking with the fruit, the spring after Daddy Mose drove five rusty nails into its heart and buried something tied up in a rag at its roots.

But it was the rising generation, in his own country and in his own house, that troubled Daddy Mose, and he leaned on his hoe and looked with evident dissatisfaction at the little black figure pirouetting defiantly before him.

"Don' yo' de hit, Solly—don' yo' de hit!"

"But Misser Lingum say he gimme er quarter, Daddy!"

"What good dat pitiful little quarter gwine de yo' if yo' kills er black cat?" There was a withering contempt in the tone which made the little imp squirm arid twist uneasily.

"Er black cat es wuth es much es ernuther eat, if hit's good fur er quarter, Daddy!" grunted the imp, plucking tip courage and making a circle in the dust with his great toe.

Daddy Mose hoed two or three turns vigorously, and then looked the little imp straight in the face.

"Dat des lack dese free-born-sence-de-war niggers! Yo' po' little mizerbul fool, does yo' know who er black cat am?"

Solly winced. "He's wuth er quarter, fur Misser Lingum at de sto' he 'low he gimme one if I kills hit an' fotch de cat ter him. He say he done pay fur de kullin' er dat cat free times, but hit allus turns up ergin."

"'Cou'se hit gwine kim back; er black cat allus do," said Daddy Mose. "Hain't no tree ebber sprouted er chunk dat'll kill er black cat, lessen you does hit nine times, an' I lay yo' gwine be powerful sorry if you does hit den."

"But I'se gwine hang him wid er rope!" retorted the imp, with a grin.

"Yo' Sol'mun Hightower Dewberry!—Yo' little black rapsallion!—Hain't got de fear er debil er man! What you' Mammy been er doin' dat she hain't lam yo' better? Des er gwine out in de worl' an' er fetchin in bad luck lack de mud on you' loots! I lay I lam yo' how ter hang er black cat—I larn yo'!"

There was a fruitless plunge and a wild yell, with very spicy punctuations. Solly's mother, from the tree where she was washing, grunted her endorsement, and, his wrath being appeased and his audience increased by two or three, for it was the noon hour. Daddy Mose took his seat on the washbeuch and fanned himself with his hat.

"De free niggers is mighty big fools," he mused, "des er flingin' out de sense er dey daddies and manimies es las' es dey put book larnin' in; an' de chillen—de po', impident free chillen!—dey hain't lack white folks, an' dey hain't lack de niggers uster was—dey des hain't nuffin!"

There was hardly a unanimous endorsement of the assertion, but it was accorded a respectful hearing, and the quiescent state of his listeners and his “chaw er stingy green” at last rendered Daddy Mose pleasantly reminiscent.

“Ebber telled yo’ all how ’Lish Stone fetched de ten-year bad luck on hisse’f?” he queried, thoughtfully.

“No, yo’ hain’t el her tole we all, Daddy Mose.”

“An’ he couldn’ git shet uv hit twel dey burn up de cabin an’ de kivers?”

“Po’ creetur!—Um, um.”

“Yas, dey hatter burn up de cabin an’ de kivers,” repeated Daddy Mose, reflectively.

“Tell erbout hit, Daddy—tell embout hit!” came in chorus.

“Well,” said Daddy Mose, “hit were ’bout dis way: ’Lish Stone wa’n’t much ’count no how, but he hab er mighty fine, peart ’oman, an’ dat how come Daddy Mose ’member hit ter dis day.

“’Lish hadn’ been pleasin’ er Ole Marse in de way he been er gwine, an’ Ole Marse gib him one mighty straight talk ’fore he put de oberseer’s whup artem him, ’case one nigger is mighty hard on ernuther nigger, bond er free—you knows dat—an’ Ole Marse’s oberseers was allus niggers.

“’Lish he wa’n’t no survigorous nigger, an he feel mighty sorry now ’bout de way he berhave hisse’f, an’ Ole Marse gib him so many chances, an’ he lack mighty well ter please Ole Marse now, an’ he mek hisse’f anxious waitin’ fur de time.

