Chapter - II
PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR’S
THE SPORT OF THE GODS

The celebrated African-American writer Paul Laurence Dunbar was born on June 27, 1872 in Dayton, Ohio to parents who had escaped from slavery in Kentucky. Dunbar’s father was a veteran of the American Civil War, having served in the 55th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment and the 5th Massachusetts Colored Cavalry Regiment. Dunbar’s parents put in him a love for learning and history. He was the only African-American student during the year he attended Dayton’s Central High School, and he participated actively as a student. During high school, he was both the editor of the school newspaper and class president, as well as the president of the school literary society. Dunbar had also started the first African-American newspaper in Dayton.

Dunbar wrote his first poem at age 6 and gave his first public recital at age 9. Dunbar’s first published work came in a newspaper put out by his high school acquaintances Wilbur and Orville Wright, who owned a printing press. The Wright brothers later invested in the Dayton Tattler, a newspaper aimed at the black community, edited and published by Dunbar.

Dunbar’s first collection of poetry, Oak and Ivy, was published in 1893 and attracted the attention of James Whitcomb Riley, the popular ‘Hoosier Poet’. Both Riley and Dunbar wrote poems in both standard English and dialect. His second book, Majors and Minors (1895) brought him national fame and the patronage of William Dean Howells, the novelist and critic and editor of Harper’s Weekly. After Howell’s praise, his first two books were combined as Lyrics of Lowly Life and Dunbar started on a career of international literary fame. He moved to Washington,
D. C., in the LeDroit Park neighborhood. While in Washington, he attended Howard University.

Dunbar kept a lifelong friendship with the Wrights, and was also associated with Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington. Brand Whitlock was also described as a close friend. Dunbar was honored with a ceremonial sword by President Theodore Roosevelt.

Dunbar wrote a dozen books of poetry, four books of short stories, five novels, and a play. He also wrote lyrics for In Dahomey – the first musical written and performed entirely by African-Americans to appear on Broadway in 1903; the musical comedy successfully toured England and America over a period of four years – one of the more successful theatrical productions of its time. Dunbar’s essays and poems were published widely in the leading journals of the day. His work appeared in Harper’s Weekly, the Saturday Evening Post, the Denver Post, Current Literature and a number of other publications. During his life, considerable emphasis was laid on the fact that Dunbar was of pure black descent.

Dunbar’s work is known for its colorful language and use of dialect, and conversational tone, with a brilliant rhetorical structure. These traits were well matched to the tune-writing ability of Carrie Jacobs-Bond (1862-1946), with whom he collaborated.

Dunbar traveled to England in 1897 to recite his works on the London literary circuit. He met the brilliant young black composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor who set some of his poems to music and who was influenced by Dunbar to use African and American Negro songs and tunes in future compositions.

After returning from England, Dunbar married Alice Ruth Moore in 1898. A graduate of Straight University (now Dillard University) in New Orleans, her most famous works include a short story entitled ‘Violets’. She and her husband also
wrote books of poetry as companion pieces. An account of their love, life and marriage was depicted in a play by Kathleen McGhee-Anderson titled Oak and Ivy.

Dunbar took a job at the Library of Congress in Washington. In 1900, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis and moved to Colorado with his wife on the advice of his doctors. Dunbar and his wife separated in 1902, but they never divorced. Depression and declining health drove him to a dependence on alcohol, which further damaged his health. He moved back to Dayton to be with his mother in 1904. Dunbar died from tuberculosis on February 9, 1906, at age thirty-three. He was interred in the Woodland Cemetery in Dayton.

In 2002, Molefi Kete Asante listed Paul Laurence Dunbar on his list of 100 Greatest African Americans.

Much of Dunbar’s work was authored in conventional English, while some was rendered in African-American dialect. Dunbar remained always suspicious that there was something demeaning about the marketability of dialect poems:

I am tried, so tired of dialect. I send out graceful little poems, suited for any of the magazines, but they are returned to me by editors who say, Dunbar, but we do not care for the language compositions.

