

**Mary Burrill  
(1884–1946)**

From 1905 until her retirement in early 1944, Mary (or Mamie P.) Burrill taught English and drama, primarily at Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C. According to James Butcher, a drama professor at Howard University who had been her student, "Ms. Burrill held very high standards and was respected by her students. She emphasized speech, diction, and taught 'dramatics,' which included play performances, interpretative reading or as it was called then—declamation. She herself gave readings and her annual presentation of 'The Other Two Wise Men' at Howard University was considered a ritual part of the Christmas season."

As far as it is known, she wrote only two plays: *They That Sit in Darkness* (1919) and *Aftermath* (1919), both one-acts with social messages. *They That Sit in Darkness*, published in the *Birth Control Review*, concerns a young black girl who must abandon hope of attending college when her mother dies after the birth of a seventh child. As the eldest child, the daughter must remain home to care for her brothers and sisters. The play makes clear that the mother's death was the result of bearing too many children because the law had denied her contraceptive information.

1919, anticipates the "Red Summer" of 1919, when from June through September riots broke out in Washington, Chicago, Charleston, Knoxville, Omaha, and elsewhere. The play is a bitter and militant story of a black soldier returning from World War I to his Carolina home.

Many Blacks had been skeptical about fighting in a war for freedoms which they themselves did not enjoy; however, after the American government arrested the black editors of *The Messenger* for violation of the Espionage Act, black public opposition became less vocal. W. E. B. Du Bois, in a *Crisis* editorial, reversed his earlier stance and told Blacks, "while this war lasts, forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our own white fellow-citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy." However, by 1919, when thousands of black veterans who had fought in Europe "to make the world safe for democracy," returned to suffer the same vicious racism they had left behind, it became apparent to Du Bois that American democracy would not be extended to Blacks. He wrote in *The Crisis*: "They cheat us and mock us; they kill us and slay us; they deride our misery. When we plead for the naked protection of the law . . . , they tell us to 'GO TO HELL!' " His call became "FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT!"

Against this background, Burrill published her play in a white, left-wing periodical, *Liberator* (1918-1924), edited by the socialist Max Eastman. Later, the same year following the riots of the Red Summer, *Liberator* published Claude McKay's sonnet "If We Must Die." The play was produced by the Krigwa Players, Little Negro Theatre, New York, May 1928.

For most of her adult life, Burrill shared a house with Howard University's first dean of women, Lucy D. Slowe, and taught English and speech classes at Dunbar, where she inspired two generations of students to love and participate in theater. Although a private and outwardly conservative woman, Burrill held strong beliefs in education and social progress which she expressed through her teaching and through the publi-

cation of her plays. She is buried in Washington's Woodlawn Cemetery.

**References**

Interview. Oral History Tapes. Hatch-Billops Collection. James Butcher, September 1987.

Burrill, Mary. "They That Sit in Darkness." *Black Theater USA*, ed. James Hatch and Ted Shine. New York: Free Press, 1974, p. 178.



## Aftermath

Mary Burrill

### CHARACTERS

MILLIE, a young woman

MAM SUE, an old woman

REV. LUKE MOSEBY, a clergyman

LONNIE, a young man

MRS. HAWKINS, a friend

JOHN, a soldier

Time: The present.

Place: The Thornton Cabin in South Carolina.

It is late afternoon of a cool day in early spring. A soft afterglow pours in at the little window of the Thornton cabin. The light falls on MILLIE, a slender brown girl of sixteen, who stands near the window ironing. She wears a black dress and a big gingham apron. A clothes-horse weighted down with freshly ironed garments is nearby. In the rear there is a door leading out to the road. To the left, another door leads into the other room of the cabin. To the right there is a great stone hearth blackened by age. A Bible rests on the mantel over the hearth. An old

Originally published in the *Liberator* (April 1919).

armchair and a small table on which is a kerosene lamp are near the hearth. In the center of the room sits a well-scrubbed kitchen table and a substantial wooden chair. In front of the hearth, in a low rocking chair drawn close to the smouldering wood fire, sits MAM SUE busily sewing. The many colors in the old patchwork quilt that she is mending, together with the faded red of the bandanna on her head, contrast strangely with her black dress. MAM SUE is very old. Her ebony face is seamed with wrinkles; and in her bleared, watery eyes there is a world-old sorrow. A service flag containing one star hangs in the little window of the cabin.