“Well, Dinah an’ Marthy ’ten’ ter de dairy den, an’ bimeby dey gin out dat some un des bardaciously stealin’ de cream offen de pans in de spring-house ever’ night. Nobody know who hit were ner whar dey kim fum, but hit go on, an’ dey git so bol’ dat dar wa’n’t hardly cream ernough fur de Big House coffee, let ’lone fur churnin’ an’ things, an’ Ole Miss she say she gwine mek ’em set er watch, fur Dinah an’ Marthy ’speeted some er de fiel’ han’s an’ tole tales on ’em.

“Dar was allus war ’twixt de house niggers an’ de fiel’ han’s, lack de quality white folks an’ *po’ buckra*. Not dat Ole Mamse would er let ’em fi’t—no, my Lord—’case we hatter be peaceable an’ Christiun ’roun’ Ole Marse. But de house niggers an’ de fiel’ han’s kinder swap words, quiet lack, when dey passes, an’ when Ole Miss sont fur er little fiel’ nigger ter foller arter de chillen ee ter swing de pea-fowl bresh ober de table, um!—you think dat little nigger done gone up ter heaben!

“So dey sets er watch down by de spring-house door, an’ Pomp an’ Dave do de watchin’. Pomp he were er mighty young un, an’ don’ know nuffin but pickin’ down de row an’ ershakin’ uv he foots arter he done; but Dave he were er hard ole sinner, done coteh in ole age wid conviction, an’ he tryin’ his bestest ter git ’ligion. He done sot on de mourners’ bench fur two weeks, an’ de ’stracted meetin’ mos’ ober; done been prayed fur by ever’ ’zorter in de straw, er-groanin’ all de time lack er ox erdyin’, but hit ’pear lack he des couldn’ git hit.

“Well, ’bout dat time dey put Dave on de watch, an’ de brederin’ dey tell him dat dey gwine pray on des de same, an’ Brer Jonas, de prophesyin’ ’zorter, he promise Dave dat if he wrastle mightily wid de spent, he gwine ter see er sign.

“So ever’ night dey watch, but ever’ night de cream done off de pans lack hit were erfore, dough we knows dat Dave hain’t taken hit, ’case if er nigger ebber gwine ter be hones’, hit would be unner hard conviction lack dat Dave was er-wrastlin’ wid.

“Ole Miss she ain’ lack de way things is gwine on, an’ she ’low one day dat we all was mighty po’ niggers, dat cain’t ketch sech er low-down t’ief, an’ Dave he was so mizerbul an’ po’ly, ’case he’s feared de big meetin’ close ’dout he gittin’ ’igion, dat Brer Jonas he say fur Dave ter leabe Pomp in de Quarters, so’s he kin wrestle erlone wid de sperit down by de spring-house.

“When Brer Jonas gib dat out, Dave he see dat Ole Marse’s two boys, Johnny an’ Jeems, es fine er pa’r er rascals es ebber toted er stone-bruise, been lis’enin’ fru hit all, an’ he see ’em fetchin’ in some green watermillions fum de garden ’dout yellin’ fur er nigger ter kim an tote ’em in, but he were so mizerbul he don’ tek no notice.

“Hit were er mighty dark night de fust time dat Dave watch by hese’f, an’ dough hit hain’t gwine rain, de heat light’nin’ streck er match now an’ den, an’ hit mek hit ’pear lonesomer ter Dave; but dar hain’t nuffin kin pester him, ’case he’s unner conviction, an’ he hain’t gwine be erfeared if he see de sign, ’case, ’cordin’ ter Brer Jonas, hit gwine ter be de sign er de promise, an’ if he des kin see hit, he sho’ gwine know he got ’ligion at las’.

“So Dave he sot on de steps an’ wait. Hit were er mighty solumn, furgitable place whar de spring-house were, an’ bimeby de whup’-wills ’gin ter call ’way ober yander, an’ Dave he ’ow ter hisse’f dey allus do dat way ter mek lonesome folks feel mo’ lonesomer; den er frog in de spring branch right ’longsider Dave opin he mouf an’ say sumpen mighty short an’ den shet up, but hit mek dat Dave jump putty nigh outen he skin.

