

Chapter One

“The North Star”

As Vivian strolled down Woodward Avenue, in the heart of downtown Detroit, past the Hudson Department store, eight stories tall with its brilliant wide-arched bay windows trimmed with Apostle Island brownstone, she wondered if Lee would have the decency to meet her at the appointed time. She was so sick of him and his beautifully decorated bag of lies. She didn't know if she had the patience to let him continue to dog her until and unless he stumbled upon a piece of maturity one day. She wanted a rewarding life, yet each passing day with him convinced her that she was being suckered down the slippery slope to hell. Peace had never existed in their household, not here, and certainly not in Florida.

This was all still so very new to her, the big city life. It was only just approaching midday, and already the city was frenetic with vigor. There were horns honking, people hustling to restaurants and diners for their lunch breaks, and loads of so-called Negroes from down south, getting off trains in their tattered clothes, carrying paper bags full of cold chicken and pork chops, meeting their relations at the station, and so very happy to have escaped the nightmare of a Jackson, Mississippi, an Athens, Alabama, or a Deep-Step, Georgia gone lynch-crazy. And happy to be in a place of opportunity, where a man could do honest work making cars and bring home a paycheck that would be strong enough to make him and his family a future.

Vivian and Lee had come north for different reasons. As she walked past Kresge's, peering into the window at the household and personal items that the dime store was famous for, she wondered if it had been a mistake after all, to follow her sisters up there, with him. Things had gotten worse between them, it seemed. Or was it just her imagination? Had she been fooling herself all along about his love for her, when he seemed to find it so easy to beat her even when they were down south? And had she not made it worse by moving in with Minnie and Henry? How in the world could she have done that, she wondered, with all the rivalry that existed between him and her husband?

And her knowing that Mary...

Vivian's thoughts were suddenly interrupted when she realized that she was standing in front of the Fox Theater. It was two o'clock and Lee wasn't there. She checked herself in the window

of the theater. Even if she said so herself, she thought, I look very lovely today. She was stylishly dressed in her flapper cloche hat and a copasetic dress that showcased her ample bosom in a tubular bodice that draped straight down to her waist and then to a full dark green skirt that came down to her mid-calf. She had made the outfit herself from a pattern in a Sears catalog. After struggling with not knowing how to sew well all of her life, Vivian finally mustered the patience to teach herself. She had a lot of spare time, these days. Lee liked the outfit a lot. But not Henry, who thought it was too revealing. She laughed to herself when she recalled that Henry was forever commenting on her style of dress, and he wasn't shy about offering his input.

Lee had promised her that he would meet her at the Fox and that he would be on time. They had driven over from Pontiac that morning in Lee's new car that he got from Casey, and had a late breakfast downtown. Afterwards, he gave her a fist full of money so she could do some shopping while he ran a few quick errands. He told her that he had some business to attend to with Casey and that she wouldn't have to worry about his keeping their appointment. But she knew that business with Casey probably meant bootleg business or, just as likely, prostitute business. And she knew that Lee had a weakness for women that neither marriage nor moving to Pontiac had cured.

"He sure runs after these hot-to-trot Detroit women," she muttered under her breath. "But got the nerves to tell me how much he loves me."

She scribbled a note advising Lee that either he would find her inside the theater or at the Detroit Urban League. The Negro doorman extended his sparkling clean white gloved hand to accept the note with a gleaming smile that matched his gloves perfectly. After waiting fifteen more minutes for Lee, Vivian decided to go inside the theater and watch the silent feature that was just starting. What's the sense in wasting this whole day, she thought. The movie was called *Broken Blossoms*. It was directed by D.W. Griffiths and told the love story of a poor and gentle Chinese man who was addicted to opium and an illegitimate English girl from the slums who was abused by her father, a prizefighter. In the end, the father killed the girl. Vivian sat in the darkness of the theater, tears rolling down her cheeks, wondering why she had been so affected by the film.

Finally, she got up and went outside. Lee was still not there. It was three thirty now. Vivian could feel herself getting frosty. This was just like Lee, she thought. With his trifling self. When

he was with Casey, he seemed to get all meek and timid, like a little kid. But with her he was the big bad man that roared like a lion and knocked things around. It was scary.