Two brief examples of Dunbar’s work, the first in Standard English and the second in dialect, demonstrate the diversity of the poet’s production:

What dreams we have and how they fly
Like rosy clouds across the sky;
Of wealth, of fame, of sure success,
Of love that comes to cheer and bless;
And how they whither, how they fade,
The waning wealth, the jilting jade –
The fame that for a moment gleams,
Then flies forever, - dreams, ah – dreams!

(From ‘Dreams’)

‘Sunshine on de medders,
Greenness on de way;
Dat’s de blessed reason
I sing all de day.’
Look hyeah! What you axing’?
What meks me so merry?
‘Spect to see me sighin’
W’en hit’s wa’ m in Febawary?

(From ‘A warm day in winter’)

Dunbar’s vaudeville song ‘Who Dat Say Chicken in Dis Crowd’ may have influenced the development of ‘Who dat? Who dat? Who dat say gonna beat dem Saints?’, the New Orleans Saints’ chant.

Dunbar was a prolific writer. Though he lived for 34 years, he wrote a dozen books of poetry, four books of short stories, five novels and a play.

The important of Dunbar’s poetry collections are as follows:

Poetry:
1. Poems of Cabin and Field (1899)
2. Lyrics of the Hearthside (2009)
3. Lyrics of Lowly Life, 2009
4. Oak and Ivy, 2010

**Short Stories:**
2. The Strength of Gideon and Other Stories (2008)
3. The Heart of Happy Hollow: A Collection of Stories (1904)

**Novels:**
2. The Uncalled a Novel (2009)

**Criticism about Dunbar:**

**Paul Laurence Dunbar’s The Sport of the Gods (1962)**

Paul Laurence Dunbar was a prolific writer. He was interested in journalism, poetry, novel, short story and play. He wrote books of short stories like *Folks from Dixie* (1898) and as many as four novels. In 1898, he published his first novel *The Uncalled* (1898) about a white preacher. This novel was commercially and critically unsuccessful, as were the two that he wrote next. His fourth novel *The Sport of the Gods* (1902) became successful. Unlike the first three novels, this novel has the black protagonist.
Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods* (1902) chronicles the life of black American family which migrates from the rural south in search of prosperity and opportunity in Harlem, New York, only to be confronted with the harsh realities of ghetto life.

A brief yet critical appreciation of the novel is as follows. Chapter -I is called “The Hamiltons.” Berry Hamilton is a slave. Fannie is his wife. Joe and Kit are his son and daughter. They live in a cabin in the premises of their masters, the Oakleys. Berry is a butler for Maurice Oakley for 20 years. The slavery once ended, but the slaves stayed. Actually Berry’s wife was the master’s housekeeper. The author says, “Berry worked in the lodge, and Fannie in the house and garden. Their two darlings Joe and Kitty grew happily. They got what schooling the town offered. Kitty helped her mother and Joe learned the trade of barber. Kitty was pretty and would sing like a lark. His father counseled him thus: ‘It’s de p’opah thing fu’ a man what waits on quality to have quality mannahs an’ to waih quality clothes.’

Yet the family lived in poverty. There is a reference to Kitty, in rags when she sang for her father’s society, the tribe of Benjamin. Mrs. Oakley who took an interest in her helped her always. In fact, the black parents spoiled their children as much as white parents. Dunbar writes about an occasion in the family.

Joe and Kit were respectively eighteen and sixteen at the time when the preparations for Maurice Oakley’s farewell dinner to his brother Francis were agitating the whole Hamilton household. All of them had a hand in the work: Joe had shaved the two men; Kit had helped Mrs. Oakley’s maid; the mother had fretted herself weak over the shortcomings of a cook that had been in the family nearly as long as herself, while Berry was stern and dignified in anticipation of the glorious figure he was to make in serving (Ch-I, p.3).

Chapter-II is called “A Farewell Dinner.” Maurice Oakley was not a man of sudden or violent enthusiasm. Conservatism was the quality that had been the
foundation of his fortunes at a time when the disruption of the country had involved most of the men of his region in ruin. The landlord faced the Civil War, lost much and yet could not help adjusting to it. He often thought that changing ways had some affirmative values. The citizen’s should adjust with the change. He had done this. His house, his reputation, his satisfaction, were all evidences that he had succeeded. As a childless man he bestowed upon his younger brother Francis, whatever property and concern he could. His wife gave cooperation.

