FICTION FROM 'BEST SHORT STORIES' BY AFRO-AMERICAN WRITERS

Cupid Wags His Tail

You people just don't know what we dogs have to go through. Now pay attention while I tell you what happened at our house when the master and mistress weren't getting along so hot.

By H. L. Faggett

Hi, there! I know you —or don't I? No matter, glad to see you, anyway. Been here before, haven't you? Come to see Bill and Bess, of course; but I'm here too.

'Scuss me; I gotta flea that's getting fresh . . . You probably never realized it, but we fellers can show ourselves off better when we stretch and strain around to scratch.

Look — be a good fellow and scratch my back for me — down the middle near my tail where I can't reach so well myself. Be a real sport and do that for me, won't you?

And if you get behind my ears right good, I'll tell you a story, a true story — a little spiel about Bess and Bill.

M . . .mm. . .that. . .feels so-oo-oh-oh good. . .I just can't keep m' . . .feet still . . .mm. . .

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SAY, YOU'RE a right guy. But don't go to sleep — not now, not until I've told you my story. Bess and Bill will be upstairs for almost an hour, believe me. They didn't start dressing until after they let you in.

Just relax in that easy chair, if you want to, and listen. Of course, I can just as well do my talking from here on the floor — playing dead, flat o' my back with four cute feet in the air — limp, like this. See? Looking? Listening? Aren't going to sleep, are you . . .?

Trouble started a couple of months ago. I first noticed something when Bill popped off about the chuck roast Bess had burnt. By golly, it was lousy! I had a tough time packing away the meat myself, but I finally made it to the bone — the very best part, you know.

The rest of the dinner wasn't much to sniff it seemed; then Bess brought out a meal like that. He couldn't take it. With a few yaps and a cuss word or two, Bill slammed on out to eat elsewhere.

Bess boohooed into her apron; looked sorta pitiful, but I didn't have time to comfort her right then. At that moment she really needed a friend, too. Kinda bedraggled, she was — like a wet poodle peeping from the dust beneath a bed, after a stolen jaunt on a rainy day.

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WELL, TO bob a tale the quickest way, I'll just tell you how Bill began working late at the office, almost every night. Bess would wait up for him, looking frowzy as hell — oops! 'scuse me. My language is getting awful.

Bill always came in, sooner or later — mostly later — tight as a drum, but able to navigate on instruments.

Sometimes he had rubbed up against a smelly stranger, too —mightly close. I could tell, but Bess couldn't—at least not my way. She managed to catch on, though.

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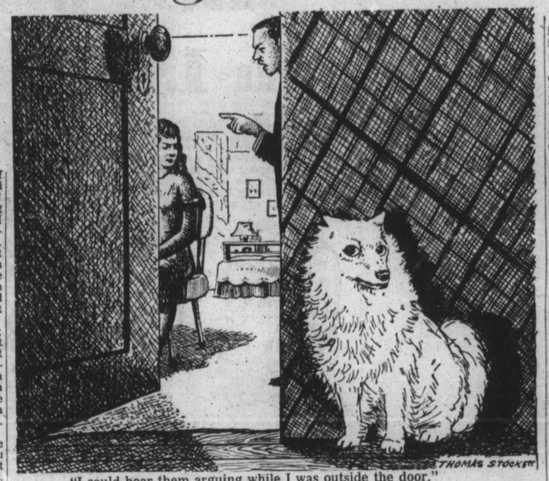
THINGS WENT along like this until about ten days ago.



"I could hear them arguing while I was outside the door."

I was listening at the closed door of their bedroom. 'Twas about eleven at night, and they were quarreling like the only two toms at a pussycat prowling party.

Poked with my nose to get inside the room. No soap! But I could hear well enough . . .

". . .If you do, you'll be sorry the rest of your life . . ." from tearful Bess.

"Yeah?. . .but I'm sick of you . . .hate the very sight of you . . ." he boiled over.

"I'm sick too, Bill. . .because . . .because of the way you've been acting. I can leave here as well as you . . . got plenty reason to go . . ."

"Go, then! G'wan home to your battle-faced Ma. . .Tell her I sent you. Or stay here, if you want to, 'cause I'm leaving first!"

