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SOUTH CAROLINA WRITERS' PROJECT

LIFE HISTORY

TITLE: IN ABRAHAM'S BOSOM

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Fictitious Name	
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The one-room tenant shanty sagged dangerously in the middle, its pine-black foundation having rotted years before. A greenish scum covered the mill-dewed shingle roof, and the weather-boarding buckled from the up-rights leaving large cracks. Rough wooden shutters with quarter-inch seams served as windows. A few hardy flowers struggled for survival in the bare, hard-packed yard.

The interior presented an equally despairing picture with its rough, pine-board floor and its smoke-stained walls plastered with old newspapers to keep out the cold.

The furniture, in keeping with its surroundings, consisted of two rickety iron beds that sagged like the house itself, and on which, were piled musty, ragged quilts and old clothes. A wobbly, grease-stained table stood in the middle of the room. An ancient Victrola rested precariously on an uncertain three-legged stool. In one corner, an old New Home sewing machine with half its parts lying beside it spoke of more affluent times. In another corner, its rusty pipe sticking through a hole in the wall, stood an old-fashioned "nigger" stove that boasted a Pepsi-Cola sign for a top, the original having burned out long before. On the mantel above the rough fireplace stood a motley collection of hair-grease tins, bleaching cream jars, and Black Draught boxes.

"Yassuh! we'se moving dis Jan'u'wery sho!" Emaline, Black, emaciated, fifty, leaned forward on her soap-box chair and threw a fat splinter in the fireplace from which most of the bricks had fallen. "We'se been heah 'leben yeahs,

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an' hit sho' looks to me lak we gits deeper in de bog ev'vy yeah, yassuh, dat we she does! Mister Stoley, dats de man we wucks fo', tele Tee, dats mah boy, dat he mought as well give him de cotten crop caze he warn't gwine meck nothin' no-hew. Hit de beat de nation how we'se allus in de pinch caze we she wucks an' mecks hit! De plain Gawd's truth is dat Mister Stoley done stole mos' ev'vy thing he niggers meck caze we is ignunt an' caint figger wid him.

"I'se jes' bout nekkid myse'f, but I kin meck out summers. Hit's dese heah grandchillen what frets me. I went down to de relief place what gives clothes an' sich truck, an' de lady what run de she-bang ax me effen Mister Stoley doan' teck kere of he han's, an' I tole her 'no mam dat he sho' doant!' She knowed right well I wuz telling de Gawd's truth, an' her eyes kinda flash lak, an' she sez: 'Damm em, dey wucks de po' niggers an' white buckra mos' to death in de spring an' summer, and fall, an' den leads em on us after stealing dere share de crop! An' dey got de nerve to cuss de relief! Why! dey's de ones meckin' money offen de guvment! Damm em!'

"I de^clar' mister, dat young lady sho aint³ no fool, an' she doant³ teck no draggin' offen nobody, nawsuh. I reckon she wouldn't teck no sassin' offen Mister Rosy-velt effen he wuz to come in blowin' off. She say she gwine see de right done effen hit cost her her job, but shucks, dey couldn't run dat gal off.

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De po' niggers an' white buckra would tear down de jint effen dey did try hit.
She sho' is one good 'oman, effen she do cusses a little. She gived me a little piece er paper an' tole me to teck hit to another lady an tell her she say give me some clothes fer dese here chillen, an' me too. An' dat lady done hit too, an' hit sho' is help out, yassuh.

"Mister Stoley, he is sho' one hard man to wuck for, yassuh, dat he sho' is. He got a commissary what is sho' a gold mine. An' what mecks hit worse, he turn out de hawks an' say, 'let em forage 'roun', an' dey forages right in mah gyarden an' et up all mah collards. De stock jes' naturally eat up an' tromple ev'vy thing I plants. Hit sho' do seem hard, dat hit do. We ain' even got no toilet no mo. De ole un is fell down, an' Mister Stoley he wont⁹ put up a new 'un. De guvment man come out an' sez he kin put up one what de relief mens is meckin' fo' ten dollars. But Mister Stoley, he jes' laugh an' sez: 'Let em go to de bushes lak dey been er-doin'.