Actually Francis was only a half brother to Maurice. The elderly brother had educated Francis in art first in America, and then in Paris. Yet Francis was not a successful man. He was tall, handsome and graceful. He had the look of a poet. On one occasion when Francis was to depart for the next five years, the Oakley couple hoisted him a dinner.

It was generally conceded that Mrs. Oakley was a hostess whose guests had no awkward half-hour before dinner. No praise could be higher than this, and to-night she had no need to exert herself to maintain this reputation. Her brother-in-law was the life of the assembly; he had wit and daring, and about him there was just that hint of charming danger that made him irresistible to women. The guests heard the dinner announced with surprise,—an unusual thing, except in this house.

Both Maurice Oakley and his wife looked fondly at the artist as he went in with Claire Lessing. He was talking animatedly to the girl, having changed the general trend of the conversation to a manner and tone directed more particularly to her. While she listened to him, her face glowed and her eyes shone with a light that every man could not bring into them.

As Maurice and his wife followed him with their gaze, the same thought was in their minds, and it had not just come to them. Why could not Francis marry Claire Lessing and settle in America, instead of going back ever and again to that life in the
Latin Quarter? They did not believe that it was a bad life or a dissipated one, but from the little that they had seen of it when they were in Paris, it was at least a bit too free and unconventional for their traditions. There were, too, temptations which must assail any man of Francis's looks and talents. They had perfect faith in the strength of his manhood, of course, but could they have had their way, it would have been their will to hedge him about so that no breath of evil invitation could have come nigh to him.

But this younger brother was an unruly member. He talked and laughed, rode and walked, with Claire Lessing with the same free abandon, the same show of uninterested good comradeship, that he had used towards her when they were boy and girl together. There was not a shade more of warmth or self-consciousness in his manner towards her than there had been fifteen years before. In fact, there was less, for there had been a time, when he was six and Claire three, that Francis, with a boldness that the lover of maturer years tries vainly to attain, had announced to Claire that he was going to marry her. But he had never renewed this declaration when it came time that it would carry weight with it.

They made a fine picture as they sat together to-night. One seeing them could hardly help thinking on the instant that they were made for each other. Something in the woman's face, in her expression perhaps, supplied a palpable lack in the man. The strength of her mouth and chin helped the weakness of his. She was the sort of woman who, if ever he came to a great moral crisis in his life, would be able to save him if she were near. And yet he was going away from her, giving up the pearl that he had only to put out his hand to take. Some of these thoughts were in the minds of the brother and sister now. 'Five years does seem a long while,' Francis was saying, 'but if a man accomplishes anything, after all, it seems only a short time to look back upon' (Ch-II, p. 2).
A man called Esterton thought that Francis’s foreign education will be a boon to him on returning to America. Francis did not agree. He thought nothing can equal his lover Claire. Claire herself wondered at it. The dinner was almost over. The men lingered over their cigars.

Chapter- III is entitled ‘Theft’, as indicated an event at the end of the preceding chapter.

Maurice enquired Frank about the theft. Frank was guilty of some trouble. He explained that the money he had deposited in an Oak cabinet had gone. The amount was 986 dollars, which Frank had got from Maurice. Guilty of his own future Frank confessed: ‘The artist shook his head. ‘No, Maurice,’ he said, ‘I can accept no more from you. I have already used up all my own money and too much of yours in this hopeless fight. I don’t suppose I was ever cut out for an artist, or I’d have done something really notable in this time, and would not be a burden upon those who care for me. No, I’ll give up going to Paris and find some work to do.’

‘Frank, Frank, be silent. This is nonsense, Give up your art? You shall not do it. You shall go to Paris as usual. Leslie and I have perfect faith in you. You shall not give up on account of this misfortune. What are the few paltry dollars to me or to you?’ (Ch - III, p.1).

Frank admitted his faults and decided to mend himself. Maurice, likewise, decided to find out the stolen goods. Frank told that the people who stayed with him the previous night were Esterton, Hamilton, Joe (Hamilton’s barber son), Jack, a washerman. The two hotly thought of Hamilton’s goodness, however. Maurice thought that Hamilton as a negro wanted rapid earning. Soon the young man went to bed, and the older one rang for the police.

