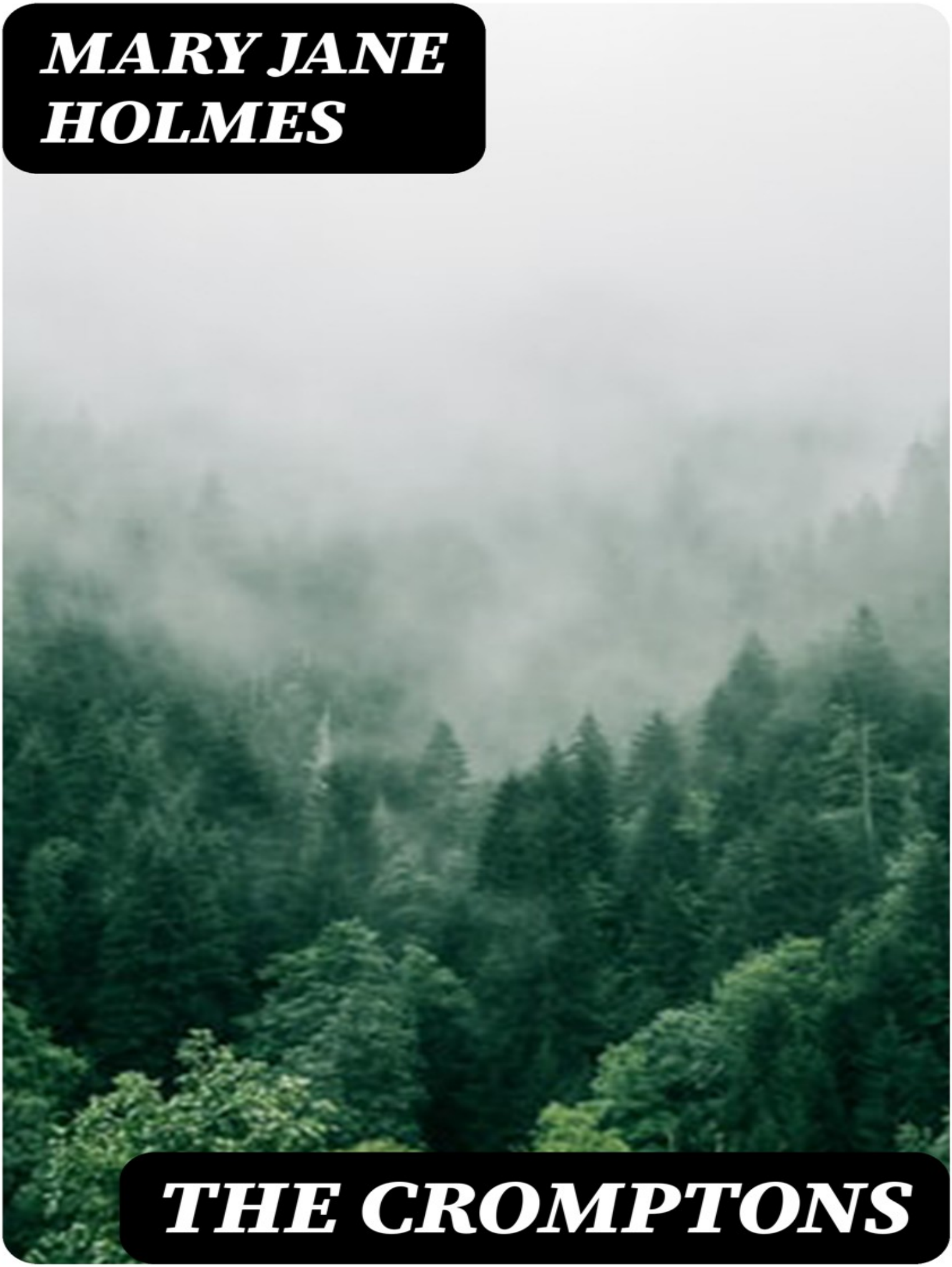
MARY JANE HOLMES



THE CROMPTONS

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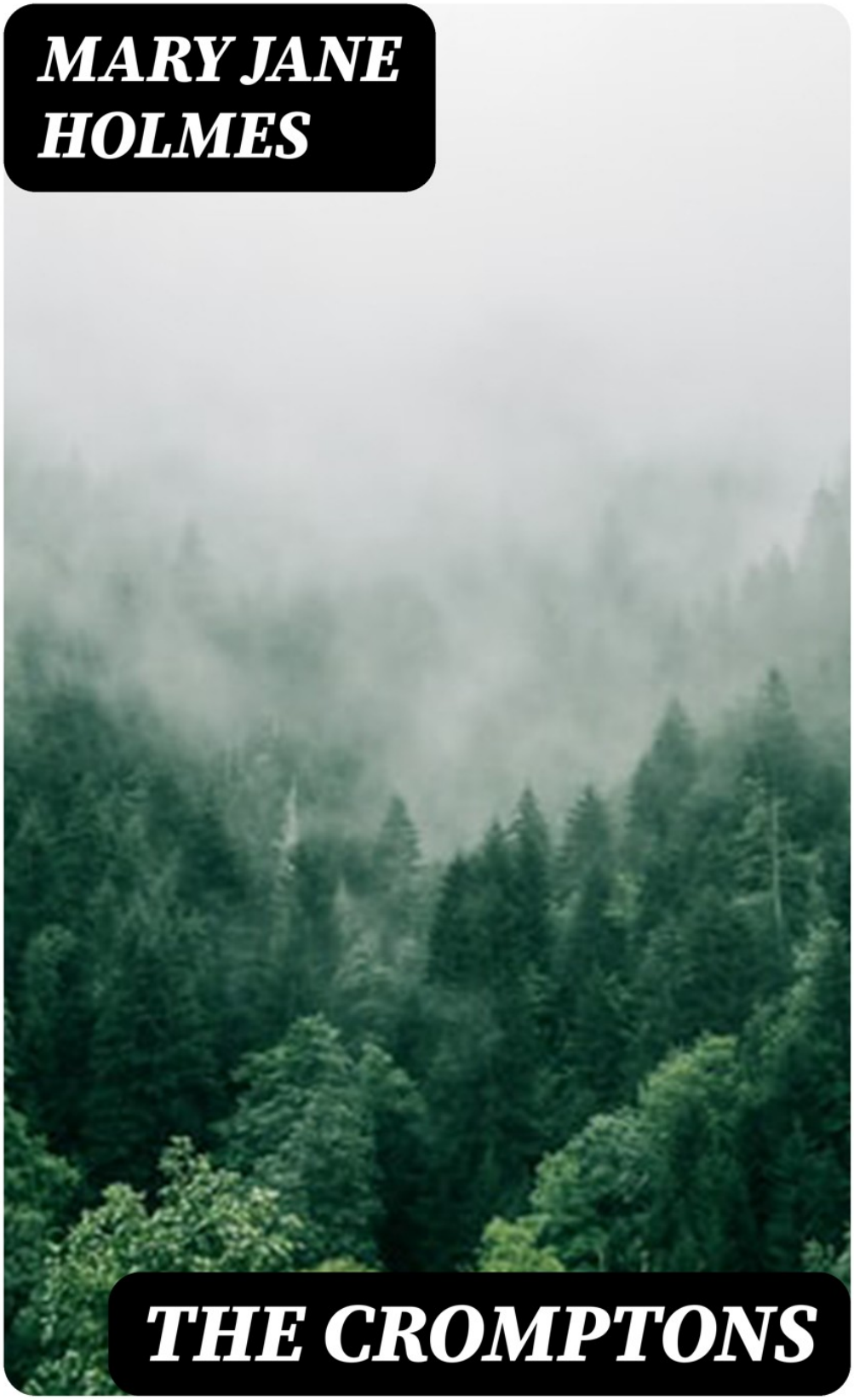

THE CROMPTONS

Mary Jane Holmes

The Cromptons

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PART I

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CHAPTER I

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THE STRANGER AT THE BROCK HOUSE

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The steamer "Hatty" which plied between Jacksonville and Enterprise was late, and the people who had come down from the Brock House to the landing had waited half an hour before a puff of smoke in the distance told that she was coming. There had been many conjectures as to the cause of the delay, for she was usually on time, and those who had friends on the boat were growing nervous, fearing an accident, and all were getting tired, when she appeared in the distance, the puffs of smoke increasing in volume as she drew nearer, and the sound of her whistle echoing across the water, which at Enterprise spreads out into a lake. She had not met with an accident, but had been detained at Palatka waiting for a passenger of whom the captain had been apprised.

"He may be a trifle late, but if he is, wait. He must take your boat," Tom Hardy had said to the captain when engaging passage for his friend, and Tom Hardy was not one whose wishes were often disregarded. "Them Hardys does more business with me in one year than ten other families

and I can't go agin Tom, and if he says wait for his friend, why, there's nothing to do but wait," the captain said, as he walked up and down in front of his boat, growing more and more impatient, until at last as he was beginning to swear he'd wait no longer for all the Hardys in Christendom, two men came slowly towards the landing, talking earnestly and not seeming to be in the least hurry, although the "Hatty" began to scream herself hoarse as if frantic to be gone.

"How d'ye, Cap," Tom said, in his easy, off-hand way. "Hope we haven't kept you long. This is my friend I told you about. I suppose his berth is ready?"