“Dave sot an’ stedly an’ stedly ’bout he sins twel he see sumpen ’way off yander lack er star, but Dave he hain’t skeered ertall, ’case he been waitin’ all erlong fur de sign. Den he sees supen er-shinin’ lack two stars, an’ den sumpen white riz up berhin’ ’em, an’ Dave he fall ter sribin’ lack Brer Jonas tell him ’bout, an’ de two sumpens kim er nigher.

“Dave he keep on sribin’, but he scribe wid one eye opin now, an’ de two sumpens an’ de white thing kim er nigh an’ er nigher. Den he fall to sribin’ wid bofe eyes opin now, an’ opin wide, when one er de ghostes fotch er groan, an’ de white fire kim outen he nose an’ mouf.

“Now Brer Jonas he say fur Dave ter ’spute wid de sign when he see hit, dat he mout know hit were de true sign, but when Dave see dat fire—de berry fire er de debil, he say arter’ards, des er burnin’ on de inside—he ain’ wait fur ter ’spute, but des tek ’em es dey looks, an’ light out fum dar an’ mek tracks. Dat fool nigger he shake lack he got de agur de res’ er dat night, an’ when mornin’ kim he done got ’ligion good an’ fas’—plum skeered inter hit—an’ Brer Jonas he ’low, sorter private lack ’mongst de bredrin’, but mighty solumn, dough, dat hit hain’t de fust time dat he see ’ligion kim outen er green water-million. Fur hit git out somers, ’case Marthy she say dat Ole Marse hab Johnny an’ Jeems sont up ter his office one day, when she were dustin’ ’roun’, an’ she ’low she hear Ole Marse say he hain’t gwine hab no sech carryin’s on on his place, er-skeerin’ de niggers inter fits, an’ she ’low hones’ dat he whup ’em bofe, an’ I reckon he did hit, ’case Ole Marse wa’n’t no han’ ter tek any foolishness.

“But dey ain’ git Dave back ter watch at de spring-house no mo’, an’ de cream goes off de pans worser ’n ebber.

“Well, dat triflin’ ’Lish he been er-lis’enin’ ’roun’, an’ he wanter pleasure Ole Miss, ’case he know she tell Ole Marse ’bout hit, an’ he ups an’ ’low dat he gwine watch at de spring-house, an’ co ch de t’ief, an’ he struts ’roun’ mighty mannish ’bout hit.

“So ’Lish he taken Dave’s place on de watch, an’ lock de door er de ’spring-house an’ gorm up de key-hole wid beeswax, but dat cream was gone in de mornin’ des lack hit were erfore. Den ’Lish he ’low dat hit hain’t man ner beast dat taken de cream, but sumpen dat’ll go fru de door dout opiuin’ uv hit; but he ’low he hain’t ’feared er nuffin.

“So he goes down ter de branch in de night-time (hit were de dark er de moon), an’ gadder some *he fern seed* an’ put ’em in he Sunday shoes (fiel’ han’s don’ w’ar shoes ever’ day), an’ he taken de veil what he were borned wid an’ put hit in he pocket, ’case if hit er sperit dat hone fur de cream, ’Lish know dat he kin view hit now, fur de veil hit work er charm so’s he kin see de ghostes good, an’ de sperits hain’t gwine ter fly fum de foots what got de *he fern seed* in de holler.

“Well, ’Lish he des sot an’ wait, an’ ever-thing plum cl’ar ter he eye, an’ bimeby he sees er shinin’, an’ sumpen black kim er-sneakin’ an’ er-sneakin’, an’ hit slips right clost ter de door’, an’ ’Lish he look twel hit ’pear dat de eyes des pop plum outen he head, ’case dat black cat des stan’ dar an’ wave he tail free times, den go right fru dat door dat done shet an’ locked, des lack dar wa’n’t no door dar.”

“Den ’Lish he git clost up an’ put he year right ’gin de wall an’ hear de water tricklin’ in de trough, but he hear dat cat too, des er-lappin’ de cream. He done fin’ de t’ief, but hit wa’n’t no rale cat ertall, but de debil dat been er-gittin’ dat cream.

“Birneby de cat git ernough an’ sneak out ergin, an’ look ’Lish plum in de eyes an’ grin es he passes.