As Maurice had said, he was a plain, hard-headed business man, and it took very few words for him to put the Chief of Police in possession of the principal facts of the case. A detective was detailed to take charge of the case, and was started
immediately, so that he might be upon the ground as soon after the commission of
the crime as possible.

When the detective came he insisted that if he was to do anything he must
question the robbed man and search his room at once. Oakley protested, but the
detective was adamant. Even now the presence in the room of a man uninitiated into
the mysteries of criminal methods might be destroying the last vestige of a really
important clue. The master of the house had no alternative save to yield. Together
they went to the artist’s room. A light shone out through the crack under the door.

To the detective’s questions he answered in substance what he had told before.
He also brought out the cabinet. It was a strong oak box, uncarven, but bound at the
edges with brass. The key was still in the lock, where Frank had left it on discovering
his loss. They raised the lid. The cabinet contained two compartments, one for letters
and a smaller one for jewels and trinkets.

The detective made a hard enquiry. The artist gave a sigh of relief. He hated to
be involved in unpleasant things. He went as far as the outer door with his brother
and the detective. As he bade the officer good-night and hurried up the hall, Frank
put his hand to his head again with a convulsive gesture, as if struck by a sudden
pain. Maurice found his wife asleep when he reached the room, but he awakened her
to tell her the story. She was horror-struck. It was hard to have to believe this awful
thing of an old servant, but she agreed with him that Hamilton must be made an
example of when the time came. Before that, however, he must not know that he was
suspected.

They fell asleep, he with thoughts of anger and revenge, and she grieved and
disappointed.

The inmates of the Oakley house had not been long in their beds before
Hamilton was out of his and rousing his own little household: ‘You, Joe,’ he called to
his son, ‘gift from daih an’ come right hyeah. You got to he’p me befo’ you go to any shop dis mo’nin.’ You, Kitty, stir yo’ stumps, miss. I know yo’ ma’s a-dressin’ now. Ef she ain’t, I bet I’ll be aftah huh in a minute, too. You all layin’ ‘roun,’ snoozin’ w’en you all des pint’ly know dis is de mo’nin’ Mistah Frank go ‘way from hyeah’ (Ch- IV p. 1).

It was a cool Autumn morning, fresh and dew-washed. The sun was just rising, and a cool clear breeze was blowing across the land. The blue from the ‘house’ where the fire was already going, whirled fantastically over the roofs like a belated ghost. It was just the morning to doze in comfort, as thought all of Berry’s household except himself. Loud was the complaining as they threw themselves out of bed. They maintained that it was an altogether unearthly hour to get up. Even Mrs. Hamilton added her protest, until she suddenly remembered what morning it was, when she hurried into her clothes and set about getting the family’s breakfast.

Precisely the Hamilton family wondered at a white man’s (detective’s) walk around them the next morning.

Meanwhile, they witnessed Frank’s departure to New York. He was, however, sympathetic about Hamilton.

The young fellow bade them a hearty good-bye, and they, knowing what his feelings must be, spared him the prolonging of the strain. They waited in the carriage, and he waved to them as the train rolled out of the station.

The detective was waiting on the lawn when Maurice Oakley returned. They went immediately to the library, Oakley walking with the firm, hard tread of a man who is both exasperated and determined, and the officer gliding along with the cat-like step which is one of the attributes of his profession.

Then the detective and Mr. Maurice Oakley met and spoke of the theft. He spoke of Hamilton Berry’s having deposited 500 dollars in a bank the day before.
This heightened Maurice doubt, and he summoned Berry for an enquiry. The scene is quite interesting for its doubts, fear, and reasoning:

‘You had better let me talk to Berry, Mr. Oakley,’ said the officer.

Oakley nodded. Berry was looking distressed and excited. He seemed not to understand it at all.

‘Berry,’ the officer pursued, ‘you admit having deposited five hundred dollars in the bank yesterday?’

‘Sut’ny. Dey ain’t to reason why I should n’t admit it, ‘ceptin’ ermong dese jealous niggahs.’