He did not tell the name of his friend, who, as if loath to cross the plank, held back for a few more words. Tom gave him a little push at last, and said, "Good-bye, you really must go. Success to you, but don't for a moment think of carrying out that quixotic plan you first mentioned. Better jump into the river. Good-bye!"

The plank was crossed and pulled in, and a mulatto boy came forward to take the stranger's bag and pilot him to his stateroom, which opened from what was called the ladies' parlor. Coiled up in a corner on the deck was a bundle of something which stirred as they came near to it, and began to turn over, making the stranger start with a slight exclamation.

"Doan you be skeert, sar," the boy said, "dat's nottin' but Mandy Ann, an onery nigger what b'longs to ole Miss Harris in de clarin' up ter Ent'prise. She's been hired out a spell in Jacksonville,—nuss to a little gal, and now she's gwine home. Miss Dory done sent for her, 'case Jake is gone and ole Miss is wus,—never was very peart," and turning to the

girl the boy Ted continued: "You Mandy Ann, doan you know more manners not to skeer a gemman, rollin' round like a punkin? Get back wid yer."

He spurned the bundle with his foot, while the stranger stopped suddenly, as if a blow had been struck him.

"Who did you say she was? To whom does she belong, I mean?" he asked, and the boy replied, "Mandy Ann, a no count nigger, b'longs to Miss Harris. Poor white trash! Crackers! Dis your stateroom, sar. Kin I do somethin' for you?"

The boy's head was held high, indicative of his opinion of poor white trash and Crackers in general, and Mandy Ann in particular.

"No, thanks," the stranger said, taking his bag and shutting himself into his stuffy little stateroom.

"'Specs he's from de Norf; looks like it, an' dey allus askin' who we 'longs to. In course we 'longs to somebody. We has ter," Ted thought, as he made his way back to Mandy Ann, who was wide-awake and ready for any war of words which might come up between herself and Ted, "who felt mighty smart 'case he was cabin boy on de 'Hatty.'"

As Ted suspected, the stranger was of Northern birth, which showed itself in his accent and cold, proud bearing. He might have been thirty, and he might have been more. His face did not show his age. His features were regular, and his complexion pale as a woman's. His eyes were a cross between blue and gray, with a look in them which made you feel that they were reading your inmost secrets, and you involuntarily turned away when they were fixed upon you. On this occasion he seemed colder and prouder than usual,

as he seated himself upon the stool in his stateroom and looked about him,—not at any thing that was there, for he did not see it, or think how small and uncomfortable his quarters were, although recommended as one of the staterooms *de luxe* on the boat. His thoughts were outside, first on Mandy Ann,—not because of anything about her personally. He had seen nothing except a woolly head, a dark blue dress, and two black, bare feet and ankles, but because she was Mandy Ann, bound slave of "ole Miss Harris, who lived in de clarin'," and for that reason she connected him with something from which he shrank with an indescribable loathing. At last he concluded to try the narrow berth, but finding it too hard and too short went out upon the rear deck, and taking a chair where he would be most out of the way and screened from observation, he sat until the moon went down behind a clump of palms, and the stars paled in the light of the sun which shone down upon the beautiful river and the tangled mass of shrubbery and undergrowth on either side of it.

At last the passengers began to appear one by one, with their cheery how dye's and good mornings, and curious glances at this stranger in their midst, who, although with them, did not seem to be one of them. They were all Southerners and inclined to be friendly, but nothing in the stranger's attitude invited sociability. He was looking off upon the water in the direction from which they had come, and never turned his head in response to the loud shouts, when an alligator was seen lying upon the shore, or a big turtle was sunning itself on a log. He was a Northerner, they knew from his general make-up, and a friend of Tom Hardy,

the captain said, when questioned with regard to him. This last was sufficient to atone for any proclivities he might have antagonistic to the South. Tom Hardy, although living in Georgia, was well known in Florida. To be his friend was to be somebody; and two or three attempts at conversation were made in the course of the morning. One man, bolder than the rest, told him it was a fine day and a fine trip, but that the "Hatty" was getting a little too *passée* for real comfort. At the word *passée* the stranger looked up with something like interest, and admitted that the boat was *passée*, and the day fine, and the trip, too. A cigar was next offered, but politely declined, and then the attempt at an acquaintance ceased on the part of the first to make it. Later on an old Georgian planter, garrulous and good-humored, swore he'd find out what stuff the Yankee was made of, and why he was down there where few of his kind ever came. His first move was the offer of tobacco, with the words: "How d'ye, sir? Have a chew?"

The stranger's head went up a little higher than its wont, and the proud look on the pale face deepened as he declined the tobacco civilly, as he had the cigar.

"Wall, now, don't chew tobacky? You lose a good deal. I couldn't live without it. Sorter soothin', an' keeps my jaws goin', and when I'm so full of vim,—mad, you know,—that I'm fit to bust, why, I spit and spit,—backy juice in course,—till I spit it all out," the Georgian said, taking an immense chew, and sitting down by the stranger, who gave no sign that he knew of his proximity, but still kept his eyes on the river as if absorbed in the scenery.