**MAM SUE:** (crooning the old melody)

O, yes, yonder comes mah Lawd,

He is comin' dis way

Wid his sword in his han'

O, yes, yonder comes—

(A burning log falls apart, and MAM SUE suddenly stops singing and gazes intently at the fire. She speaks in deep mysterious tones to MILLIE, who has finished her task and has come to the hearth to put up her irons)

See dat log dah, Millie? De one fallin' tuh de side dah wid de big flame lappin' 'round hit? Dat means big doin's 'round heah tonight!

**MILLIE:** (with a start) Oh, Mam Sue, don' you go proph'sying no mo'! You seen big doin's in dat fire de night befo' them w'ite devuls come in heah an' tuk'n po' dad out and bu'nt him!

**MAM SUE:** (calmly) No, Millie, Ah didn' see no big doin's dat night—Ah see'd evul doin's an' Ah tole yo' po' daddy to keep erway f'om town de nex' day wid his cotton. Ah jes knowed dat he wuz gwine to git in a row wid dem w'ite debbils—but he wou'd'n lis'n tuh his ole mammy—De good Lawd sen' me dese warnin's in dis fiah, jes lak He sen' His messiges in de fiah to Moses. Yo' chillun bettah lis'n to—

MILLIE: (*nervously*) Oh, Mam Sue, you skeers me when you talks erbout seein' all them things in de fire—

MAM SUE: Yuh gits skeered case yuh don' put yo' trus' in de good Lawd! He kin tek keer o' yuh no mattuh whut com'!

MILLIE: (*bitterly*) Sometimes I thinks that Gawd's done fu'got us po' cullud people. Gawd didn' tek no keer o' po' dad and he put his trus' in Him! He uster set evah night by dis fire at dis here table and read his Bible an' pray—but jes look whut happen' to dad! That don' look like Gawd wuz tekin' keer—

MAM SUE: (*sharply*) Heish yo' mouf, Millie! Ah ain't a-gwine to 'ave dat sinner-talk 'roun' hyeah! (*derisively*) Gawd don't tek no keer o' yuh? Ain't yuh bin prayin' night an' mawnin' fo' Gawd to sen' yo' brudder back f'om de war 'live an' whole? An' ain't yuh git dat lettah no longer'n yistiddy sayin' dat de fightin's all done stopp't an' dat de blessid Lawd's done brung yo' brudder thoo all dem battuls live an' whole? Don' dat look lak de Lawd's done 'membered yuh?

MILLIE: (*thoughtfully*) I reckon youse right, Mam Sue. But ef anything had a-happen' to John I wuz'n evah goin' to pray no mo'!

(MILLIE goes to the clothes-horse and folds the garments and lays them carefully into a large basket. MAM SUE falls again to her crooning)

MAM SUE:

O, yes, yonder comes mah Lawd.  
He's comin' dis way-a.

MILLIE: Lonnie's so late gittin' home tonight; I guess I'd bettah tek Mis' Hart's wash home tonight myse'f.

MAM SUE: Yas, Lonnie's mighty late. Ah reckons you'd bettah slip erlon' wid hit. (MILLIE gets her hat from the adjoining room and is about to leave with the basket when MAM SUE calls significantly) Millie?

MILLIE: Yas, Mam Sue.

MAM SUE: (*firmlly*) Don' yo' fu'git to drap dat lettah fu' John in de Pos' Awfus ez yuh goes by. Whah's de lettah?



**MILLIE:** (reluctantly) But, Mam Sue, please don' lets—

(A knock is heard. **MILLIE** opens the door and **REV. LUKE MOSEBY** enters. **MOSEBY** is a wiry little old man with a black, kindly face, and bright, searching eyes; his woolly hair and beard are snow-white. He is dressed in a rusty black suit with a coat of clerical cut that comes to his knees. In one hand he carries a large Bible, and in the other, a stout walking stick)

**MILLIE:** Good evenin', Brother Moseby, come right in.

**MOSEBY:** Good eben', Millie. Good eben', Mam Sue. Ah jes drap't in to see ef you-all is still trus'in de good Lawd an'—

**MAM SUE:** Lor', Brudder Moseby, ain't Ah bin trus'n' de good Lawd nigh onter dese eighty yeah! Whut fu' yuh think Ah's gwine to quit w'en Ah'm in sight o' de Promis' Lan'? Millie, fetch Brudder Moseby dat cheer.