‘Uh huh! Well, now where did you get this money?’

‘Why, I wo’ked fu’it, o’co’se, whaih you s’pose I got it? Tain’t drappin’ off trees, I reckon, not roun’ dis pa’t of de country.’

‘You worked for it? You must have done a pretty big job to have got so much money all in a lump?’

‘But I did n’t git it in a lump. Why, man, I’ve been savin’ dat money fu mo’n fo’ yeahs.’

‘More than four years? Why did n’t you put it in the bank as you got it?’

‘Why, mos’ly it was too small, an’ so I des’ kep’ it in a ol’ sock. I tol’ Fannie dat some day ef de bank did n’t bus’ wid all deres’ I had, I’d put it in too. She was allus sayin’ it was too much to have layin’ roun’ de house. But I des’ tol’ huh dat no robber was n’t goin’ to bothah de po’ niggah down in de ye’d wid de rich white man up at de house. But finally I listened to huh an’ spossed it yistiddy.’

‘You’re liar! You’re a liar, you black thief! Oakley broke in impetuously. ‘You have learned your lesson well, but you can’t cheat me. I know where that money came from.’
Fannie was summoned, and when the matter was explained to her, first gave evidences of giving way to grief, but when the detective began to question her, calmed herself and answered directly just as her husband had.

‘Well posted,’ sneered Oakley. ‘Arrest that man’ (Ch-IV, pp. 15-16).

Berry had begun to look more hopeful during Fannie’s recital, but now the ashen look came back into his face. At the word ‘arrest’ his wife collapsed utterly, and sobbed on her husband’s shoulder.

Finally Berry was arrested.

The arrest of Berry Flamilton on the charge preferred by his employer was the cause of unusual commotion in the town. Both the accuser and the accused were well known to the citizens, white and black, -- Maurice Oakley as a solid man of business, and Berry as an honest, sensible negro. The evening papers had a full story of the crime, which closed by saying that the prisoner had amassed a considerable sum of money.

The whole town worried and wondered about these two gentlemen.

In the black part of the town the strong influence of slavery was still operative, and with one accord they turned from one of their own kind upon whom had been set the ban of the white people’s displeasure. If they had sympathy, they dared not show it. Their own interests, the safety of their own positions and firesides, demanded that they stand aloof from the criminal. One man said acidly: "’Mistah Rich Niggah,’ said another. ‘He wanted to dress his wife an’ chillen lak white folks, did he? Well, he foun’ out, he foun’ out. By de time de jedge git thoo wid him he won’t be hol ‘in’ his haid so high’ (Ch-V, p. 1).

The fact of the matter was that Minty Brown was no better than she should have been, and did not deserve to be spoken to. But none of this was taken into account either by the speaker or the hearers. The man was down, it was time to strike. The
whites were not neglecting to review and comment on the case also. Mr. Beachfield Davis elaborated a case against, with an example of his own.

‘I disagree with you entirely, Mr. Talbot,’ broke in Mr. Beachfield Davis, who was a mighty hunter.—‘Make mine the same, Jerry, only add a little syrup.—I disagree with you. It’s simply total depravity, that’s all. All negroes are alike, and there’s no use trying to do anything with them. Look at that man, Dodson, of mine. I had one of the finest young hounds in the State. You know that white pup of mine, Mr. Talbot, that I bought from Hiram Gaskins? Mighty fine breed. Well, I was spendin’ all my time and patience trainin’ that dog in the day time. At night I put him in that negro’s care to feed and bed. Well, do you know, I came home the other night and found that black rascal gone? I went out to see if the dog was properly bedded, and by Jove, the dog was gone too. Then I got suspicious. When a negro and a dog go out together at night, one draws certain conclusions. I thought I had heard bayin’ way out towards the edge of the town. So I stayed outside and watched. In about an hour here came Dodson with a possum hung over his shoulder and my dog trottin’ at his heel. He’d been possum huntin’ with my hound—with the finest hound in the state, sir (Ch-V, p. 3).