The Georgian was not to be easily rebuffed. Crossing his legs and planting his big hat on his knees, he went on:

"You are from the North, I calculate?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. We can mostly tell 'em. From Boston, I reckon?"

"No."

"New York, mabby? No? Chicago? No? Wall, where in—" the Georgian stopped, checked by a look in the bluish-gray eyes which seldom failed in its effect.

Evidently the stranger didn't choose to tell where he lived, but the Georgian, though somewhat subdued, was not wholly silenced, and he continued: "Ever in Florida before?"

"No."

"Wall, I s'pose you're takin' a little pleasure trip like the rest of us?"

To this there was no response, the stranger thinking with bitterness that his trip was anything but one of pleasure. There was still one chord left to pull and that was Tom Hardy, who in a way was voucher for this interloper, and the Georgian's next question was: "Do you know Tom well?"

"Do you mean, Mr. Hardy?" the stranger asked, and the Georgian replied. "In course, but I allus calls him Tom. Have known him since he wore gowns. My plantation jines old man Hardy's."

There was no doubt, now, that the stranger was interested, and had his companion been a close observer he would have seen the kindling light in his eyes, and the spots of red beginning to show on his face. Whether to talk or not was a question in his mind. Cowardice prompted him to

remain silent, and something which defied silence prompted him at last to talk.

"I was with Mr. Thomas Hardy in college," he said, "and I have visited him in his home. He is my best friend."

"To-be-sure!" the Georgian said, hitching nearer to the stranger, as if there was a bond of relationship between them.

The man had given no inkling of the date of his visit, and as it was some years since Tom was graduated the Georgian did not dream of associating the visit with a few weeks before, when he had heard that a high buck was at old man Hardy's and with Tom was painting the neighborhood red and scandalizing some of the more sober citizens with his excesses. This quiet stranger with the proud face and hard eyes never helped paint anything. It was somebody else, whose name he had forgotten, but of whom he went on to speak in not very complimentary terms.

"A high buck, I never happened to see squar in the face," he said. "Had glimpses of him in the distance ridin' ole man Hardy's sorrel, like he was crazy, and oncet reelin' in the saddle. Yes, sar, *reelin'*, as if he'd took too much. I b'lieve in a drink when you are dry, but Lord land, whar's the sense of *reelin'*? I don't see it, do you?"

The stranger said he didn't and the Georgian went on, now in a lower, confidential voice.

"I actually hearn that this chap,—what the deuce was his name? Have you an idee? He was from the North?"

If the stranger had an *idee* he didn't give it, and the Georgian continued: "These two young chaps—Tom ain't right young though, same age as you, I reckon—called on

some Cracker girls back in the woods and the Northern feller staid thar two or three days. Think of it—Cracker girls! Now, if'ted been niggers, instead of Crackers!"

"Ugh!" the stranger exclaimed, wakened into something like life. "Don't talk any more about that man! He must have been a sneak and villain and a low-lived dog, and if there is any meaner name you can give him, do so. It will fit him well, and please me."

"Call him a Cracker, but a Florida one. Georgy is mostly better—not up to so much snuff, you know," the Georgian suggested, while the Northerner drew a quick breath and thought of Mandy Ann, and wondered where she was and if he should see her again.

He felt as if there was not a dry thread in one of his garments when his companion left him, and returning to his friends reported that he hadn't made much out of the chap. He wasn't from New York, nor Boston, nor Chicago, and "I don't know where in thunder he is from, nor his name nuther. I forgot to ask it, he was so stiff and offish. He was in college with Tom Hardy and visited him years ago; that's all I know," the planter said, and after that the stranger was left mostly to himself, while the passengers busied themselves with gossip, and the scenery, and trying to keep cool.

The day was hot and grew hotter as the sun rose higher in the heavens, and the stranger felt very uncomfortable, but it was not the heat which affected him as much as the terrible network of circumstances which he had woven for himself. It was the harvest he was reaping as the result of one false step, when his brain was blurred and he was somebody besides the elegant gentleman whom people felt