**MOSEBY:** (drawing his chair to the fire) Dat's right, Mam Sue, you jes a-keep on trus'n an' prayin' an' evahthing's gwine to come aw-right. (observing **MILLIE** is about to leave) Don' lemme 'tain yuh, Millie, but whut's all dis good news wese bin heahin' 'bout yo' brudder John? Dey say he's done won some kind o' medal ober dah in France?

**MILLIE:** (brightening up) Oh, yes, we got a lettah day befo' yestiddy f'om John tellin' us all erbout it. He's won de War Cross! He fought off twenty Germuns all erlone an' saved his whole comp'ny an' the gret French Gen'rul come an' pinned de medal on him, *hisse'f*!

**MOSEBY:** De Lawd bles' his soul! Ah know'd dat boy wud mek good!

**MILLIE:** (excited by the glory of it all) An' he's been to Paris, an' the fines' people stopp't him when they seen his medal, an' shook his han' an' smiled at him— an' he kin go evahwhere, an' dey ain't nobody all the time a-lookin' down on him, an' a-sneerin' at him 'cause he's black; but evahwhere they's jes gran' to him! An' he sez it's the firs' time evah in his life he's felt lak a real, sho-nuf man!

MOSEBY: Well, honey, don't de Holy Book say, "De fust shill be las' and de las' shill be fust"?

MAM SUE: (*fervently*) Dat hit do! An' de Holy Book ain't nebber tole no lie!

MOSEBY: Folks ober in Char'ston is sayin' dat some sojers is gwine to lan' dah today or tomorrer. Ah reck-ons day'll all be comin' 'long soon now dat de war's done stopp't.

MILLIE: I jes hates the thought of John comin' home an' hearin' 'bout dad!

MOSEBY: (*in astonishment*) Whut! Yuh mean to say yuh ain't 'rite him 'bout yo' daddy, yit?

MAM SUE: Dat she ain't! Millie mus' 'ave huh way! She 'lowed huh brudder ough'n be tole, an' dat huh could keep on writin' to him jes lak huh dad wuz livin'—Millie allus done de writin'—An' Ah lets huh 'ave huh way—

MOSEBY: (*shaking his head in disapproval*) Yuh mean tuh say—

MILLIE: (*pleading*) But, Brother Moseby, I couldn't write John no bad news wilst he wuz way over there by hisse'f. He had 'nuf to worry him with death a'-starin' him in the face evah day!

MAM SUE: Yas, Brudder Moseby, Millie's bin carryin' on dem lies in huh lettahs fu' de las' six months; but today Ah jes sez to huh—Dis war done stopp't now, an' John he gwine to be comin' home soon, an' he ain't agwine to come hyeah an' fin' me wid no lie on mah soul! An' Ah med huh set down an' tell him de whole truf. She's gwine out to pos' dat lettah dis minute.

MOSEBY: (*still disapproving*) No good nebber come—

(*The door is pushed violently open, and LONNIE, a sturdy black boy of eighteen rushes in breathlessly*)

LONNIE: Mam Sue! Millie! Whut'da yuh think? John's come home!

MILLIE: (*speechless with astonishment*) John? Home? Where's he at?



**MAM SUE:** (*incredulously*) Whut yuh sayin'? John done come home? Bles' de Lawd! Bles' de Lawd! Millie, didn' Ah tell yuh sumpin wuz gwine tuh happen?

**LONNIE:** (*excitedly*) I wuz sweepin' up de sto' jes befo' leavin' an' de phone rung—it wuz John—he wuz at Char'ston—jes landid! His comp'ny's waitin' to git de ten o'clock train fu' Camp Reed, whah dey's goin' to be mustered out.

**MOSEBY:** But how's he gwine to get erway?

**LONNIE:** Oh, good evenin', Brother Moseby, lse jes so 'cited I didn' see yuh—Why his Cap'n done give him leave to run over heah 'tell de train's ready. He ought tuh be heah now 'cause it's mos' two hours sence he wuz talkin'—

**MAM SUE:** Whuffo yuh so long comin' home an' tellin' us?

**LONNIE:** (*hesitatingly*) I did start right out but when I git to Sherley's corner I seen a whole lot of them w'ite hoodlums hangin' 'round de feed sto'—I jes felt like dey wuz jes waitin' dah to start sumpin, so I dodged 'em by tekin' de long way home.