In no time, she neared the Columbia Street Community Center. “At least I can see Mr. Gancy,” she said aloud without realizing it. Gancy, the director of the Detroit Urban League, had befriended Vivian and Lee when they first came to town. He helped them adjust to big city life and even got Lee an interview at one of the automobile factories. But Lee had met Casey through Robeena before the interview and that had been the end of that. As it turned out, Lee was more interested in a quick buck, even if it was illegal, than in working hard at a sure thing.

“Baby, I’m a man what works smart,” he had told her. “Not hard.” What was she to do?

Anyway, she liked Gancy and the people around him who worked so hard to help the poor people from down south who were now coming north by the tens of thousands seeking a better life. They helped people find homes and jobs, and they helped them with their medical needs, too. And now, under Mr. Gancy’s leadership, since 1919, the center had a reading room, a baby clinic, and a music school. Vivian loved to go to the center whenever she could get away from all the twisted madness of her life with Lee just to breathe the atmosphere of peace and joy that she found at the center and to help Mr. Gancy. Of course, Lee didn’t like that either. He accused her of wanting to get with Gancy. Vivian tried to explain that volunteering at the center brought balance to her life and filled her with a joy that, even though it was temporary, Vivian needed as much as she needed water and food.

At the center, teaching the children how to read and listening to them as they sang and played in the music school, she felt that she was near the purpose of her life, which she had never known before. Vivian accepted that she was not a top reader, herself. In fact, she regretted dropping out of school so early. But the children at the center, some of them had no schooling at all!

As she walked through the door of the center, Gancy ran to greet her. “Vivian, if this ain’t a surprise!” he said. “What brings my favorite volunteer out today? Some of the children were just asking about you. And where’s that baby and husband of yours?” Gancy, a tall dark man with a slim mustache, reached out to hug her and she hugged him back.

“Now, Mr. Gancy,” she said, “you know that I use every opportunity I can to sneak over here. The baby is fine--she’s with my sister. And Lee’s fine, too, I guess. He was supposed to

meet me at two o'clock in front of the Fox." She emitted a deep sigh of disgust. "Anyway, I thought I'd come by and check on y'all."

"And we're so glad you did," said Gancy. "It's always good to see you, darling. Besides, there's someone back in the music school who's just itching to see you."

Gancy took her hand and she followed him to the far end of the music room, painted in a bright orange, with photographs of King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, Beethoven, and Scott Joplin on the walls. There were three class sessions per day, for violin, trumpet, and piano. This was the final class.

"Good afternoon, Miss Vivian," the class said in sing-song unison, with the crisp military precision that had been instilled in them by their instructors. But the martial spirit was quickly broken when a diminutive but effusive youth from the back of the class in the piano section broke out and ran to hug Vivian.

"Hey, Miss Vivian," said the boy, gleaming. Vivian beamed with delight.

"Hey David," she said. "Are you alright?" He nodded. It was little twelve-year-old David Foster. David and his parents and seven brothers and sisters had arrived in Michigan from Mississippi at about the same time that she and Lee had. Sadly, David's mother had died during the birthing labor of her eighth child within a month of their migration. Vivian learned of his story from Gancy and thus showered special attention upon the child, who seemed to her unusually bright. They had been drawn to each other by a special magnetism.

The staff members had helped the boy's father get a job and had also helped to find a house large enough to accommodate him and his seven children. And as a result of the safety net provided by the center, the boy was flourishing, despite his mother's absence. The music teachers at the center discovered that he had a unique aptitude for the piano.

"Vivian, you have to hear what David's been working on," said Gancy. The shy boy went back and took his seat at the piano and began to play a classical piece so masterfully that tears welled up in Vivian's eyes. Then, with a devilish glint in his eyes, as he looked at Vivian, David did a deft segue into Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag," his slender fingers nimbly bringing the jazz piece to life. Vivian laughed.