“In de mornin’ ’Lish he go up ter de Big House, an’ Ole Miss brag on him fur bein’ smart ernough to fin’ de t’ief, an’ she say dat some un gotter kill de black cat.

“Now, white folks ain’ lack niggers—I mean de ole-time niggers. Dey hain’t got de ole ’he sense’ dat de niggers is got, an’ wid dey book-larnin’ an’ dey fine clo’ses an’ things, hit ’pear lack dey done furgit what folks *kin* do an’ what dey *cain’t*, ’case nobody kin do des what dey pleases; fur dar’s sumpin des er little bit higher ’n ever’body, dat got er rope on em, an’ dey gotter kim when dey feels hit pull. But, howsomebbher, I’s seen wid my own eyes de white folks cuttin’ uv er baby’s finger-nails wid de scissors ’stead er bitin’ uv ’em off, lack ’spectable folks, des er makin’ er t’ief fur de jail ter cotch, an’ er-laffin’ ’bout hit, too. Dey sees er rabbit cross de road an’ nebber eben think ’bout makin’ uv er cross an’ spittin’ in hit. Dey’ll look at de new moon ober de lef’ shoulder th’u’ de trees an’ nebber eben tek time ter say er pra’r back’ards; whilst dey puts on de right shoe lust, an’ wonder what’s de matter wid dey business when hit go wrong; an’ dey eben taken dese days ter cuttin’ winders in de house, right whilst dey libin’ in hit an’ dey’s ’sprised when some er dey folks dies soon, an’ dey calls hit de ‘wuk er Prov’dence.’ White folks sho’ is cuis.

“Well, ’Lish he know better; ’cordin’ ter de knowledgments er ever’ sensible nigger, he know hit, an’ he know dat stealin’ de cream was des er trick er de debil an’ he sarchin’ fur er humin soul; but ’Lish so proud ’counter Ole Miss praisin’ uv him dat he done turn fool, an’ he promise Ole Miss dat he kill dat cat.

“He stedly ’bout hit powerful arter de proud cool off an’ he go ter de cabin; but he done gib he promise ter Ole Miss, an’ he cain’t back out. He know dar hain’t nuffin but er rope ’ll git yo’ shet uv er black cat, leastways he’d er knowed hit if he’d er thunk; but he knowed de bad luck hit ’ud fotch, so he ’low fur ter lay fur de cat an’ hit him wid er chunk fust.

“So dat night de cat kim sho’ ’nough ergin, an’ es he cmope clost by ’Lish, he nail him wid de chunk, an’ leabe him kickin’, an’ ’low ter show him ter Ole Miss in de mornin’. But when de mornin’ kim dar want no cat dar, dead er ’live, an’ Ole Marse laff an’ say dat ’Lish been er-dreamin’, but Ole Miss she git sorter mad an’ r’ar ’counter de tale dat ’Lish tell dat he kill de cat.

“Well, ’Lish, he hain’t no skeery nigger, he gittin’ smart lack de white folks; so next night he sets er dead-fall fur de cat, made outen heaby timber, an’ he sees de trigger spring an’ de dead-fall drap, ‘bang!’ plum on de cat, ’fore he leabe dar. But in de mornin’ dar wa’n’t no cat ner dead-fall nuther dar, an’ de cream done gone ergin.

“De nex’ night but one ’Lish stedly an’ stedly, an’ set er steel trap fur him. Now er steel trap’s er mighty good trap fur ever’ kin’ er cat ’ceptin’ er black cat, an’ dat nigger ’Lish mout er knowed dat he wastin’ he time, ’case er steel trap cain’t ebber hol ’er black cat; but, anyhow, he sot de steel trap fur him, an’ arter hit snap an’ he hear de cat yowl, he go off inter de cabin ter sleep. Me an’ Marthy an’ Dinah heard dat cat er yowlin’, too, but when momnin’ kim dar wa’n’t no cat by de spring-house, an’ no cream nuther.