**MILLIE:** Po' Lonnie! He's allus dodgin' po' w'ite trash!

**LONNIE:** (*sullenly*) Well, yuh see whut dad got by not dodgin' 'em.

**MOSEBY:** (*rising to go*) Ah mus' be steppin' 'long now. Ah got to stop in to see ole man Hawkins; he's mighty sick. Ah'll drap in on mah way back fu' a word o' prayer wid John.

**MAM SUE:** Lonnie, yu'd bettah run erlon' as Brudder Moseby go an' tote dat wash tuh Mis' Ha't. An' drap in Mis' Hawkins' sto' an' git some soap an' starch; an' Ah reckons yu'd bettah bring me a bottle o' linimint—dis ole pain done come back in mah knee. (*to MOSEBY*) Good eben, Brudder Moseby.

**MOSEBY:** Good eben, Mam Sue; Good eben, Millie, an' Gawd bles' yuh.

**LONNIE:** (*as he is leaving*) Tell John I'll git back fo' he leaves.

(LONNIE and MOSEBY leave. MILLIE closes the door behind them and then goes to the window and looks out anxiously)

MILLIE: (musingly) Po' John! Po' John! (turning to MAM SUE) Mam Sue?

MAM SUE: Yas, Millie.

MILLIE: (hesitatingly) Who's goin' to tell John 'bout dad?

MAM SUE: (realizing for the first time that the task must fall to someone) Dunno. Ah reckons yu'd bettah.

MILLIE: (going to MAM SUE and kneeling softly at her side) Mam Sue, don' let's tell him now! He's got only a li'l hour to spen' with us—an' it's the firs' time fu' so long! John loved daddy so! Let 'im be happy jes a li'l longer—we kin tell 'im the truth when he comes back fu' good. Please, Mam Sue!

MAM SUE: (softened by MILLIE's pleading) Honey chile, John gwine to be askin' for his daddy fust thing—dey ain't no way—

MILLIE: (gaining courage) Oh, yes, 'tis! We kin tell 'im dad's gone to town—anything, jes so's he kin spen' these few lil'l minutes in peace! I'll fix the Bible jes like dad's been in an' been a-readin' in it! He won't know no bettah!

(MILLIE takes the Bible from the mantel and opening it at random lays it on the table; she draws the old armchair close to the table as her father had been wont to do every evening when he read his Bible)

MAM SUE: (shaking her head doubtfully) Ah ain't much on actin' dis lie, Millie.

(The soft afterglow fades and the little cabin is filled with shadows. MILLIE goes again to the window and peers out. MAM SUE falls again to her crooning)

MAM SUE: (crooning)  
O, yes, yonder comes mah Lawd,  
He's comin' dis way  
Wid his sword in his han'—

(to MILLIE) Millie, bettah light de lamp; it's gittin' dark.

He's gwine ter hew dem sinners down

Right lebbal to de groun'

O, yes, yonder comes mah Lawd—

(As MILLIE is lighting the lamp, whistling is heard in the distance. MILLIE listens intently, then rushes to the window. The whistling comes nearer; it rings out clear and familiar—"Though the boys are far away, they dream of home")

MILLIE: (excitedly) That's him! That's John, Mam Sue!

(MILLIE rushes out of doors. The voices of JOHN and MILLIE are heard from without in greetings. Presently, JOHN and MILLIE enter the cabin. JOHN is tall and straight—a good soldier and a strong man. He wears the uniform of a private in the American Army. One hand is clasped in both of MILLIE's. In the other, he carries an old fashioned valise. The War Cross is pinned on his breast. On his sleeve three chevrons tell mutely of wounds suffered in the cause of freedom. His brown face is aglow with life and the joy of homecoming)

JOHN: (eagerly) Where's dad? Where's Mam Sue?

MAM SUE: (hobbling painfully to meet him) Heah's ole Mam Sue! (JOHN takes her tenderly in his arms) Bles' yo' heart, chile, bles' yo' heart! Tuh think dat de good Lawd's done lemme live to see dis day!

JOHN: Dear old Mam Sue! Gee, but I'm glad to see you an' Millie again!

MAM SUE: Didn' Ah say dat yuh wuz comin' back hyeah?