it an honor to know. He was himself now, crushed inwardly, but carrying himself just as proudly as if no mental fire were consuming him, making him think seriously more than once of jumping into the river and ending it all. He was very luxurious and fastidious in his tastes, and would have nothing unseemly in his home at the North, where he had only to say to his servants come and they came, and where, if he died on his rosewood bedstead with silken hangings, they would make him a grand funeral—smother him with flowers, and perhaps photograph him as he lay in state. Here, if he ended his life, in the river, with alligators and turtles, he would be fished up a sorry spectacle, and laid upon the deck with weeds and ferns clinging to him, and no one knowing who he was till they sent for Tom Hardy at that moment hurrying back to his home in Georgia, from which he had come at the earnest request of his friend. He did not like the looks of himself bedraggled and wet, and dead, on the deck of the "Hatty," with that curious crowd looking at him, Mandy Ann with the rest. Strange that thoughts of Mandy Ann should flit through his mind as he decided against the cold bath in the St. John's and *to face* it, whatever it was. Occasionally some one spoke to him, and he always answered politely, and once offered his chair to a lady who seemed to be looking for one. But she declined it, and he was again left alone. Once he went to the other end of the boat for a little exercise and change, he said to himself, but really for a chance of seeing Mandy Ann, who of all the passengers interested him the most. But Mandy Ann was not in sight, nor did he see her again till the boat was moving slowly up to the wharf at Enterprise, and with her

braided tags of hair standing up like little horns, and her worldly goods tied up in a cotton handkerchief, she stood respectfully behind the waiting crowd, each eager to be the first to land.

The Brock House was full—"not so much as a cot or a shelf for one more," the clerk said to the stranger, who was last at the desk. He had lingered behind the others to watch Mandy Ann, with a half-formed resolution to ask her to direct him to "ole Miss Harrises" if, as Ted had said, she was going there. Mandy Ann did not seem to be in any hurry and sauntered leisurely up the lane a little beyond the Brock House, where she sat down and stretching out her bare feet began to suck an orange Ted had given her at parting, telling her that though she was "an onery nigger who belonged to a Cracker, she had rather far eyes and a mouth that couldn't be beat for sass, adding that he reckoned that thar tall man who didn't speak to nobody might be wantin' to buy her, as he had done ast him oncet how far it was to the clarin', an' he couldn't want nobody thar but her." Mandy Ann had taken the orange, but had spurned what Ted had said of the tall man's intentions. She had been told too many times, during her brief stay in Jacksonville as a nurse girl, that she was of no manner of account to believe any one wished to buy her, and she paid no attention to the tall man, except to see that he was the last to enter the hotel, where he was told there was no room for him.

"But I must have a place to sleep," he said. "It is only for the night. I return on the 'Hatty.'"

"Why not stay on her then? Some do who only come up for the trip," was the clerk's reply.

This was not a bad idea, although the stranger shuddered as he thought of his ill-smelling stateroom and short berth. Still it was better than camping out doors, or—the clearing—where he might be accommodated. He shuddered again when he thought of that possibility—thanked the clerk for his suggestion—and declined the book which had been pushed towards him for his name. No use to register if he was not to be a guest; no use to tell his name anyway, if he could avoid it, as he had successfully on the boat, and with a polite good-evening he stepped outside just as Mandy Ann, having finished her orange, peel and all, gathered herself up with a view to starting for home.

CHAPTER II

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THE PALMETTO CLEARING

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The stranger had asked Ted on the boat, when he came with some lemonade he had ordered, how far it was from the Brock House to the palmetto clearing, and if there was any conveyance to take him there. Ted had stared at him with wonder—first, as to what such as he could want at the clearing, and second, if he was crazy enough to think there was a conveyance. From being a petted cabin boy, Ted had grown to be something of a spoiled one, and was what the passengers thought rather too "peart" in his ways, while some of the crew insisted that he needed "takin' down a button hole lower," whatever that might mean.

"Bless yer soul, Mas'r," he said, in reply to the question. "Thar ain't no conveyance to the clarin'. It's off in de woods a piece, right smart. You sticks to de road a spell, till you comes to a grave—what used to be—but it's done sunk in now till nuffin's thar but de stun an' some blackb'ry bushes clamberin' over it. Then you turns inter de wust piece of road in Floridy, and turns agin whar some yaller jasmine is growin', an fore long you're dar."

The direction was not very lucid, and the stranger thought of asking the clerk for something more minute, but the surprise in Ted's eyes when he inquired the way to the clearing had put him on his guard against a greater surprise in the clerk. He would find his way somehow, and he went out into the yard and looked in the direction of the sandy road which led into the woods and which Mandy Ann was taking, presumably on her way home. A second time the thought came to him that she might direct him, and he started rather rapidly after her, calling as he went: "I say girl, I want you. Do you hear?"

