

Mississippi Narratives
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Lucy Galloway

Mr. John Gray he give her his big house and some slaves, den he goes back to his old home. It was a big fine house. It stood up high offen de ground and had a cemented cellar under it. De slave quarters was in de back, long rows of double and single-pen log cabins for de slaves. Mr. Gray come down frum de north and he didn't have no slaves, but "Miss Frances" didn't 'low nobody to mistreat her slaves. She say dat dem niggers was her property and her living and she want goin' to 'low nobody to whup 'em."

"My mother and Steve was two of her best niggers. Steve worked in de fiel' and my mother was a house-girl and nurse. "Mis' Frances had five chillun. Der names was Spencer, Johnnie, Tommie, Willie and Arkie. Den my mother and Steve had five about de same age of Miss Frances' and Mr. Grays. Der names was Martin, Elbert, York, Lewis and Minty. My mother was de wet-nurse and she "suckled" all of "Mis' Frances'" chillun. Dey all called her "Mammy."

Wen Mis' Frances' las' baby was bawn, she lose her min' and dey had to sen' her to de asylum. My mother had to look atter dem chillun until Old Mis' Hoye---Mis' Frances' mother tuk em to her house.

Den Mr. Gray sold Steve to de "speculators" and my mother didn't never see him any more. Atter dat, I was bawn. My mother said she couldn't hep herself---dat she was jest a slave, but I was de only "bright" chile she had--all de rest of dem was black. She tole me atter I got older who my daddy was but tole me

not to tell anybody but jes' say dat she was "my mammy and daddy bof'." De chillun used to ask me who my daddy was but I jes' tole dem I didn't have no daddy.

Dey brought "Mis' Frances" back frum de asylum jest once, but she go "slap-stone crazy" agin' and dey had to send her back. She died in de asylum.

I remembers 'bout one gal dat come from Africa. She was a "purr" African an' had long black hair. She would grease dat hair and plait it in two long braids down her back and tie it wid red ribbon-bows. She say when dey put her on de block to sell, dey tole her to dance fer dem. She show was a good dancer. She dance the same way she did in Africa and what she had learned dere. She was 15 year old when dey bring her over here. Dey bought her in South Callina from a speculator. She said she was a slave in Africa. Lucy was smart and "clean as a pin."

"Mis' Frances's" niggers was free to visit among demselves atter de days work was over, and dey could have "meetings" and sing, but usually when de slaves had der meetin's---singin' and prayin', dey would turn a wash-pot upside-down in front of de door to kill de sound. Den you couldn't hear 'em outside de door.

De only ghos' I ever saw was a man what didn't have no head on him. It was 'tween dusk and dark. I run tell my mother, but when she come he had disappeared. She say I musta be mistaken, but when dey all talked it over, dey decided it musta been somebody de overseer had kilt and he had come back to tell us 'bout it. But I never see him any mo'.

After dey took "Mis' Frances" away to de asylum, Old Masta was good to all her niggers. He joined de army and went and fought for de south. We had one overseer. He was a 'po'; white man' and was mean to de niggers. Dey finally turned him off.

My grandmother was name Frances. She and my granddaddy always live wid old Dr. Hoyer. She was one of der best slaves. Dey tuk good keer of her cause she was "fine stock." She had 22 chillun---all black.

I heard my mammy tell 'bout when de Yankees come to der house. Dey busted in de smokehouse, and "tore up everythin'"-----We niggers was running 'round like rabbits, peeping out frum under de floor, scairt to death.

When de war was over, my mammy said, "Masta John" blow'd de bugle and call all his slaves together, and stood up on de block and says: "Dis block has parted many a mother and chile, husband and wif--- brother and sister----but, now you is all free as I am. You can go or you can stay here wid me. I'll pay you fer yer work." Some of dem stay on wid him, but my mother didn't. She married de second year of de surrender and had five more chillun. Dey was Mose, Jim, Willie, and a pair of twins---whut died. She had Willie when she was 51 years old. She died when she was 62. After de war Mis' Hoyer taken Miss Frances' chillun and finish raisin' em. My white folks was always good to me.