"I sho' wishes I could git wid Mister Rogers, but he is allus full-up caze he so good to he han's. I 'clar to Gawd he sho' is one grand man, yassuh, dat he sho' is. He jes' as diffunt from Mister Stoley ez day is from night, yassuh. I 'member when mah ol'est boy, Ed traded wid him. Ed, he been useta stealing what wuz his'n from Mister Stoley, an' he kinda got de habit. He hadn't been wid Mister Rogers more'n a week fo' he stole a bushel er peas, an' "

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sole 'em up to de fillin' station on de road. When de ole man fine hit out, he call Ed up to de big house one mawning early lak, an' says right slow an' low: 'Ed, my niggers doant steal from me. I treats my niggers good, an' dey treats me de same. I'm gwine look over dis caze yo' is new heah, but doan' never let hit happen agin, yo' understan'?'

"Ed, he felt so orney an' mean dat he borrowed some money on he mule an' bought dem peas back for twice what he got for em, an' teck em back to Mister Rogers an' 'pologize.

"Ed, he jes' lak all de res' now. Jes' loves de groun' de ole man walks on, yassuh. All he niggers is 'voted to him. De ole man tuck sick las' yeah, an ev'vy body thought sho' he gwine die, an' I reckon de ole man thought so too. He call he niggers in an' tuck each one by de han' and says: ' I wants you to teck kere of Miss Lucy effen I die. Teck yo' share de crop an' put hit in yo' barns an' teck my share an' put hit in my barns. Stay on here an' teck kere of Miss Lucy lak you is allus done.'

"Gre't Gawd, Mister, but dem niggers did kerry on sumpin terrible, yassuh, dat dey sho did. I could hear 'em er crying an prayin' clean over here. Dey sho' wuz sum rejoicin' when de ole man pull through. I reckon de Lawd kinda reconsidered, an' let de ole man stay on to hep po' folks an' niggers what needed him so bad. I speeks hit wuz partly on account er Miss Anne, Mister Rogers fust an' only wife what wuz sech a grand 'oman an' died when Miss Lucy wuz bawn. I

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never seed sech a good oman. She tole Mister Rogers to be kind and loving to ev'vy body what needed hep, an' not crush de life outen po' folks caze dey didn't git no chance in de worl'. Mister Rogers, he sho' loved dat 'oman. I 'members when dey wuz both young an' courtin'. Mister Rogers, he teck an' drive by here in a spring board wid a high steppin' hoss, an' dere beside 'im wuz Miss Anne, all dress fit to kill, an' lookin' pretty ez all git out, ~~Yassuh~~. Dat man sho worshipped dat gal, more'n even de Lawd, I specks, an' yo' couldn't blame him, nawzuh. Dey wuz a sight er young mens courtin' her same time, but she didn't have eyes fer nobody but Mister Rogers, nawzuh. I 'members de day he foun' out she gwine take him in pref'rence to all de res'. He wuz jes' about de happiest man in dese parts.

"Dey sho' wuz happy effen dey did start off po'. Miss Annie she wuz so sweet an' siderate, an' hit warn't long fo' all de bes' han's wuz on he place. He done prospered ever since.

" 'Cose Mister Stoley doan lak him much, caze I specks Mister Stoley wuz kinda stuck on Miss Anne too. Dey all wuz raised in dis part er de country. Dey is allus at it too. Mister Stoley tell Mister Rogers he gwine go busted messin' up wid po' whites an' niggers, an not lookin' to he business, but Mister Rogers jes' smile sad lak he allus done since Miss Anne died, an' say: 'I treats my niggers good, Stoley, an' dey treats me de same.' An' dey sho' is done dat very thing too, caze Mr. Rogers got de prettiest house, an' de bes'

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barns, an' de mos' stock, an' a lot er money in de bank.