Meanwhile, Berry had the following fear, and doubt: ‘“I did n’t tech his money, Fannie, you know I did n’t. I wo’ked fu’ every cent of dat money, an’ I saved it myself. Oh, I’ll nevah be able to git a job ag’in. Me in lock-up—me, aftah all dese yeahs!”’ (Ch-V p. 4).

Beyond this, apparently, his mind could not go. That his detention was anything more than temporary never seemed to enter his mind. That he would be convicted and sentenced was as far from possibility as the skies from the earth. If he
saw visions of a long sojourn in prison, it was only as a nightmare half consciously experienced and with which the struggle must give way before the waking.

Fannie was utterly hopeless. She had laid down whatever pride had been hers and gone to plead with Maurice Oakley for her husband’s freedom, and she had seen his hard, set face. She had gone upon her knees before his wife to cite Berry’s long fidelity.

Of all the family Joe was the only who burned with a fierce indignation. He knew that his father was innocent, and his very helplessness made a fever in his soul. The looks and gibes of his fellow-employees at the barber-shop forced him to leave his work there. Kit, bowed with shame and grief, dared not appear upon the streets, where the girls who had envied her now hooted at her. So the little family was shut in upon itself away from fellowship and sympathy.

Berry was indicted. His trial followed soon, and the town turned out to see it. Some came to laugh and scoff, but these, his enemies, were silenced by the spectacle of his grief. In vain the lawyer whom he had secured showed that the evidence against him proved nothing. In vain he produced proof of the slow accumulation of what the man had. In vain he pleaded the man’s former good name. The judge and the jury saw otherwise. Berry was convicted. He was given ten years at hard labor.

Finally, the Oakley removed the Berries from their neighborhood. Their plight was most tragic at this time.

What particularly irritated Maurice Oakley was that Berry should to the very last keep up his claim of innocence. He reiterated it to the very moment that the train which was bearing him away pulled out of the station. There had seldom been seen such an example of criminal hardihood, and Oakley was hardened thereby to greater severity in dealing with the convict’s wife. He began to urge her more strongly to move, and she, dispirited and humiliated by what had come to her, looked vainly
about for the way to satisfy his demands. With her natural protector gone, she felt more weak and helpless than she had thought it possible to feel. It was hard enough to face the world. But to have to ask something of it was almost more than she could bear.

The Oaklies confiscated 500 dollars of the money from Berry Hamilton. Still Fannie had enough money for pulling over, but not enough confidence. She was forced to find out a rented house. Joe and Kit felt it very bad. Joe liked to stop doing barber work for the whites. He did it for the coloured ones now. He said, ‘Oh, no, suh,’ said the proprietor, ‘I don’t think we got anything fu’ you to do; you’re a white man’s bahbah. We don’t shave nothin’ but niggahs hyeah, an’ we shave ‘em in de light o’ day an’ on de groun’ flo’ (Ch-VI, p. 2).

Joe Hamilton never knew how he got out of that shop. He only knew that he found himself upon the street outside the door, tears of anger and shame in his eyes, and the laughs and taunts of his tormentors still ringing in his ears. Lately he decided to change his Job. He sought a job at Continental Hotel. He received humiliation there too: “I didn’t know,” he said, “I didn’t know that you were Berry Hamilton’s boy. Now, I’ve got nothing against you myself. I don’t hold you responsible for what your father did, but I don’t believe our boys would work with you. I can’t take you on”” (Ch-VI, p. 3).

Benjamin Quarles thinks that the blacks were badly segregated in the past. He adds, “The plight of the city Negro in search of a job was intensified by the deepening color line. The doctrine of white supremacy and black separation permeated the job market as it did other aspects of southern life. Increasingly the Negro found himself driven out of the ‘clean’ and better-paid occupations.”

As the son Joe returned home without a job, the mother Fannie returned home without a house for staying next. Mother said, ‘Oh Kitty! Kitty! you don’t know
what it was like. It nigh killed me. Thaih was plenty of houses an’ owned by people I’ve knowed fu’ yeahs, but not one of ‘em wanted to rent to me. Some of ‘em made excuses ‘bout one thing er t’ other, but de res’ come right straight out an’ said dat we’d give a neighbourhood a bad name ef we moved into it. I ‘ve almost trampled my laigs off. I ‘ve tried every decent place I could think of, but nobody wants us’” (Ch -VI, p. 4).