"Whut do I think 'bout slav'ry now, Miss?" Sometimes, I think it was like de childr'n of Israel. Maybe it was God's plan fer 'em. 'Cose we is havin' a hard time. Dem days Old Masta and Old Mis' looked atter us, but now we has to git out and "scuttle" fer ourselves. I always got alon' wid de white folks, cause I knows how to "carry" myself. I am a Baptist. I think everybody oughta be religious for dats de only hope we have atter leavin' here."

On a second visit to Lucy who lives in a little three room shack with a sister-in-law, whose husband, Nep Jenkins, is bed-ridden, having suffered from a stroke of paralysis six weeks ago. Lucy helps wait on him and look after two small children in the family. A grand-daughter from New Orleans also lives with them at present while she is looking for a job.

When the writer asked Lucy to tell her something more about the "black girl that came from Africa," her face brightened and she said:

"We was all crazy about "Little Luce." Dat was what we called her, cause she was little, but my! she was strong and could whup anybody dat fooled wid her. She remembered her mother who was also a slave in Africy. Their master over dere was a black man and he was mean to dem; would beat 'em when dey didn't do to suit him. Luce had one tooth missing in front, which she said she lost while fighting the black boss over dere. She said dat was de reason dey sold her because she was so bad about fightin' and bitin'--she was strong and could fight jes' like a cat.

"When dey was fixin' to sell her to de white folks, dey made her grease her long black hair and plait it in braids to hang down her back, and to wash and grease her legs to make dem shine when she was dancing fer dem. De speculators sho' like to see her dance! She said all she wore was a full skirt dat come to her knees and a sash tied roun' her waist. She said dat she always brought big money when dey put her on de block to sell. She was a good-look-in' gal--jest as black and slick as a--"gutta-pucha button." She had bright, black eyes, and purty white teeth, and little feet--she wore no. 4 shoes, but she had a big mouth and when she laugh, she show all of dem white teef.

She was sold over here to a man name Hutson, and she always go by de name of "Lucy Hutson." She stayed wid her white folks till after de surrender. She wuked in de fiel' at fust, but she was so clean and "swift" about her work dat dey put her in de house to work. She married Alf Hutson, one of de black man on de place. She said dat dey dressed her up and told her dat her and Alf had to "Jump over de Broom."

After dey jumped over de broom, Old Masta said: "Now salute yer bride!" After dat dey had cake and feasting. Luce was a favorite wid all of dem. She said she always took de prize at all de dances.

Her Old Mistress would never hear to selling Lucy. She said she was too smart and "responsible" fer her to part wid her. Lucy lived wid her white people long after de war was over. She worked in de house and Alf was de carriage driver. Dey had two children---a boy and a gal---named Marsh and Liza. Dey was smart chillun, too."

Asked about her grandmother---"Frances," she said:

"My grandmother was a "good breeder", and dat is reason she did not have to work as hard as some of de other slaves. She had 22 chillun. It was her job to look after all the slave chillun. She saw dat dey all got fed good. She had two big wooden trays and about four o'clock ever even' she would fill dem trays wid somethin' to eat and call all de pick-a-ninnies, and dey would all com a-runnin'. Den dey didn't git no more till mawnin'---but - dey was round and fat as butter balls. My grandmother always lived wid de Hoys. She come from South Calliny. She was low and chunky with brown skin. She was good-looking and always smilin'."

"I members once 'bout a African preacher tellin' us how dey burried folks in Africy. Dey always buried dem at night. Dey would dig de grave and when night would come dey all carried a torch and followed single file atter de ones totin' de corpse. When dey throw de dirt in and fill up de grave, dey pile it up high, den dey all dance around on top of de grave and beat de dirt down smooth. Dey would sing at the same time.