JOHN: (smiling) Same old Mam Sue with huh faith an' huh prayers! But where's dad? (he glances toward the open Bible) He's been in from de field, ain't he?

MILLIE: (without lifting her eyes) Yes, he's come in but he had to go out ag'in—to Sherley's feed sto'.



**JOHN:** *(reaching for his cap that he has tossed upon the table)* That ain't far. I've jes a few minutes so I'd bettah run down there an' hunt him up. Won't he be surprised!

**MILLIE:** *(confused)* No—no, John—I fu'got; he ain't gone to Sherley's, he's gone to town.

**JOHN:** *(disappointed)* To town? I hope he'll git in befo' I'm leavin'. There's no tellin' how long they'll keep me at Camp Reed. Where's Lonnie?

**MAM SUE:** Lonnie's done gone to Mis' Ha't's wid de wash. He'll be back to-reckly.

**MILLIE:** *(admiring the medal on his breast)* An' this is the medal? Tell us all erbout it, John.

**JOHN:** Oh, Sis, it's an awful story—wait 'til I git back fu' good. Let's see whut I've got in dis bag fu' you. *(he places the worn valise on the table and opens it. He takes out a bright-colored dress pattern)* That's fu' you, Millie, and quit wearin' them black clothes.

*(MILLIE takes the silk and hugs it eagerly to her breast, suddenly there sweeps into her mind the realization that she cannot wear it, and the silk falls to the floor)*

**MILLIE:** *(trying to be brave)* Oh, John, it's jes lovely! *(as she shows it to MAM SUE)* Look, Mam Sue!

**JOHN:** *(flourishing a bright shawl)* An' this is fu' Mam Sue. Mam Sue'll be so gay!

**MAM SUE:** *(admiring the gift)* Who'd evah b'lieved dat yo' ole Mam Sue would live to be wearin' clo'es whut huh gran'chile done brung huh f'om Eu'ope!

**JOHN:** Never you mind, Mam Sue, one of these days I'm goin' to tek you an' Millie over there, so's you kin breathe free jes once befo' yuh die.

**MAM SUE:** It's got tuh be soon, 'cause dis ole body's mos' wo'e out; an' de good Lawd's gwine to be callin' me to pay mah debt 'fo' long.

**JOHN:** *(showing some handkerchiefs, with gay borders)* These are fu' Lonnie. *(he next takes out a tiny*

box that might contain a bit of jewelry) An' this is fu' dad. Sum'pin he's been wantin' fu' years. I ain't goin' to open it 'till he comes.

(MILLIE walks into the shadows and furtively wipes a tear from her eyes)

JOHN: (taking two army pistols from his bag and placing them on the table) An' these las' are fu' youahs truly.

MILLIE: (looking at them, fearfully) Oh, John, are them youahs?

JOHN: One of 'em's mine; the other's my Lieutenant's. I've been cleanin' it fu' him. Don' tech 'em—'cause mine's loaded.

MILLIE: (still looking at them in fearful wonder) Did they learn yuh how to shoot 'em?

JOHN: Yep, an' I kin evah mo' pick 'em off!

MILLIE: (reproachfully) Oh, John!

JOHN: Nevah you worry, li'l Sis, John's nevah goin' to use 'em 'less it's right fu' him to. (he places the pistols on the mantel—on the very spot where the Bible has lain) My! but it's good to be home! I've been erway only two years but it seems like two cent'ries. All that life ovah there seems like some awful dream!

MAM SUE: (fervently) Ah know it do! Many's de day yo' ole Mam Sue set in dis cheer an' prayed fu' yuh.

JOHN: Lots of times, too, in the trenches when I wuz dog-tired, an' sick, an' achin' wid the cold I uster say: well, if we're sufferin' all this for the oppressed, like they tell us, then Mam Sue, an' dad, an' Millie come in on that—they'll git some good ou'n it if I don't! An' I'd shet my eyes an' fu'git the cold, an' the pain, an' them old guns spittin' death all 'round us; an' see you folks settin' here by this fire—Mam Sue, noddin', an' singin'; dad a spellin' out his Bible—(he glances toward the open book) Let's see whut he's been readin'—(JOHN takes up the Bible and reads the first passage upon which his eye falls) "But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, an' do good to them that hate you"—(he lets the Bible fall

to the table) That ain't the dope they been feedin' us soljers on! "Love your enemies?" It's been—git a good aim at 'em, an' let huh go!