"You ole devil, you," she cried. Gancy knew that Scott Joplin was one of Vivian's favorite artists by the way she exclaimed when he had given her one of Joplin's record as a gift. Gancy

laughed and walked away, pleased to see the sparkle in Vivian's eyes as she conversed with David.

She spent the next thirty minutes with David, catching up with what he had been doing and how he'd been feeling since the last time she'd seen him, listening very carefully to both the words he shared about the loss of his mother, and the sad spirit that came from the words. Afterwards, they embraced again, and he looked up at her and said: "Miss Vivian, I love you. And, no matter where I go in life and no matter how long I live, I will never forget the love that you have given me. I'd promise that on a whole stack of Bibles."

She hugged him again, fighting back tears and wondering why she was so weepy today. She taught reading to a few other students in her brief hour there and Gancy walked her out the door of the center a little before five o'clock. With her hand in his, Gancy told her he was on his way to Pontiac, too, once the center closed in a few minutes. His sister lived only two blocks from Vivian. Gancy offered her a ride home since she didn't seem to know where Lee could be, but then her ears were trained to some squealing tires a short way in the distance.

Suddenly, Lee drove up, screeching to a halt. Vivian walked ahead of Gancy down the steps of the center and opened the door of the car. Gancy knew the score. He didn't expect Vivian to wave goodbye, and he didn't bother to acknowledge Lee before he slid backwards inside the center.

"Get in the car, bitch," Lee hissed. Embarrassed, she did, not sure if Gancy was still watching. And Lee reached across her lap to slam the door shut. Then he gave her a quick backhand that drew blood from her mouth. And he drove home to Pontiac.

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On the inside, Lee was an emotional basket case. She had done it again. Vivian had succeeded in pissing him off to the point of no return. As usual, everything was just about her fault because today was the day that he anticipated treating her like a queen. Earlier that morning, Lee got the bright idea to plan something special for Vivian, whether she deserved it or not. They would go for an outing in Detroit, and it would be fun. He needed to meet Casey, anyway, so he would kill two birds with one stone. When he announced that he had planned their day, she seemed excited about hanging out in the city with him, and for the occasion, she put on

one of the nice skirt-dresses that she'd recently made.

Unfortunately, their brightly intended day turned into a stormy parade of madness when Lee suspected the worse after he arrived at the Fox Theater as planned, only to find that Vivian had trotted her fast tail down to the Columbia Street Detroit Urban League where the well-to-do and intriguing Gancy worked. Lee had given her money to shop while he took care of his business with Casey. All he asked for in return was that she meet him at the Fox. Although Lee was late making their appointment, he didn't think that warranted her going down to the urban league. Therefore, after he read the theater doorman's note from Vivian stating her whereabouts, he raced over to Columbia Street in anger. He saw her prancing down the steps with Gancy, as though he was her lover. And he knew she was using her soft sexy voice on him because that was her so-called innocent lure.

Lee glared at Gancy but after he saw Lee's car, Gancy turned away, and Vivian hurried down the steps in guilt, Lee perceived. He couldn't wait to slap her silly, which he did the moment she plopped down in her seat. He noted from a sideways glance that her mouth was bleeding, and that was fine. She could deal with that and her actions that mandated his chastisement.

For a long while as he drove, they didn't speak to each other, and Vivian let the blood dry on her face in silent mutiny. Finally, she mustered the emotional strength to look for something to clean herself. Soon, they would arrive at her sister's house to pick up the baby, and she definitely didn't want her family to see what Lee had done. She found sound napkins in the glove compartment. Adding a little spittle helped to clean the sore area, yet her lip had already begun to swell from the inside.

"I'm tired of being hit on all the time, Lee," she whimpered. Lee was exceeding normal speeds as he tore down Woodward Avenue with only one hand on the steering wheel and with a gangster lean.

"I don't hit you all the time, girl. Quit exaggerating."

"Please slow down, Lee..."

"That's one thing I can say about you: You ought to be in some of them movies you be watching, 'cause you can act yo' stockings off." He hit the brakes just in time to avoid crossing traffic when he ignored a stop sign.

