

**LAURA CORNISH was born on the plantation of Isaiah Day, near Dayton, Texas. She "reckons I's 'bout twelve or maybe thirteen years old when all de cullud folks was made free." Laura's memory is poor, but she made an effort to recall slave days. She lives at 2915 Nance St., Houston, Texas.**

"Lawd have mercy 'pon me, when you calls me Aunt Laura it seems jes' like you must be some of my white folks, 'cause dat what dey calls me. I mean Papa Day's chillen and dere younguns, when dey comes to see me. But it been de long time since any of dem come to see old Aunt Laura, and I reckon dey most all gone now.

"You know where Dayton is at? Well, dat's where Papa Day's plantation was at and where I's borned. I don't know when dat am, 'zactly, but when all de cullud folks was made free, I reckons I's 'bout twelve or thirteen years old.

"Mama's name was Maria Dunlap and daddy's name was Saul. Mamma was de seamstress and don't do nothin' but weave cloth on de spinnin' wheel and make clothes. Daddy from Lake Providence, I heard him say, but I don't know where at dat is. He do all de carpenter work. I has five sisters and two brothers, but dey heaps older dan me and I don't know much 'bout dem.

"We 'longs to Papa Day, his name Isaiah, but us all call him Papa Day, 'cause he won't 'low none he cullud folks to call him master. He say us is born free as he is, only de other white folks won't tell us so, and our souls is jes' as white, and de reason us am darker on de outside is 'cause us is sunburnt. I don't reckon dere am anybody as good to dere cullud folks as he was. [Pg 255]

"Miss Martha, he wife, was mighty good, too. Does any us chillen git hurt or scratched, she fix us up and give us a hug. I knows dey has two boys and a gal, and dey comes to see me long time after I's free and brings dere own chillen. But my mem'ry am sort of foggy-like and I can't 'member dere names now.

"De only work Papa Day 'lows us chillen do am pick de boles close to de ground, and dat mostly fun, and us ride to de house on de wagon what takes de pickin' at night. Papa Day don't make he cullud folks work Saturdays and Sundays and dey can visit round on other plantations, and he say nobody better bother us none, either.

"One time us chillen playin' out in de woods and seed two old men what look like wild men, sho' 'nough. Dey has long hair all over de face and dere shirts all bloody. Us run and tell Papa Day and he makes us take him dere and he goes in de briar patch where dem men hidin'. Dey takes him round de knees and begs him do he not tell dere massa where dey at, 'cause dey maybe git kilt. Dey say dey am old Lodge and Baldo and dey run 'way 'cause dere massa whips dem, 'cause dey so old dey can't work good no more. Papa Day has tears comin' in he eyes. Dey can't hardly walk, so he sends dem to de house and has Aunt Mandy, de cook, fix up somethin' to eat quick. I never seed sech eatin', dey so hongry. He puts dem in a house and tells us not to say nothin'. Den he rides off on he hoss and goes to dere massa and tells him 'bout it, and jes' dares him to come git dem. He pays de man some money and Lodge and Baldo stays with Papa Day and I guess daythink dey in Heaven.

"One mornin' Papa Day calls all us to de house and reads de freedom papers and say, 'De gov'ment don't need to tell you you is free, 'cause you been free all you days. If you wants to stay you can and if you wants to go, you can. But if you go, lots of white folks ain't gwine treat you like I does.' [Pg 256]

"For de longest time, maybe two years, dey wasn't none of Papa Day's cullud folks what left, but den first one fam'ly den 'nother gits some land to make a crop on, and den daddy gits some land and us leaves, too. Maybe he gits de land from Papa Day, 'cause it an't far from his plantation. Us sho' work hard on dat place, but I hearded mama say lots of times she wishes we stay on Papa Day's place.

"I 'member one year us don't make no crop hardly and daddy say he gwine git out 'fore us starves to death, and he moves to Houston. He gits a job doin' carpenter work and hires me out for de housegirl. But mama dies and daddy takes sick and dies, too. Lawd have mercy, dat sho' de hard time for me when I loses my mama and daddy, and I has to go to Dayton and stay with my sister, Rachel. Both my husbands what I marries done been dead a long time now, and de only child I ever had died when he jes' a baby. Now I's jes' alone, sittin' and waitin' for de Lawd to call me." [Pg 257]