

## The Overseer

“Hush now child,” my mother whispered to me. “Mr. Charlie is just a few rows over. Do you want him to see you?” As I shook my head no, she hurriedly pulled out the sticky things from my fingers and wiped the blood away. “Remember, you pull the cotton gently and work fast or they will dock your pay again”, she said. Tears flowed down my face as I recalled how I used to play with Miss Ann in the yard of the big house. I wanted to go back to that time. We ran, made mud pies, had tea parties and sat on the dock and listened to the steamboats coming in. I wiped those tears with the back of my hurting hands and began to pull the cotton from the row that was all mines. Everyone was so much farther ahead of me. My sack looked sad compared to the others. Mr. Charlie was the overseer and most times he acted like he birthed this cotton himself. “Faster chile,” he yelled to me. “You wanna get your pay docked again?” No sir, I mumbled. I was only getting 3 cents a pound now because I was not a fast picker. I tried to keep the blood off the cotton because if I didn’t, I wouldn’t get any pay at all. I hated Mr. Charlie and that dang horse. If he knew how it was supposed to be done, why didn’t he get a sack and join us in the fields. The Massa said that we were to obey Mr. Charlie, even if he was Black like us. I just wish I could play again but my place was in these fields. Didn’t seems fair to me, but what did I know- I was only 10.

## **Pentecost Baptist Church**

I hated that dress and these stockings pricked my legs. What was the big deal? We went to church every Sunday and it was always a grand occasion. "Close your legs," my grandma told me this at least 10 times on any given Sunday. I was not used to these dresses and stockings. I wanted to wear jeans and shorts but that wouldn't be appropriate. Women wore shirts or dresses and Men wore suits and ties. It took nearly an hour to get to the church and you could hear the sounds of the organ music as you rounded the bend of Old River (Cane

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River). "Mrs. Bertha, your grandbabies look so nice," the women cooed. I just wanted it to be over so I could get some of that fried chicken, mashed potatoes, green beans, cake and pop they served after church. Churching was serious business. We were there for at least 4 hours- calling on the Lord and such. If it was a "good" Sunday- The Holy Ghost visited, and a few wigs went flying. I looked over at the wall in the back on the left side and there it was- the hole that Mrs. Hawthorn left when the Holy Ghost came over her and she snapped her head back and made that hole. I didn't understand why the Holy Ghost could make you jump out your seat and over benches or lay you out on the floor for several minutes. Sometimes it took others longer and the ushers came with the smelling salts. The best part for me was the music- it was lively, and it seemed to fill the church with life! The piano would talk, and the organ would respond. Each in a harmonious dance as the notes lifted us higher. I looked around for a fan. Luckily, there was one in the row I was in. I stared at the two children on the front- a boy and a girl in prayer. I flipped to the back and it was an advertisement for some funeral home. It was getting hot in this packed church. I saw the deacons lifting the windows. We still had a way to go here. The preacher hadn't preached yet. I loved when the music would stop but the song carried on with stomping

and clapping. This was the essence of church for me. We didn't need any fancy instruments-just each other voices, hands and feet.

When the music stopped, after that hymn of preparation, the preacher came up. My uncle, Flueny, was the preacher. This was my grandpa's brother. Uncle Flueny read some scripture and then proceeded to preach about something else entirely. I guess it was customary to throw some scripture around before you preached. I tended to blank out at that point. It mostly went over my head and I was feeling mighty uncomfortable in these clothes. Then I heard something familiar. My Uncle said, "Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the King's horses and all the King's men, couldn't put Humpty back together again." I looked around to see if anyone besides me was giggling. All the kids had smiles on their faces, but the adults were serious. What in the world did a children's rhyme have to do with God? Well, I was curious on that Sunday. Uncle Flueny preached as if it was his last sermon. After 2 hours of preaching, Uncle Flueny brought it back around. Humpty Dumpty never should have been on that wall. It's like us, we straddle the fence trying to see what our neighbors have. When Humpty fell, he broke. We often fall in our walk with God and become broken. Humpty was looking to others to piece him back together. We look at friends, neighbors, anybody to help us get our life back right. You see, Humpty Dumpty in all his brokenness needed King Jesus to make him whole again. And we are the same-only Jesus can make us whole again. I finally got it! The doors of the church opened, and I was the first to hop out my seat. I wanted to be made whole and I knew I was in the right place for it to happen.