“Lee! Watch out!” He took off again, smashing his foot hard on the accelerator.

“You watch out...if you know what’s good fo’ you. That stop sign shouldn’t even be there, but that nice big Jewish Synagogue requires that the rest of the li’l people stop on this main thoroughfare just in case they having a meeting or something. So, don’t tell me how to drive. Only a thoroughbred can wheel this piece. You wanna drive?” Without looking at him she shook her head. “See, you think you slick, but you can’t play a niggah that’s down wit’ the game. I created the game!”

“Just let me out the car!” She screamed at him. “I’ll walk home.” She didn’t want to cry, but she couldn’t help herself. He was so rude. She didn’t think she could stand being in his presence for another moment without exploding.

“You want me to slap you again? Then don’t tell me what to do. I told you to meet me at the Fox. I ain’t tell you to go down to no Urban League. You too burning hot fo’ yo’ own good.”

“I stayed at the Fox waiting on you for almost two hours!”

“Vivian, I hate how stupid you be acting. You is too unreliable ‘n you don’t know nothing. I had a big emergency today, ‘n that’s how come I was late. You think you too good to wait more than two hours? All you had to do was wait. It don’t matter how long...sometimes you just oughta be obedient.”

“That’s your favorite part of this marriage...if all I can do is what you say, I guess that’ll be heaven for you.”

“I’m trying to build our marriage. Can’t you see that?”

“I don’t see how you think you gonna build something with me when you be with Casey doing all sorts of illegal stuff.”

“Casey ‘n me ain’t as close as we used to be. But ain’t nothing I do ever good enough fo’ you. I even told Casey that it wasn’t a good idea fo’ us to hang so close since me ‘n you moved away from yo’ family ‘n we trying to be on our own. The reason I needed to see him is because he promised me the title to this car, ‘n I had to get it—make ‘em stick to his word, but he di’n like that. I’m trying to do this thing right, muffin.” He reached under his seat for a pint of liquor that was more than half empty. “That’s what took me so long. Casey was trying to convince me to be his boy, but snap—I ain’t never been nobody’s boy ‘n I ain’t gone start being a boy up here.”

“Don’t drink that, Lee...”

“I told him that none of his money could tie me to a life that would destroy me. Been there, done that. See, baby?” He pointed to the windshield where the title had been thrown. “I’m working things out fo’ us. I got you this car...”

“Lee!”

He swung the jug wildly, almost hitting her in the jaw. “This ain’t even a pint.” He turned it up and finished it in three gulps. Vivian was concerned that he couldn’t clearly see the road while he drank. She grinded her feet in the floor board until her ankles ached. “And right about now, you should wish I had another pint ‘n then if I drank that then maybe I would begin to see some pleasure in the fact that I married a stupid woman like you.”

Crying noiselessly, she refused to answer. She would leave him if he couldn’t appreciate her. So what if people whispered behind her back or if her sisters would see her as a failure—she didn’t have to take his mess. There was no way he could say he adored her and then be so disrespectful. As she slipped more into a depression, she no longer cared how reckless he was driving. She only wanted to make it to Minnie’s house in one piece as soon as humanly possible so she could get out of the car and tell Lee to take a hike.

“It ain’t no sense in you getting all quiet now, Vivian. You wanted to put yo’ mouth on me...” He slowed the car a little, realizing that he was losing control. “Well I’m now putting my mouth on you. Somebody gotta let you know that you is full of horse manure.”

“Just leave me alone!” She couldn’t help feeling provoked that time, but she warned herself not to utter another word to him until her anger subsided.

“I did tell Casey that. I know you ain’t believing me, but that’s alright.” When he turned down Franklin Road, Vivian started straightening herself in the mirror, and she whipped out some of her mother’s strawberry oil that she’d taken from Florida and smoothed it on her wrists. “Girl, I’m trying to be a family man. I’m gonna do whatever it takes to keep my family together, you dig?” Lee glanced at her to make sure she was in agreement. He couldn’t believe that she had her make-up purse out, and that she was getting herself pretty when moments ago she was the queen of slop and tears.