“Den Ole Miss she gib ’Lish er gun, an’ he tote de gun so proud dat de fiel’ han’s des couldn’ speak ter him. Well, night kim at las’, an’ wid hit kim de cat, an’ he look at ’Lish an’ grin des er darin’ uv him ter shoot him, ’case he see he got de gun. But de fool nigger ain’ see dat, an’ he tek aim at de shinin’ green eyes an’ fire, ‘bang!’ an’ ober went de cat an’ ober go ’Lish, ’case de gun done kick him bad. Well, dar sot ’Lish, an’ dar sot de cat er-grinnin’ an’ wid his eyes er-shinin’ des er-waitin’ fur ’Lish ter shoot ergin. Den de debil tech him wid de fire uv he sperit, an’ ’Lish git blin’ mad, an’ he pull de trigger, an’ dis time he git him, fur de cat keel ober an’ ’pear ter die, an’ ’Lish taken him by de tail an’ fling him in de bayou.

“In de mornin’ dar was blood all ’bout de spring-house door, but Ole Miss she sho’ r’ar dat day, ’case not on’y de cream on top was gone but half de milk in de pans, an’ Ole Miss ’low some mighty hard things.

“Hit pester ’Lish mightily, ’case he done ’memb’rin’ what he Mammy larn him mighty fas’, but Ole Miss she got her dander up now, an’ she say she hain’t gwine ter stan’ all dis foolishness des ’bout de killin’ uv er lttle black cat, an’ ’Lish, he were sech er big plum fool nigger, he gwine ter gib up he knowledgments des fur de pleasurin’ uv Ole Miss. But if he think bad luck gwine skip anybody dat hunt fur hit wid bofe eyes opin he reckon mighty po’ ’bout luck. So he p’intedly wrestled wid hit, twel he ’low ter hisse’f dat he allus been lucky an’ allus gwine ter be, an’ den he des gits down ter business, an’ greases a rope fur ter mek hit slick, an’ hides hit unbeknownst in de cabin ter wait fur night, ’case he know de niggers be all plum ergin him if dey know he gwine hang er black cat.

“Late in de ebenin’ he go whistlin’ down ter de spring-house, arter Dinah an’ Marthy done put erway de milk, an’ he ben’ down er limb uv er little hick’ry saplin’ an’ cut hit twel he git er swingin’ fork fur ter noose de rope in.

“I’se heard ’Lish tell erbout hit many’s de time. Well, he ’low dat es he work sumpen des ’pear ter git inter him, an’ he whistle an’ whistle, an’ den he couldn’t keep his ole feets still, but des lit inter dancing in front er de spring-house lack mad, an’ all de time, unbeknownst, dat black cat des er-watchin’ uv him up er tree.

“Bimeby he des hatter set down, ’case he done danced all de bref outen him, an’ he feels mighty cuis, ’case es he set dar in de dark hit ’pear lack all he ebber done—all de little good, an’ all de whole heap er low down, sneakin’ things dat he done furgit

erbout—kim er-swimmin' erfore one his eyes, des ter mek him tek notice uv 'em. Hit were er warnin', sho', 'case hit were de *sperit* er 'Lish, prophesyin' ter de po' weak flesh er de *man* 'Lish, but de man 'Lish cain't unnerstan' what de spent 'Lish mean, an' hit mek him plum mizerbul.

"But arter while de cat kim em-sneakin' er-long, wid he eyes des em-shinin' white an' red an' green, lack de fox-fire in de swamp. When he sees 'Lish, he quoil he tail keerful lack an' sot down an' look at him erwhile, an' he look an' look, so knowin', twel hit mek de goose bumps fa'r riz up on 'Lish's back; den he git tired er settin', an' whisk dat ole long tail er his'n at 'Lish an' go on inter de spring-house, des er darin' 'Lish ter foller.

"Den 'Lish 'pear ter git sorter flustered, 'case he done furgit ter work de charm 'gin de debil, but go right inter de spring-house an' cornder de cat an' fling de greased rope ober he head. De cat he 'ain' show no fight now, but des grin an' sink he ole long white teef plum inter 'Lish's han', but dar hain't no blood drawed, 'case black cat nebber draws blood, but des sink p'is'n deep down on de eends er dey teef. 'Lish think 'bout dat, an' he feared ter put he han' in he mouf fur ter suck de p'is'n outen hit; but he know he in fur hit now, an' so he draw dat noose tighter an' tighter.