THIS VERBAGE must have been going on for some time, for it ended at the moment he spoke those last words. Out stormed Bill, bag-in-hand, blustering his way toward the front door.

I took one quick look at Bess in the bedroom, then tore out after the boss.

It wasn't unusual for me to do a trick little that: Never missed a chance to sneak out, yet. Was always such fun to have Bill take me, though — long walks to the playground and back! the best fireplugs!

* * *

SO I HAD to follow my buddy, Bill. He didn't notice me as I scooted out ahead of him.

The heavy traffic made it easy for me to trail Bill's taxi, but I lost him in the crowd at the railroad station — that is, I lost sight of him for a while.

Scared silly, I dodged a porter and a few other conscientious objectors to my presence.

But I had to find Billy-boy . . .just had to. . .because . . . well, I just had to find him. Though I caught a whiff of him once or twice, as I moved outside the building, out by the tracks. Other people were standing on the platform, but no Bill did I see.

A train was coming in. Then as I sidled away, I saw him—and HER, too. At once I howled at him a couple of times to let him know I was around; then I took off in his direction like a super-duper jet job at a wagon race.

That scent she wore! I recognized it. The boss had brought that odor to our home a number of times.

* * *

"SPUD! How did you? Where on earth do you think you're . . .?"

I was afraid to jump up at him. He probably would be peeved enough at my trailing trick, without pawprints on his Sunday suit, I thought.

So I wigwagged an answer —tail-talk, just the right angle —not too high, not too low; grin; wide—panting the exact number of huffs per second, with that LOOK in my eyes—"What say, Boss? How 'bout that?"

Then SHE cut in:

"Is that your horrible looking mutt? Catch him! He's runing up the steps to the car!" and I was insulted.

I stood up there looking down on them, trying to be friendly the best I knew how. Incidentally, SHE wasn't hard to look at, either. A fine little filly with her trimming just right; put poor Bess in the shade any day.

But gosh dang it, she didn't need to insult me!

"Come down, Spud!" Bill call again. I didn't budge: kept on grinning.

If only that dame had kept her big, pretty mouth shut . ."

"Get rid of that filthy dog . . ."

Now, can you imagine that? Calling me — one of the family, no less — calling me an ordinary "d-o-g." After all, I wasn't very dirty.

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"OUR TRAIN is leaving any second. For Pete's sake get rid of that dirty hound" — called me a "hound" she did — "and let's go — I'm getting on it, whether you do or not. . ."

SHE was really excited and she upset Bill — more than anything had ever upset him before! He kicked me, Bill did! Yep, my own buddy gave me the boot.

This was the finale, the last straw, indeed. After that first kick, and then another one. . I didn't care about anything else.

My world had ended; my life and love were lost, for Bill was just all of everything to me. But SHE was the cause of it all, really.

I was ready to forgive him, even after that boot. Just one half-friendly look, and I would have scuttled back to lick his hand. Took that chance to glance back at him as I started to cross the busy street.

Thought maybe he might wave good-bye . . .Didn't see the taxi coming, swerving . . . screeching tires on concrete . . .Bill's yell, and my squeal, I guess, for I blacked out, sorta, didn't mind . . .whatever happened. . .nothing to live for. Bill was gone.

* * *

WHEN THE lights came on again for me, I tried to jump away from that careening taxicab; but it wasn't there. Nor could I move. Boy! I was trussed up like a Frank Buck special-delivery from Borneo. Heard a voice:

"Easy now, Spud, old boy."

Of all the surprises: Bill has Bess in his arms, holding her some way or other. By golly, they were standing there together about so close as white on rice. M-mm-m-umh! It was so-o-o good — just to peep!

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". . .**BABY,** oh Honey! You were willing to let me go and never tell me that you . . ."

"What's this?" I thought; cocked the only ear that was working.

"You didn't try to understand why things were — not normal around here. You just started stepping out on me . ." "But dearest, why didn't you tell me you are going to have a baby . . ."

Oh, my gosh? Competition in the household. I knew it would be OK, though . . .

Say, mister! Are you still sleeping there in that easy chair? I meant to tell you that they just took off the last of my bandages yesterday. Uh, oh! Here come Bill and Bess at last. Not a word about what I've told you. Do you hear?