Once they reached the corner of Franklin Road and California Street, it dawned on Lee that Vivian expected to get out of the car at her sister’s house. “Where in shitsmobile do you think

you going, where?"

"I wanna see my sister and just get away from you!" Swiftly, he pulled off the road and almost plunged into a ditch near the corner where the land was uncultivated; but nearing three hundred and sixty degrees, the tires spun in the dirt until the nose of the engine was facing the road again. He jerked the gear to the parking mode and charged out of the car like a raging bull. Vivian fumbled with her door handle in her hurry to escape the vehicle before he could make it to her side. But as she was tripping out of the car, he grabbed her arm, dragged her with one swooping motion and flung her over the hood. The back of her body smashed on the hard metal with a tremendous thump. Not yet feeling the sting, she only hoped someone would come outside and catch him in the act, but the street was quiet.

"Do I look like some plantation slave to you? You think you can tell me where you going wit'out asking fo' my permission? I'll kick the wind outa you." Vivian rolled slowly away from him because she felt that if she made any sudden movements, he would pounce on her.

She softened her voice. "I just wanna see my family." He walked away from her about six feet, only to turn around and stand within centimeters of her.

"Don't play me, Vivian. I'll slap you into next week right here and now. You think I won't because we in front of yo' sister's house? Do you really think I'm scared of Henry's black ass?" He moved in on her and straddled her under him. She was humiliated. He kissed her and he tasted like stale, molded cheese. She knew instantly that what he had swigged in the car definitely wasn't his first drink of the day. She tried to shove him away but he only budged an inch. "What's the matter? You don't want nobody to see me 'n you like this? Who is you hiding from, Viv?"

"Nobody."

"You used to like it. Remember the day we met?"

"Just move so I can get back in the car, Lee."

"Exactly. Finally you sound like you got some sense. Don't try me today, girl." He gripped her face with both of his hands, roughly turning her to face him. "Now, gimme 'nother kiss." His breath was foul. "Come on 'n give me that kiss, baby." He took his time, even though he knew that she wanted to disappear.

"Okay, so I kissed you. Can I get back inside the car now while you go get the baby?"

“What? You don’t wanna come in wit’ me? You smelling all pretty—you sho you don’t wanna go inside ‘n let them know that we doing just fine?” He turned her loose. “We don’t need nothing from nobody, muffin pie. I can take care of you wit’ out no help from some other man. I don’t want nothing from nobody!”

“I just wanna go home. Please go on and get the baby, Lee, so we can go.” The thought of going home sent a great surge of tears to the surface again. She didn’t know where home was anymore. And if she could go anywhere she liked, she didn’t know in an instant where she wanted to be. The North Star had yet to fulfill its promise to her and others who had followed it chasing a dream—they seemed just as lost as she, although her people were almost sixty years up from slavery. She knew of no Negro who was truly happy since they came up north following the same star she’d followed, and she had the inside scoop on Minnie’s decaying relationship as well as Robeena’s pseudo-happiness. It was supposed to be different for her, though, Vivian thought. She was the princess, as they all had told her all of her life. She climbed back into the car, taking a quick peek to see if Minnie or Henry had been peering at them from a window. It didn’t matter. Whenever Lee made it back outside with the baby, they would go home and she would continue to lock herself in a private hell...unless someone—a knight in shining armor or a prince or a king would rescue her. It would have to be a knight or a king because it was unthinkable to suggest to herself that God would come in person to lift her to a heavenly state of being. And to Vivian, God was a ghost, not a king, a formless spirit floating in the sky, not a man who had power in his hands, not a knight. God wouldn’t come to her people, anyway, the rejected and the despised. He could show himself face to face to Moses and Abraham and Enoch, but Vivian surmised that he would never come to deliver the sheep that was lost in the wilderness of North America.

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A Few Months Earlier...

Vivian exhaled noisily as she stared up at the dark sky. Where was her husband? She was fed up with all the games and deceit. “I’m tired of living like a lowly dog,” she mouthed. She felt that even though they argued constantly, he had no right to lurk the streets like a heated beast.

