

SIDE 9 - AUNT

KATE. Yes. Today it's crayfish and palmetto fans. (AUNT OLA smiles) Whatever did you put in that iced tea last night? It must have been drugged for me to sleep like that.

AUNT OLA. It's that old attic fan, just hulls you right out. KATE. (Observes AUNT OLA for a moment and then picks up snapped bean) All these years I thought they grew that way.

AUNT OLA. (Chuckles) Uh-huh. And you the big, smart reporter for Life magazine?

KATE. Well, come on, Aunt Ola, give me a break. The only thing I use my kitchen for is to water my plants.

AUNT OLA. (Chuckles. Pause, amazed) You live by yourself in New York City?

KATE. (Amused) I do.

AUNT OLA. Lord, I can't even imagine that.

KATE. You might surprise yourself.

AUNT OLA. Oh lord, I ain't got the heart for any more surprises in my life. Kate, are my boys really on their way home?

KATE. Yep. There's some delay with Johnny, but he'll make it.

AUNT OLA. Just like that.

KATE. Just like that. Are you excited about seeing your boys?

AUNT OLA. They'll get to see their daddy alive. I'm excited about that.

KATE. Oh, I'm sorry, Aunt Ola. I didn't realize ... What will you do?

AUNT OLA. Same old, same old. Ain't much choice about that.

ADDIE MAE. Yoo-hoo!

AUNT OLA. (Laughs, enjoying KATE) Well, don't let Addie Mae wear you out. Poor old Sonny ain't breathed a relaxin' breath since the day they got married.

Ola, Tood

(ADDIE MAE enters, approaches porch.)

ADDIE MAE. (Admiring KATE) My goodness, you are just a glory this mornin'! A mornin' glory! Ain't that right, Aunt Ola?

AUNT OLA. Well, I was tellin' her the very same thing when you walked up.

ADDIE MAE. Well, I'd love to sit around and talk all mornin' (AUNT OLA looks mischievously at KATE) but, lord, I got a list of things to show Kate as long as my arm. (To KATE) You know you said you wanted background, and background you gonna get! Come on! (Starts to leave, notices KATE is not right behind her, turns, and with more authority) Come on!

KATE. (Smiling) O.K., let's go. (TOOD comes out of the house) Tood, I'll be back later.

(AUNT OLA goes back to snapping beans. TOOD watches where KATE has gone. After a moment:)

TOOD. She's something ain't she. (AUNT OLA smiles, looks at TOOD, who is pensive, looking away) Aunt Ola?

AUNT OLA. (Knowing something is on TOOD's mind) Here grab some of these beans.

(TOOD takes some beans in her apron and starts snapping them. Quiet.)

START TOOD. How is Uncle Tom?

AUNT OLA. Well, Dr. Pollard said he ain't pinched a nurse in three days, so I figure he must be about dead. (They laugh at this) What absolutely amazes me is that one of them nurses ain't pulled the plug on that old fart. (More laughter)

Some women just don't seem to mind. *(Pause)* How you doin', Baby?

TOOD. All right.

AUNT OLA. Did you really say "Aunt Ola" cause you wanted to know how Tom was doin'?

TOOD. Well ... *(Finally gathering her courage)* Aunt Ola? Why are your sons all like they are? Except for Tommy? He ain't like the rest of them.

AUNT OLA. As far as Tommy is concerned, he needs a little more of them, if you ask me.

TOOD. What part of them do you wish on him?

AUNT OLA. Tommy ought to be a little tougher. If he was tougher he would stand up to them. *(Pointedly)* If he was tougher he would take his beautiful new wife and baby and leave this town when he gets back.

TOOD. That's why I said "Aunt Ola."

AUNT OLA. I know that.

TOOD. You wouldn't be real hurt if we moved someplace? Not too far, but just far enough to ...

AUNT OLA. Lord no, I wouldn't mind. I ain't dead, you know. I'd love to go visit my younguns in Dallas or Atlanta or someplace like that.

TOOD. Oh Aunt Ola, is it wrong to want me and Tommy to have a world of our own?

AUNT OLA. Come here. *(AUNT OLA takes her hands)* I know my boys is all stuck on themselves and hard on the people that loves 'em. Poor old Sybil, she ain't got no idea yet what a real dog Johnny's gonna be. And if Lois lives to see her grandkids, it will surprise me. But there she is. *(Pause)* The boys come by it natural.

TOOD. Uncle Tom? He don't seem so bad.

AUNT OLA. He ain't so bad. Now. *(Smiles at TOOD, amused by the coming story)* He changed, because he had a *(Grandly)* religious experience.

TOOD. *(Awe)* He did?

AUNT OLA. *(Solemnly)* He seen a cross. *(Punchline)* Burnin' in his front yard!

TOOD. *(Flabbergasted)* The Klan?!

AUNT OLA. Yeah, the Klan! They didn't just go after colored folks and the white folks that helped 'em. They thought they was God's Little Army and if a good Christian white man started back-slidin' ... well, they provided him a little help to get back on God's Highway.

TOOD. My lord, what did he do?

AUNT OLA. Well, I was big pregnant with Teat.

TOOD. Aunt Ola, please don't call him Teat.

AUNT OLA. I called him Teat for twenty years.

TOOD. Yes ma'am. *(Smiles)*

AUNT OLA. I was pregnant with ... Tommy. *(TOOD smiles)* And me and the younguns had wore our tails out makin' that stringy crop of beans. But then about September, Tom starts helpin' out. Gettin' the crop in. And we do get it in. And Tom takes it to town to sell. He left on a Monday and he didn't come back for two weeks. *(Pause)* He sold them crops and checked into the Louisiana Hotel in Monroe - with some doe-eyed heifer. Oh yeah, had himself a high old time. And he didn't have a cent when he come home. Three younguns - one in diapers! One on the way! And not a cent. And nothin' in the fields to eat. *(Looks at TOOD)* Oh yeah, they come by it natural. **EVD**

TOOD. What did you do?

AUNT OLA. *(Suddenly realizing - seemingly for the first time. Amazed at the fact)* Nothin'. I didn't do nothin'.

TOOD. Why do we fall in love with them?

AUNT OLA. *(Starts to move inside)* What difference does that make? We do. *(Turns back)* They got this ... I don't know ... "gift", I reckon. You know they all good-lookin'.