AFRO PATTERNS

A favorite with fashion this season — the youthful chemise frock, shown here is a short sleeved or sleeveless version.

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AFRO Magazine Section

The Exodus

It Started 40 Years Ago

Call to Arms Resounds in Kitchens; Emil Off to Fight

Cartoon from New York Telegram, 1914. Caption read "As the European reservist was called to the colors, colored waiters from the south were called to take their place."

Farm labor in Dixie earned only 50-75 cents a day in 1918. Then Northern industries called for colored workers, and churches lost half their congregations in a single week.

By John Jasper

It all happened in World War I and just afterwards.

And it occurred so quietly that many people were not aware of it.

It was the migration of a million colored people from Southern farms to the cities and to the North.

What started it were the following:

1. Shut off by World War I, European migration dropped from 1,200,000 in 1914 to 24,000 in 1916.

2. Floods and the boll weevil ruined the South's cotton.

3. The demand for manufactured goods came at a time, when the main labor force was in war work, and the only source of new workers was colored people in the South.

4. Foreign born males by the thousands were called home to Europe to enlist in the armed forces.

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WITH CESSATION of the immigration that had long been the supply of cheap unskilled labor, and with the increased need for such labor, industrialists in the North sent employment agents into the Southern states.

To the colored worker in the cotton fields and on the levee, the labor - agents sang a siren song; undreamed of wages, steady jobs, political equality, no race discrimination, better housing, good schools for the children, free transportation North and frequently money for food while on the way.

The song fell on willing ears.

A LARGE percentage of the South's colored were living on hunger wages.

MODERN DAY COVERED WAGON—With all of their belongings in a truck, this family flees north from Georgia. They stop for a rest here in Richmond, Va. It happened in 1950.

15 Top Cities

The 15 top cities, according to the U.S. Census reports of 1910 and 1950 show growth of colored population in urban areas.

	1910	1950
New York	94,446	775,529
Chicago	91,709	509,437
Philadelphia	89,262	378,968
Detroit	84,749	303,721
Washington	84,459	284,032
Baltimore	52,441	226,053
Los Angeles	52,305	211,585
New Orleans	51,902	182,682
St. Louis	46,733	154,448
Cleveland	44,103	149,547
Memphis	43,960	147,287
Birmingham	23,929	130,142
Houston	8,448	125,660
Atlanta	7,599	121,416
Richmond	5,741	73,087

Some Southern farmers lost their white labor force in World War I Cartoon from Louisville Courier Journal, 1915.

The boll weevil was virulent, crops had been bad for several consecutive years.

Floods in 1916 had done great damage in Alabama and Mississippi.

Many of the plantations paid but 50 to 75 cents a day, and this only when there was work. One - dollar and twenty - five cents to $2.00 were high wages and went only to a few men in the cotton mills and the saw mills.

HOUSING AND schools were inferior; "Jim Crow" cars, political inequality — the combination made the colored worker eager to go — "I'm going to live till I die anyhow: I might as well go up North."

The exodus started. "A minister may have all his deacons with him for the mid-week meeting, but by Sunday every church officer and half the congregation were likely to be in the North."

The South, complacent at first about the social result of lessening of colored majorities, began to be alarmed by other effects: the disappearance of field hands essential to plantation life, of house servants held in affection, of factory workers indispensable to industry; break-up of a familiar and cherished social order.

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THE MACON Telegraph printed a plaintive warning: "Everybody seems to be asleep about what is going on right under our noses — that is, everybody but those farmers, who waked up mornings recently to find every colored person over twenty-one on their places gone —to Cleveland, to Pittsburgh, to Chicago, to Indianapolis."

Estimates said that 50,000 went North from Georgia, the Commission of Agriculture in Alabama thought that 90,000 had gone from their State. In Mississippi, colored insurance companies considered 100,000 a conservative estimate.

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THIS WAS the first giant migration of a million Southern colored workers to the North.

World War II started a second new Exodus from the South.

A million men from jim-crow areas trained in army and navy camps all over the country were sent abroad.

When they came back, they decided that the South was a good place to be "from."

The Korean war educated other thousands of Southerners in the benefits of integration so that the movement of colored people from the South to the North and West continues strong until this day.

But it all began just about 40 years ago.