His drinking was becoming more of a problem these days, too. Lee seemed most happy when he frequented the lowliest drinking and gambling spots in town with his friend Casey. It perturbed Vivian to reflect that although most of Lee's time was spent away from home, he still claimed she was his only love.

Vivian spied the North Star with mixed emotions. "I followed you, you ole dreamy thing," she breathed. "What good have you been so far?" She waited, half expecting the star to answer with some astronomical sign. Vivian remembered when she was on the train en route for Michigan with Lee, less than one year ago. She had wanted to make a better life for her family. Her two sisters, Robeena and Minnie had already made their way to the northern dreamland. Vivian had received two or three letters since her sibling's departure. Minnie sent the first letter on March 1, 1922:

Dear Vivian,

I miss ya'll so much! It's been quite lonely here without mama, that's all I can say that's bad about this here place. Henry has been really good to me, child. We's married now . . . legally. Henry and I done went to us a Justice of the Peace what done married us off! So tell mama she ain't gotta hide her face in no more shame about me, on account of me and my man finally done it right. We got us a house that's big and nice. Can you believe that, Vivian? A house! It's way bigger than our house down south, too. This one is two stories, and has a separate dining room. It's two other houses on our road. Well, there's more than that, but from our house to the field is two other houses.

We found some decent hand me down furniture for each and every room, but most of the stuff in our house, Henry made it by hand! He made our chest of drawers, a boxboard for our bed, and he still making stuff for our house.

Got two other bedrooms 'sides our own. Beena was supposed to be in one of them 'til she went on 'bout her way. We both be working good jobs, too. Henry got him a job helping some folks with building all sorts of things. There's this place called the Detroit Urban League, and a Negro man named Gancy runs that whole center. Can you believe that? He found Henry a job on account of that's what they do down here. Henry's part of a crew that's building a big ole building right down town. Girl, he learning a lot. He even built us some cabinets in our house.

We still trying for a baby.

The good Lord has been with us all this time. Oh yea. I do washing for two families! Ones, I keep her child whilst she runs errands and be with her husband, and you know, she rests a lot and she is needing me to look after her boy. I believe I got hired on account of I can read and write so well. Mrs. Miller is thinking I'd be good for her boy. She a fragile woman, Mrs. Miller is. The other family I just do the washing for. I might not be with them too much longer, though. Beena doing fine, too, except she likes to hang out in the streets too much.

Vivian, tell mama to think about coming out here and getting a life going on. Ain't no white person gonna give you nothing in the south. They don't too much bother us up here . . . they just leave us be. And the type of work we do up here and the money we make is better than what we would make down in Florida. Take this \$10.00 and give most of it to mama. Kiss mama for me, too. Tell her I'll write her when I can sit and get a good letter going. I just finished reading her letter. This the address mama gave me for you. Said you was married to Lee! I can't wait to tell Henry. Maybe now ya'll can come on up here. You can stay with us 'til you find a place, too. Well, Viv, I just wanted to write you as soon as I heard the news. Little William Miller is tugging on my dress, child! I love you, and may God bless you. Write back really soon.

Mrs. Minnie Raison 409 California Street Pontiac, Michigan 48053

Then a letter came from Robeena a few weeks later:

Dear Viv,

Hey girl, what you doing still down there in hot Florida? You ain't packed yourself and mama up yet? I know you all ain't mad with us on account of we got out of that jungle, are you? How mama doing? Is that Mistuh Eli still coming by to see her? Ain't no needing me asking 'bout daddy, 'cause I know that sorry hustler ain't doing nothing for you or mama. This is real living up here, Viv. I'm thinking 'bout leaving Pontiac and going to Detroit, girl! They got fine men all the ways from New York what be in Detroit, too. I don't stay with Minnie no more. Her and Henry too boring for me. But they do have a big ole nice house. In their yard they got a green apple tree, a pear tree, AND a grapevine. They got two big trees in the front yard, too. Henry gave them all his money and they say them ain't got no problem selling no house to a

colored boy, long as he pays. Henry had us three to take a fine portrait together. Says he gonna put it in his new house. Minnie told me that you was married now to Lee. I know that's a fat lie. Girl, you better write me and tell me what's going on! Take care of mama for me, and write me back.