Mandy Ann heard, gave one glance over her shoulder, saw who was following her, and began at once to run, her bare feet and ankles throwing up the sand, and her sunbonnet falling from her head down her back, where it flapped from side to side as she ran. She remembered what Ted had said of the stranger, who might be thinking of buying her; this was possible after all, as he had said he wanted her, and though her home in the clearing was not one of luxury, it was one of ease and indolence, and she had no desire for a new one—certainly not with this man whose face did not attract her. Just why she ran, she did not know. It was of no use to appeal to *ole missus*, who would not know whether she belonged to her or some one else. Miss Dory was her only hope. With promises of future good behavior and abstinence from pilfering and lying, and badness generally, she might enlist her sympathy and protection till Jake came home, when all would be right. So she sped on like a deer, glancing back occasionally to see the stranger following her with rapid strides which, however,

did not avail to overtake her. The afternoon was very warm—the road sandy and uneven—and he soon gave up the chase, wondering why the girl ran so fast, as if afraid of him. The last sight he had of her was of her woolly head, turning off from the road to the right, where it disappeared behind some thick undergrowth. Ted had said, "Turn at the grave," and he walked on till he reached the spot, and stood by the low railing enclosing a sunken grave, whether of man or woman he could not tell, the lettering on the discolored stone was so obscure. Studying it very carefully, he thought he made out "Mrs." before the moss-blurred name.

"A woman," he said, with a feeling how terrible it must be to be buried and left alone in that dreary, sandy waste, with no human habitation nearer than the Brock House, and no sound of life passing by, except from the same place, unless—and he started, as he noticed for the first time what Ted had said was the worst road in Florida, and what was scarcely more than a footpath leading off to the right, and to the clearing, of course—and he must follow it past tangled weeds and shrubs, and briers, and dwarf palmettoes, stumps of which impeded his progress.

Mandy Ann had entirely disappeared, but here and there in the sand he saw her footprints, the toes spread wide apart, and knew he was right. Suddenly there came a diversion, and he leaned against a tree and breathed hard and fast, as one does when a shock comes unexpectedly. His ear had caught the sound of voices at no great distance from him. A negro's voice—Mandy Ann's, he was sure—eager, excited, and pleading; and another, soft and low, and reassuring, but wringing the sweat from him in great drops,

and making his heart beat rapidly. He knew who was with Mandy Ann, and that she, too, was hurrying on to the clearing, still in the distance. Had there been any doubt of her identity, it would have been swept away when, through an opening in the trees, he caught sight of a slender girlish figure, clad in the homely garments of what Ted called poorwhite trash, and of which he had some knowledge. There was, however, a certain grace in the movements of the girl which moved him a little, for he was not blind to any point of beauty in a woman, and the beauty of this girl, hurrying on so fast, had been his ruin, as he in one sense had been hers.

"Eudora!" he said, with a groan, and with a half resolve to turn back rather than go on.

Tom Hardy in their talk while the boat waited for them at Palatka, had told him what *not* to do, and he was there to follow Tom's advice—though, to do him justice, there was a thought in his heart that possibly he might do what he knew he ought to do, in spite of Tom.

"I'll wait and see, and if—" he said at last, as he began to pick his way over the palmetto stumps and ridges of sand till he came upon the clearing.

It was an open space of two or three acres, cleared from tanglewood and dwarf palmettoes. In the centre was a log-house, larger and more pretentious than many log-houses which he had seen in the South. A Marshal Niel had climbed up one corner to the roof, and twined itself around the chimney, giving a rather picturesque effect to the house, and reminding the stranger of some of the cabins he had seen in Ireland, with ivy growing over them. There was an

attempt at a flower garden where many roses were blooming. Some one was fond of flowers, and the thought gave the stranger a grain of comfort, for a love of flowers was associated in his mind with an innate refinement in the lover, and there was for a moment a tinge of brightness in the darkness settling upon his future. Around the house there was no sign of life or stir, except a brood of well-grown chickens, which, with their mother, were huddled on the door step, evidently contemplating an entrance into the house, the door of which was open, as were the shutters to the windows, which were minus glass, as was the fashion of many old Florida houses in the days before the Civil War. With a shoo to the chickens, which sent some into the house and others flying into the yard, the stranger stepped to the door and knocked, once very gently, then more decidedly—then, as there came no response, he ventured in, and driving out the chickens, one of which had mounted upon a table and was pecking at a few crumbs of bread left there, he sat down and looked about him. In the loft which could hardly be dignified with the name chamber, he heard a low murmur of voices, and the sound of footsteps moving rapidly, as if some one were in a hurry. The room in which he sat was evidently living and dining-room both, and was destitute of everything which he deemed necessary to comfort. He had been in a Cracker's house before, and it seemed to him now that his heart turned over when he recalled his visits there, and his utter disregard of his surroundings.

"I was a fool, and blind, then; but I can see now," he said to himself, as he looked around at the marks of poverty, or

shiftlessness, or both, and contrasted them with his home in the North.

The floor was bare, with the exception of a mat laid before the door leading into another and larger room, before one of the windows of which a white curtain was gently blowing in the wind. A rough, uncovered table pushed against the wall, three or four chairs, and a hair-cloth settee completed the furniture, with the exception of a low rocking-chair, in which sat huddled and wrapped in a shawl a little old woman whose yellow, wrinkled face told of the snuff habit, and bore a strong resemblance to a mummy, except that the woman wore a cap with a fluted frill, and moved her head up and down like Christmas toys of old men and women. She was evidently asleep, as she gave no sign of consciousness that any one was there.