**MAM SUE:** (*surprised*) Honey, Ah hates to hyeah yuh talkin' lak dat! It sound lak yuh done fu'git yuh Gawd!

**JOHN:** No, Mam Sue, I ain't fu'got God, but I've quit thinkin' that prayers kin do ever'thing. I've seen a whole lot sence I've been erway from here. I've seen some men go into battle with a curse on their lips, and I've seen them same men come back with never a scratch; an' I've seen men whut read their Bibles befo' battle, an' prayed to live, left dead on the field. Yes, Mam Sue, I've seen a heap an' I've done a tall lot o' thinkin' sence I've been erway from here. An' I b'lieve it's jes like this—beyon' a certain point prayers ain't no good! The Lawd does jes so much for you, then it's up to you to do the res' fu' yourse'f. The Lawd's done His part when He's done give me strength an' courage; I got tuh do the res' fu' myse'f!

**MAM SUE:** (*shaking her head*) Ah don' lak dat kin' o' talk—it don' bode no good!

(*The door opens and LONNIE enters with packages. He slips the bolt across the door*)

**JOHN:** (*rushing to LONNIE and seizing his hand*) Hello, Lonnie, ole man!

**LONNIE:** Hello, John, Gee, but Ah'm glad tuh see yuh!

**JOHN:** Boy, you should 'ave been with me! It would 'ave taken some of the skeeriness out o' yuh, an' done yuh a worl' o' good.

**LONNIE:** (*ignoring JOHN's remark*) Here's the soap an starch, Millie.

**MAM SUE:** Has yuh brung mah linimint?

**LONNIE:** Yassum, it's in de packige.

**MILLIE:** (*unwrapping the package*) No, it ain't, Lonnie.

**LONNIE:** Mis' Hawkins give it tuh me. Ah mus' a lef' it on de counter. Ah'll git it w'en Ah goes to de train wid John.



**MILLIE:** *(showing him the handkerchief)* See whut John done brought you! An' look on de mantel! *(pointing to the pistols)*

**LONNIE:** *(drawing back in fear as he glances at the pistols)* You'd bettah hide them things! No cullud man bettah be seen wid dem things down heah!

**JOHN:** That's all right, Lonnie, nevah you fear. I'm goin' to keep 'em an' I ain't a-goin' to hide 'em either. See them. *(pointing to the wound chevrons on his arm)* Well, when I got them wounds, I let out all the rabbit-blood 'at wuz in me! *(defiantly)* Ef I kin be trusted with a gun in France, I kin be trusted with one in South Car'lina.

**MAM SUE:** *(sensing trouble)* Millie, yu'd bettah fix some suppah fu' John.

**JOHN:** *(looking at his watch)* I don' want a thing, I've got to be leavin' in a little while. I'm 'fraid I'm goin' to miss dad after all.

*(The knob of the door is turned as though someone is trying to enter. Then there is a loud knock on the door)*

**JOHN:** *(excitedly)* That's dad! Don't tell him I'm here!

*(JOHN tips hurriedly into the adjoining room. LONNIE unbolts the door and MRS. SELENA HAWKINS enters)*

**MRS. HAWKINS:** Lonnie fu'got de liniment so I thought I' bettah run ovah wid hit, 'cause when Mam Sue sen' fu' dis stuff she sho' needs hit. Brudder Moseby's been tellin' me dat John's done come home.

**JOHN:** *(coming from his hiding place and trying to conceal his disappointment)* Yes, I'm here. Good evenin', Mis' Hawkins. Glad to see you.

**MRS. HAWKINS:** *(shaking hands with JOHN)* Well, lan' sakes alive! Ef it ain't John sho'nuf! An' ain't he lookin' gran'! Jes look at dat medal a-shining' on his coat! Put on yuh cap, boy, an' lemme see how yuh look!

**JOHN:** Sure! *(JOHN puts on his overseas cap and, smiling, stands at attention a few paces off, while*

MAM SUE, LONNIE, and MILLIE form an admiring circle around him)

MRS. HAWKINS: Now don' he sholy look gran'! I knows yo' sistah, an' gran'-mammy's proud o' yuh! (*a note of sadness creeps into her voice*) Ef only yuh po' daddy had a-lived to see dis day!