"Now er black cat won't holler when yo' hangs him, if hit er rale black cat, 'case hit's mostly de debil dat is er-w'arin' uv er black cat's skin when he wanter 'do erbout,' 'case he know no hones'-minded pusson is gwine ter dribe erway er cat. So de debil he set by de warm hearth, in de skin er de black cat, an' purr an' purr, an' hear all de secrets er de fambly, an' things dat passes twixt man an man an' man an' wife, 'dout anybody tekin' notice; an' dat how things go singin' noun' an' dar hain't nobody tole 'em.

"But dar's one thing dat yo' kin put in yo' pipe an' smoke; we's all got our match somers, dar's sumpen gwine ter ketch up wid de fastes', an' dat why de black cat 'ain' show no fight 'gin er rope.

"Well, 'Lish he tightens de noose an' fling de eend er de rope ober de swingin' fork, an' tie hit dar, an' sot an' wait. De cat he grin an' grin at 'Lish; he kin see de teef by de light er de eyes dat des shoot sparks, an' hit 'pear lack dem eyes des charm 'Lish lack er snake, fur his'n plum sot on de cat's, an' he cain't tek 'em off.

"Den sumpen happin dat mek 'Lish's blood fa'r rin cole an' he hair ter stan' right up an' straighten out, es kinky es hit were; fur 'Lish he hear er voice 'hine de cat somers, an' he know hit were de cat, dough de ole cat's tongue was des er hangin' out. Den hit 'pear lack dar were two cats, den free cats, den de air hit 'pear ter be plum full er cats, an' dey all opin dey moufs an' says de same thing all at de same time; 'Lish say hit were des lack thunder. He hain't nebber, nebber tole what de cats gib out—he allus shiver an' 'low he cain't, so we all hain't ebber know. But all dis time de hung cat was des er-grinnin' at 'Lish.

"Dat cat sho' dead dis time—dar wa'n't no 'sputin' 'bout dat, dough dat wa'n't no sign dat de debil done gone back ter his own. But arter de air git cl'ar fum de odder cats, 'Lish taken de hung cat down an' hide de rope in de bayou, 'case he don' want de niggems ter know he hang er black cat, an' es he lock de door, he know de cream done safe now, an' dar hain't nuffin gwine ter pester hit no mo'.

"Ole Miss mek mighty much er 'Lish, an' Ole Marse brags on him, but it don' 'pear ter de 'Lish much good; fur we cain't hide nuffin fum de truf, an' what er nigger do wrong in de dark, gwine ter be onkivered in de daylight, an' hit hain't gwineter be er cloudy day, sho's yo' born. Er sin is one er de bes' keepin' things on dis here yeth; hit hain't er gwine

ter spile in de keepin', an' when dey onkiver hit, hit 'll be des es safe an' soun' de day arter de Judgment es you kin fin' hit ter-day; an' dat nigger he know he 'mittin' er sin 'gin de 'ligion er he Mammy when he kill dat cat.

"But de bad luck dat he hunted fur kim on him putty fas' arter dat; fur de day lackin' one arter he hang de cat, er muel he were ridin' ter de fiel'—er ole, slow, jog-trottin', sleepy muel—git de debil in her an' frow him an' break he leg.

"Den he taken wid de browncreeturs in he thote 'fore he git fru dat, an' hab er powerful hard time. Ole Miss think he gwinter die, but de debil hain't gwinter let him die, he gwinter mek him mo' painful yit. Den he taken wid de arysipulous in de lame leg, an' some call hit scrofulow an' some call hit des arysipulous; but, anyhow, he seed sights wid hit, dough Ole Miss doctors on him so hard dat he git shet uv hit.

"Den de new wife she leabe him, 'case when he able ter set up she pick hit outen him dat he kill de black cat des ter pleasure Ole Miss, an' Keziah don' want de bad luck, 'case hit de ten-year luck, an' de Lord on'y know whar hit gwinter stop. An' las'ly 'Lish were taken wid de miz'ry in de chist. Well, dat las' pester Ole Miss mightily, an' she do what she kin fur bofe de ailments. She try ter git dat gal ter go back ter 'Lish—she try ter 'suade her an' ter buy her, an' she mek plarsters fur 'Lish's chist all de time 'dout doin' any good—fur dat Keziah she lub good luck better 'n she lub 'Lish, an' de plarsters uv er good 'oman lack Ole Miss cain't work 'gin de debil.