"Old Miss," the stranger said, and his breath again came gaspingly, and Tom Hardy's advice looked more and more reasonable, while he cursed himself for the fool he had been, and would have given all he was worth, and even half his life, to be rid of this thing weighing him down like a nightmare from which he could not awaken.

He was roused at last by the sound of bare feet on the stairs in a corner of the room. Some one was coming, and in a moment Mandy Ann stood before him, her eyes shining, and her teeth showing white against the ebony of her skin. In her rush through the woods Mandy Ann had come upon her young mistress looking for the few berries which grew upon the tangled bushes.

"Miss Dory, Miss Dory!" she exclaimed, clutching the girl's arm with such force that the pail fell to the ground and

the berries were spilled, "you ain't gwine for ter sell me to nobody? Say you ain't, an' fo' de Lawd I'll never touch nothin', nor lie, nor sass ole Miss, nor make faces and mumble like she does. I'll be a fust cut nigger, an' say my prars ebery night. I'se done got a new one down ter Jacksonville. Say you ain't."

In her surprise Miss Dory did not at first speak; then, shaking Mandy Ann's hand from her arm and pushing back her sunbonnet she said: "What do you mean, and where did you come from? The 'Hatty,' I s'pose, but she must be late. I'd given you up. Who's gwine ter buy yer?"

"Ted done tole me mabby de man on de boat from de Norf, what got on ter Palatka, an' done as't the way hyar, might be after me—an'—"

She got no further, for her own arm was now clutched as her mistress's had been, while Miss Dory asked, "What man? How did he look? Whar is he?" and her eyes, shining with expectancy, looked eagerly around.

Very rapidly Mandy Ann told all she knew of the stranger, while the girl's face grew radiant as she listened. "An' he done holler and say how he want me an' follered me, an' when I turn off at the grave he was still follerin' me. He's comin' hyar. You won't sell me, shoo'," Mandy Ann said, and her mistress replied, "Sell you? No. It was one of Ted's lies. He is my friend. He's comin' to see me. Hurry!"

Eudora was racing now through the briers, and weeds, and palmetto stumps, and dragging Mandy Ann with her.

"Never mind granny," she said, when they reached the house and Mandy stopped to say how d'ye to the old woman

in the chair. "Come upstairs with me and help me change my gown."

"Faw de Lawd's sake, is he yer beau?" Mandy Ann asked, as she saw the excitement of her mistress, who was tearing around the room, now laughing, now dashing the tears away and giving the most contradicting orders as to what she was to wear and Mandy Ann was to get for her.

They heard the two knocks and knew that some one had entered the house, but Mandy Ann was too busy blacking a pair of boots to go at once, as she had her hands to wash, and yet, although it seemed to him an age, it was scarcely two minutes before she came down the stairs, nimble as a cat, and bobbed before him with a courtesy nearly to the floor. Her mistress had said to her. "Mind your manners. You say you have learned a heap in Jacksonville."

"To be shoo'. I've seen de quality thar in Miss Perkins's house," Mandy Ann replied, and hence the courtesy she thought rather fetching, although she shook a little as she confronted the stranger, whose features never relaxed in the least, and who did not answer her. "How d'ye, Mas'r," which she felt it incumbent to say, as there was no one else to receive him.

Mandy Ann was very bright, and as she knew no restraint in her Florida home, when alone with her old Miss and young Miss, she was apt to be rather familiar for a negro slave, and a little inclined to humor. She knew whom the gentleman had come to see, but when he said. "Is your mistress at home?" she turned at once to the piece of parchment in the rocking-chair and replied. "To be shoo. Dar she is in de char over dar. Dat's ole Miss Lucy."

Going up to the chair, she screamed in the woman's ear, "Wake up, Miss Lucy. I'se done comed home an' thar's a gemman to see you? Wake up!"

She shook the bundle of shawls vigorously, until the old lady was thoroughly roused and glared at her with her dark, beady eyes, while she mumbled, "You hyar, shakin' me so, you limb. You, Mandy Ann! Whar did you come from?"

"Jacksonville, in course. Whar'd you think? An' hyar's a gemman come to see you, I tell you. Wake up an' say how d'ye."

"Whar is he?" the old woman asked, beginning to show some interest, while the stranger arose and coming forward said, "Excuse me, madam. It is the young lady I wish to see —your daughter."

"She hain't her mother. She's her granny," Mandy Ann chimed in with a good deal of contempt in her voice, as she nodded to the figure in the chair, who, with some semblance of what she once was, put out a skinny hand and said, "I'm very pleased to see you. Call Dory. She'll know what to do."