"But Lawd Gawd, Mister Stoley sho' is had he ups 'en downs, yassuh. Last yeah, he los' a barn wid 1800 bushels er corn in hit -- burnt clean to de groun'. Somebody sot fire to dat barn, an' I knows who done hit, but I ain' never gwine tell, caze Mister Stoley sho' treated dat man powerful mean, dat he did. He lak to los' all he hawks jes' a little while back. Somebody put sody in dey feed. Looks lak de mo' he try to grab, de mo' he lose.

"I sho' will be proud when I kin git moved outen dis here shed. I bout freezes to death in de winter, and de skeeters eats me up in de summer. Mister Rogers he comed by one day an' look at dis shack an' sez right pert: 'Stoley, I wouldn't put stock in a shed lak dat!' Mister Stoley he mumble something bout he ain' got no money to set niggers up a fine hotel.

"Mister Rogers he keeps up he houses, leastwise, de tenants mecks enough to keep 'em up deyself. Mr. Rogers, he gived each one a cow las' yeah, an' bought fence wire so dey could have a gyarden. Cose, he tecks hit outen de crop, be he is sho' one fair an' hones' man. I don't specks he tuck out enuff to even pay de cos'.

"Jes' to show you how Mister Rogers is, I 'members when 'Zekiels wife tuck down wid de appendeceedus. She wuz tuck right sudden lak, an' de doctor what Mister Rogers gits to look arter he han's sez effen she doan' git to de

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horse-spital quick, she gwine die, sho'. Mister Rogers nearly bus' a blood-vessel gittin' out he fine cyar an' dey puts Sarah in de back, an' Mister Rogers driv' her to de horse-spital in Florence, an' paid de bill in 'vance. Cos' Zekiel paid him back. But he never ax him fer nothin'. Dat's one thing 'bout Mister Rogers, he doan' never ax you fer what you owes him. He jes' act surprise lak when you goes to pay him -- lak he warn't spectin' hit right then, but sho' is tickled to death to git hit! Gawd bless dat man!

"Po' ole Catty Birch what beens cooking fer de Rogers' fer de las' forty yeahs caint hardly git roun' no mo' on account her roomy-tism, she's so drawed up. I specks I'll git de job. Mr. Rogers wuz over heah de other day to see me bout hit. Sed he ain' got de heart to hurt Catty's feelin's, so I better jes' act lak I'se heppin' her, so she woant think dey is shunted her back caze she is gittin' ole. Mighty siderate man, Mister Rogers is, yassuh dat he sho' is.

"Well, anyhow, effen I does ever git wid Mister Rogers, I sho' gwine burrow in deep, yassuh! I done had mah share er hard times, an' I sho' ain' gwine let dis heah chance slip to git wid dat good man an' spen' de res' er my days in peace an' 'tentment.

"I wuz bawn right near here 'bout fifty yeahs ago, I specks. I married soon's I wuz ole nuff to Susan Godeys boy, Abel, by her fust husban'.

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"My Abel jes' kill ~~hese~~'f wuckin' fer Mr. Collington what is daid now, may de good Lawd rest ~~he~~ sinful soul. I warn Abel bout killin' ~~he~~ se'f in de hot broillin' sun. He tell me he got to keep goin' sun er no sun. He comed in fer dinner one day at lay-by time, jes' naturally burning up, an' mos' panting to death. He stretch out cross de bed, and teck de baby wid 'im whilst I gits he dinner fix'. When I went to git him up, he never answer when I calls, so I calls 'im again, and sez: 'What ail you, honey, come on, yo' dinner gwine git col'.' Abel he doan' say nothin'. Den I starts beratin' him from de kitchen, an' tell him he is a fool to kill hissef fer po' buckra what think mo' er de mule dan him. Abel, he still doan' say nothin'. I walked over an shuck him, an' den I seed he eyes wuz wide open, an' so big an' glassy dat hit nearly scairt me clean to death. I knowed Abel daid. I tuck de baby way from him an' started to de house to tell Mister Collington. De teahs wuz er streaming so I could hardly see. I wuz about sixteen I reckon, an' wid mah fust baby, an' I loved my man. Hit mos' broke mah heart, yassuh, dat hit sho' did. I doan' specks a gal ever gits over her fust man. I sho' didn't.