"Well, twixt all de things dat 'Lish is got an' ain' got, he w'am so po'ly dat he git rale ashy, an' hit 'pear lack de skin des sticks ter de bones, an' he set by hisse'f, 'case he hain't stout ernough ter work none now, an' talk ter somebody we cain't see, all de time. He 'low hit follers uv him, an' set down by him when he goes ter sleep uv nights, an' ain' let him git shet uv hit er minute.

"Ole Miss she git de fambly doctor now ter come an' physic on 'Lish, fur she hear de sing'in roun' 'mongst de niggers, an' she know what dey think, an' she feel 'sponsible.

"But hit 'pear lack de doctor mek 'Lish worsen, an' Ole Miss she 'low she ain' know what ter do.

"Den 'Lish he w'ar so low dat Abe, what were de carpenter, he gib out dat he gwine mek er coffin fur 'Lish, so's ter be ready fur him when he die, an' Ole Miss she feel mighty bad, 'case she 'member now de tales her black Mammy usen ter tole her when she were little. Fur er white chile ain' ebber gwine ter furgit 'em if dey lis'ens ter 'em right an' dey got er good black Mammy.

"So when Ole Miss an' de white folks' doctor des plum gib hit up, Unc' Cæsar he limp up ter de Big House, wid his white head bare, an' ax Ole Miss mout he work on 'Lish.

"Ole Miss know Unc' Cæsar 'sponsible' an' she say he mout, an' he limp off inter he cabin 'dout sayin' er word, eben ter Ole Miss, an' shot to de door, an' button hit on de inside.

"Er mighty cuis smoke kim outen Unc' Cæsar's chimbly dat ebenin', an' all de niggers say he fixin' sumpen; but we ain' know what, 'case Unc' Cæsar were er hoodoo an' work wid charms. But he go inter 'Lish cabin, an' shot de door to an' button hit on de inside, an' do sumpen ter 'Lish.

"Dat night he taken 'Lish an' set him in er cheer outside de cabin, an' 'Lish fetch his kivers outside, 'case he ain' know what Unc' Cæsar gwine do.

"Unc' Cæsar ain' say er word, but he taken er live chunk fum de hearth an' sot fire ter de cabin, an' es she blaze up high he mek passes wid his long arms an' say sumpen low,

mumblin' lack. Den when de blaze 'gin ter die down he taken 'Lish's kivers an' flings' er on, an' es de fire clomb high ergin he snatch ever' rag dat 'Lish got on him an' flings 'em on, an' swing he long arms ober he head; den, des es de flames lick de highes', he taken de rope dat he mek 'Lish creep down ter de bayou ter fin' an' fling hit on, an' dar were er power er quare-lookin' smoke in de Quarters, an' all de niggers kim er runnin' an' b'ar witness.

"Den 'Lish, des es naked as er new-borned baby, fall down an' foam an' foam at de mouf, but Unc' Cæsar won' let nobody tech him.

"Dey all stan' an' wait, des er hol'in' dey bref's ter see what gwine happin, an' bimeby de blaze hit die an' de smoke cl'ar 'way, an' dar wa'n't nuffin lef' but er little pile er ashes, an' de niggers falls ter whisperin', ercusin' Unc' Cæsar fur burnin' up po' sick 'Lish's cabin an' his kivers; when Unc' Cæsar he p'int one long arm wid er long, shakin' finger, an' say:

'Look! '—an', bless goodness! might dar in de middle er de pile er hot ashes dat des still ersmould'rin', sot de berry same ole black cat, des er-grinnin' fitten ter bust.

"De niggers dey was skeered, an' dey ain' know what ter do, but dey fotch one shout fur 'glory!' an' dat nigger 'Lish he fall ter prayin' good, 'case he know dat de cuss er de debil was offen him now, an' de soul an' de body was free."