This last to Mandy Ann, who flirted away from her and said to the stranger, "She hain't no sense mostly—some days more, some days littler, an' to-day she's littler. You wants to see Miss Dory? She's upstars changin' her gown, 'case she knows you're hyar. I done tole her, an' her face lit right up like de sun shinin' in de mawnin'. Will you gim me your caird?"

This was Mandy Ann's master-stroke at good manners. She had seen such things at "Miss Perkins's" in Jacksonville, and had once or twice taken a card on a silver tray to that lady, and why not bring the fashion to her own home, if it

were only a log-cabin, and she a bare-foot, bare-legged waitress, instead of Mrs. Perkins's maid Rachel, smart in slippers and cap, and white apron. For a moment the stranger's face relaxed into a broad smile at the ludicrousness of the situation. Mandy Ann, who was quick of comprehension, understood the smile and hastened to explain.

"I done larn't a heap of things at Miss Perkins's, which we can't do hyar, 'case of ole Miss bein' so quar. Miss Dory'd like 'em right well."

"Certainly," the stranger said, beginning to have a good deal of respect for the poor slave girl trying to keep up the dignity of her family.

Taking a card from his case he handed it to Mandy Ann, who looked at it carefully as if reading the name, although she held it wrong side up. There was no silver tray to take it on—there was no tray at all—but there was a china plate kept as an ornament on a shelf, and on this Mandy Ann placed the card, and then darted up the stairs, finding her mistress nearly dressed, and waiting for her.

"Oh, his card? He gave it to you?" Eudora said, flushing with pleasure that he had paid her this compliment, and pressing her lips to the name when Mandy Ann did not see her.

"In course he done gin it to me. Dat's de way wid de quality both Souf and Norf. We livin' hyar in de clarin' doan know noffin'." Mandy Ann replied.

On the strength of her three months sojourn with Mrs. Perkins, who was undeniably quality, she felt herself capable of teaching many things to her young mistress, who

had seldom repressed her, and who now made no answer except to ask, "How do I look?"

She had hesitated a moment as to the dress she would wear in place of the one discarded. She had very few to select from, and finally took down a white gown sacred to her, because of the one occasion on which she had worn it. It was a coarse muslin, but made rather prettily with satin bows on the sleeves, and shoulders, and neck. Several times, since she had hung it on a peg under a sheet to keep it from getting soiled, she had looked at it and stroked it, wondering if she would ever wear it again. Now she took it down and smoothed the bows of ribbon, and brushed a speck from the skirt, while there came to her eyes a rush of glad tears as she put it on, with a thought that he would like her in it, and then tried to see its effect in the little eight by twelve cracked glass upon the wall. All she could see was her head and shoulders, and so she asked the opinion of Mandy Ann, who answered quickly, "You done look beautiful —some like de young ladies in Jacksonville, and some like you was gwine to be married."

"Perhaps I am," Eudora replied, with a joyous ring in her voice. "Would you like to have me get married?"

Mandy Ann hesitated a moment and then said, "I'se promised never to tole you no mo' lies, so dis is de truffe, ef I was to drap dead. I'd like you to marry some de gemmans in Jacksonville, or some dem who comes to de Brock House, but not him downstars!"

"Why not?" Eudora asked, and there was a little sharpness in her voice.

"'Case," Mandy Ann began, "you as't me, an' fo' de Lawd I mus' tell de truffe. He's very tall an' gran', an' w'ars fine close, an' han's is white as a cotton bat, but his eyes doan set right in his head. They look hard, an' not a bit smilin', an' he looks proud as ef he thought we was dirt, an' dem white han's—I do' know, but pears like they'd squeeze body an' soul till you done cry wid pain. Doan you go for to marry him, Miss Dory, will you?"

At first Mandy Ann had opened and shut her black fingers, as she showed how the stranger's white hands would squeeze one's body and soul; then they closed round her mistress's arm as she said, "Doan you marry him, Miss Dory, will you?"

"No," Eudora answered, "don't be a silly, but go down and bring me a rose, if you can find one two-thirds open. I wore one with this dress before and he liked it, and as't me to give it to him. Mebby he will now," she thought, while waiting for Mandy Ann, who soon came back with a beautiful rose hidden under her apron.

"Strues I'm bawn, I b'lieve he's done gone to sleep like ole Miss—he's settin' thar so still," she said.

But he was far from being asleep. He had gone over again and again with everything within his range of vision, from the old woman nodding in her chair, to the bucket of water standing outside the door, with a gourd swimming on the top, and he was wondering at the delay, and feeling more and more that he should take Tom Hardy's advice, when he heard steps on the stairs, which he knew were not Mandy Ann's, and he rose to meet Eudora.