"When Mister Collington come out an' seed me standin' dere crying wid de baby under mah arm, he look kinda funny an sez: 'What ail you Emmy?'

" 'You done kill my Abel,' I sez.

"Mister Collington jes' laff, an sez: 'Onliest way to kill a nigger is to hit him on de heel, he haid too hard to hurt him!'

" 'Effen you doan believe hit, go see,' I sez.

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"He did, an' comed back an' sez: 'Hafta git somebody to finish Abel's crop. Dat darkey done up an' daid sho' nuff!'

"Dat's all he sez! He ain' kere nothin' bout po' Abel, jes' de crop!

"I got Brother Whitley what wuz a good carpenter to meck Abel a coffin outen white pine. He done hit, an' never charge me a cent. Moughty good darky, Brother Whitley. He got somebody to dig a grave, an' somebody to hitch up de two hoss wagin, an' carry Abel to he last res'. He died on a Wednesday, but hit wuz Sunday fo' we could bury him, caze de team wuz busy in de fiel'.

"I married agin bout fo' yeahs arter Abel died. My secon' husban' wuz a good man, leastwise, he wuz good to me wid what he had. Cose he had to wuck hissef nearly to death too. Some said he runned arter women, but effen he did I didn't know nothin' bout hit. Yassuh, he wuz a right smart man, but he died las' year. 'Cose, I never did git over Abel, caze I loved dat boy. A young gal loves her fust man. Yo' see dese heah widows er marryin' agin, but mos' of em marry to git somebody to teck kere of em! Yo' cain' tell me nothin', a gal jes' naturally doan' git over dat fust blush er youth wid her man!

"I jes' hopes now I kin git on wid Mister Rogers. I'se too old fer a young man, an' I sho' ain' gwine have no ole man er slobbering roun' me! Nawsuh! I jes' looks forward to a peaceful rest fer the few yeahs I got lef' on dis heah vale er tears.

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"Six feet er earth is sho' gwine meck us de same, Mister. An' I'se sho' er one thing. When yo' meets yo' Gawd face to face, he ain' gwine ax is yo' white er collud. Nawsuh! He jes' gwine turn in an' sep'rate de sheeps from de goats. Dat's all!

"When we gits up before dat golden throne de Lawd gwine say to Mister Stoley: 'Stoley, yo' ain' treated people right, nawseh, dat yo' sho' aint!'. An', de Lawd gwine call St. Peter an' tell him to throw Mister Stoley in de bottomless pit! Yassuh! An' when Mister Rogers step up fer he turn, de Lawd gwine laugh an' say: 'Welcome, Brother Rogers! I sho' is glad to see you! Jes' meck yo'sef right at home. Miss Anne is waitin' fer yo'.'

"Yassuh! Mister, dey's gwine be a scatterin' er black an' whites up dere near de throne. Heaben gwine be full er dem dat's kept de law of de Lawd, an' hell gwins be packed to over-flowin' wid dem what aint, yassuh, dat hit sho' is!

"I jes' hopes you'n me will be among dat glorious company. Ah'll git wid my Abel agin, an' ah'll love him more'n more till eternity en's! He wuz de onliest man I ever loved, Gawd bless him!

"Oh, hit'll be a glorious day, dat hit will! Po' Abel wont^s hafta plough in de hot sun up dere. Thank Gawd, dere wont be no landlawds up dere before Jesus's seat, and dat's what will meck hit heaben! Yassuh! Dat hit sho' will!"