Love you,

Beena

Michigan was a far cry from the place that Vivian had known and loved just a few months earlier and called home: Century, Florida. The concrete Pontiac streets sometimes made her heart ache for the meandering Escambia River, along which banks she and her sisters would frolic as little girls. It was a place of bottomland forest and mysterious wildlife, like bear and deer and bobcat. And, during the winter months, the music of migrant birds in nearby swamps, like the Hooded Warbler and the Parula effected the whole area. Vivian and her sisters would sometimes find beautiful water hyacinth near the swamps, which they had learned from their mother, was, when boiled, a delicious food, especially the crisp and tender stolons that connected the plant to its roots.

In those dark and dank forests, suspended from the branches of the venerable cypress trees, like the graying hair of old maids, one could see the Spanish moss, a plant so supple that it could be turned into a wig, a dress, or a seat cushion. Besides the cypress, there were the tupelos, the sweet gum, the elm, and the dogwoods, in autumn always so lush with red, crimson, and purple leaves. Flying through the trees in the summer would be red-shouldered hawks and barred owls, spying the ground for rodents and reptiles near the swamps.

Some fifty-nine miles to the south of Century, but at the axis of Century's universe, was the great fishing city of Pensacola and the breathtaking Bay of the same name. In 1559, a few thousand Spanish soldiers and settlers, under the leadership of Don Tristan de Luna, had sailed into the Bay, the first crack by a European realm to deposit firm settlement there and only the second try to forge a colony of any kind in that virgin area that would two hundred years later become the United States of America. History writes it that an overwhelming hurricane spoiled most of Don Tristan's ships, curtailing the gusto of the missionaries and causing them to

abandon the town after two years. Had this great hurricane not occurred, Pensacola would have become America's oldest city. Instead, that credit went to St. Augustine.

In 1698, the Spaniards came once again to Pensacola and settled there, as would like an express train over the next 150 years, the French, the British, the Americans, and the Confederates. Even in the midst of her many lovers, the soothing beauty of the Bay and the seemingly infinite bounty of its waters, so full of dolphin, mackerel, snapper, grouper, and mullet remained faithful. There were also clams, shrimp, and oysters. And fishermen from around the world would come to Pensacola to fish her waters, including Nova Scotians, Germans, and Italians, as there was an ever increasing market for red snapper and grouper.

When Mr. S.C. Cobb established the Pensacola Fish Company in 1872, it became the first recorded company for handling and shipping red snapper. Cobb had the mind to bring in A.F. Warren as a partner and he in due course became a competitor and the owner of the Warren Fish Company, which in 1880 caught and sold 1.5 million pounds of red snapper.

Enter ice plants in 1894 in the Gulf area. By 1895, ice began replacing the live wells which had been previously used to preserve the catch. Sometimes, a tough crew of fishermen would be at sea for up to a month at a time, and they would work on schooners, called "smacks" or on smaller vessels called "chings." The smacks had the capacity to carry seven to twelve men and up to 20 tons of ice. The boats weighed a whopping 50 to 60 tons and were nearly 100 feet long. Chings compensated crews of four to five fishermen who would stay out to sea for up to ten days. And most of the ching fishermen, many of them from Century, like Vivian's Uncle Jack, before he moved to Gainesville, and like many of Century's other young men, were colored.

As Vivian stared forlornly at the stars, she imagined what it would feel like to be out to sea with her Uncle Jack. Any place would be better than on the cold and lonely porch waiting for Lee, and anything would be more soothing to her eyes than what she had just seen upstairs. She calmed herself by imagining how peaceful it would be in the safety of a boat—even if it was filled with pounds of dead fish.

Mentally exhausted and emotionally drained, Vivian closed her eyes before going back inside the house. It really didn't matter where Lee was, she thought. She knew he would lie, anyway, so what was the point? She shoved Lee out of her mind, and concentrated on the black, cool waves.