(JOHN looks at her in amazement. MILLIE and MAM SUE stand transfixed with terror over the sudden betrayal)

JOHN: (*looking from one to the other and repeating her words as though he can scarcely realize their meaning*) "Ef your po' daddy had lived—" (*to MILLIE*) Whut does this mean?

(MILLIE sinks sobbing into the chair at the table and buries her face in her hands)

MRS. HAWKINS: Lor', Millie, I thought you'd tole him!

(*Bewildered by the catastrophe that she has precipitated, MRS. HAWKINS slips out of the cabin*)

JOHN: (*shaking MILLIE almost roughly*) Come, Millie, have you been lyin' to me? Is dad gone?

MILLIE: (*through her sobs*) I jes hated to tell you—you wuz so far erway—

JOHN: (*nervously*) Come, Millie, for God's sake don' keep me in this su'pense! I'm a brave soldier—I kin stan' it—did he suffer much? Wuz he sick long?

MILLIE: He wuzn't sick no time—they w'ite devuls come in heah an' dragged him—

JOHN: (*desperately*) My God! You mean they lynched dad?

MILLIE: (*sobbing piteously*) They burnt him down by the big gum tree!

JOHN: (*desperately*) Whut fu', Millie? What fu'?

MILLIE: He got in a row wid ole Mister Withrow 'bout the price of cotton—an' he called dad a liar an' struck him—an' dad he up an' struck him back—

JOHN: (*brokenly*) Didn' they try him? Didn' they give him a chance? Whut'd the Sheriff do? An' the Gov-nur?

MILLIE: (through her sobs) They didn't do nothin'.

JOHN: Oh, God! Oh, God! (then recovering from the first bitter anguish and speaking) So they've come into ouah home, have they! (he strides over to LONNIE and seizes him by the collar) An' whut wuz you doin' when them hounds come in here after dad?

LONNIE: (hopelessly) They wuz so many of 'em come an' git 'im—whut could Ah do?

JOHN: Do? You could 'ave fought 'em like a man!

MAM SUE: (pleadingly) Don't be too hard on 'im, John, wese ain't got no gun 'round heah!

JOHN: Then he should 'ave burnt their damn kennels ovah their heads! Who was it leadin' em?

MILLIE: Old man Withrow and the Sherley boys, they started it all.

(Gradually assuming the look of a man who has determined to do some terrible work that must be done, JOHN walks deliberately toward the mantel where the revolvers are lying)

JOHN: (bitterly) I've been helpin' the w'ite man git his freedom, I reckon I'd bettah try now to get my own!

MAM SUE: (terrified) Whut yuh gwine ter do?

JOHN: (with bitterness growing in his voice) I'm sick o' these w'ite folks doin's—we're "fine, trus'worthy feller citizuns" when they're handin' us out guns, an' Liberty Bonds, an' chuckin' us off to die; but we ain't a damn thing when it comes to handin' us the rights we done fought an' bled fu'! I'm sick o' this sort o' life—an' I'm goin' to put an' end to it!

MILLIE: (rushing to the mantel, and covering the revolvers with her hands) Oh, no, no, John! Mam Sue, John's gwine to kill hisse'f!

MAM SUE: (piteously) Oh, mah honey, don' yuh go do nothin' to bring sin on yo' soul! Pray to de good Lawd to tek all dis fiery feelin' out'n yo' heart! Wait 'tel Brud-der Moseby come back—he's gwine to pray—



JOHN: *(his speech growing more impassioned and bitter)* This ain't no time fu' preachers or prayers! You mean to tell me I mus' let them w'ite devuls send me miles erway to suffer an' be shot up fu' the freedom of people I ain't nevah seen, while they're burnin' an' killin' my folks here at home! To Hell with 'em!

*(He pushes MILLIE aside, and seizing the revolvers, thrusts the loaded one into his pocket and begins deliberately to load the other)*

MILLIE: *(throwing her arms about his neck)* Oh, John, they'll kill yuh!

JOHN: *(defiantly)* Whut ef they do! I ain't skeered o' none of 'em! I've faced worse guns than any sneakin' hounds kin show me! To Hell with 'em! *(he thrusts the revolver that he has just loaded into LONNIE's hand)* Take this, an' come on here, boy, an' we'll see what Withrow an' his gang have got to say!

*(Followed by LONNIE, who is bewildered and speechless, JOHN rushes out of the cabin and disappears in the gathering darkness)*

*(Curtain)*