In the midst of the conversation a knock came at the door. It was a messenger from the ‘House,’ as they still called Oakley’s home, and he wanted them to be out of the cottage by the next afternoon, as the new servants were coming and would want the rooms. The message was so curt, so hard and decisive, that Fannie was startled out of her grief into immediate action.

The family thought of migrating New York. They had heard of New York as a place vague and far away, a city that, like Heaven, to them had existed by faith alone. All the days of their lives they had heard of it, and it seemed to them the centre of all the glory, all the wealth, and all the freedom of the world. It had an alluring sound. Joe wrote a letter to his father in this regard. The family moved in sorrow as if they had no moorings.

To the provincial man coming to New York for the first time, ignorant and unknown, the city presented a notable mingling of the qualities of cheeriness and gloom. If he have any eye at all for the beautiful, he cannot help experiencing a thrill as he crosses the ferry over the river filled with plying craft and catches the first sight of the spires and buildings of New York.

It was the afternoon of a clear October day that the Hamiltons reached New York. Fannie had some misgivings about crossing the ferry, but once on the boat these gave way to speculations as to what they should find on the other side. With the eagerness of youth to take in new impressions, Joe and Kitty were more concerned
with what they saw about them than with what their future would hold, though they might well have stopped to ask some such questions. In all the great city they knew absolutely no one, and no idea which way to go to find a stopping place. The Berries hired a house in 27th Street.

It was a relief to the Hamiltons to find Mrs. Jones so gracious and home-like. So the matter was settled, and they took up their abode with her and sent for their baggage.

With the first pause in the rush that they had experienced since starting away from home, Mrs. Hamilton began to have time for reflection, and their condition seemed to her much better as it was. Of course, it was hard to be away from home and among strangers, but the arrangement had this advantage,—that no one knew them or could taunt them with their past trouble. She was not sure that she was going to like New York. It had a great name and was really a great place, but the very bigness of it frightened her and made her feel alone, for she knew that there could not be so many people together without a deal of wickedness. She did not argue the complement of this, that the amount of good would also be increased, but this was because to her evil was the very present factor in her life.

Joe and Kit were differently affected by what they saw about them. The boy was wild with enthusiasm and with a desire to be a part of all that the metropolis meant. In the evening he saw the young fellows passing by dressed in their spruce clothes, and he wondered with a sort of envy where they could be going. Back home there had been no place much worth going to, except church and one or two people's houses. No such radical emotions, however, troubled Kit's mind. She too stood at the windows and looked down into the street. There was a sort of complacent calm in the manner in which she viewed the girls' hats and dresses. Many of them were really pretty, she told herself, but for the most part they were not better than what she had had down home.
Porter Thomas told Kitty: ‘I tell you, Miss Kitty,’ he burst forth, a few minutes after being introduced, ‘they ain’t no use talkin’, N’ Yawk’ll give you a shakin’ up ‘at you won’t soon forget. It’s the only town on the face of the earth. You kin bet your life they ain’t no flies on N’ Yawk. We git the best shows here, we git the best concerts—say, now, what’s the use o’ my callin’ it all out?—we simply git the best of everything’ (Ch-VII, p. 3).

Thus the Berries settled down in New York. Dunbar’s depiction of their family life, beer-party and singing are heartily drawn.

Fannie Hamilton, tired as she was, sat long into the night with her little family discussing New York,—its advantages and disadvantages, its beauty and its ugliness, its morality and immorality. She had somewhat receded from her first position, that it was better being here in the great strange city than being at home where the very streets shamed them. She had not liked the way that their fellow lodger looked at Kitty. It was bold, to say the least. She was not pleased, either, with their new acquaintance’s familiarity. And yet, he had said no more than some stranger, if there could be such a stranger, would have said down home. There was a difference, however, which she recognized. Thomas was not the provincial who puts every one on a par with himself, nor was he the metropolitan who complacently patronises the whole world. He was trained out of the one and not up to the other. The intermediate only succeeded in being offensive. Mrs. Jones’ assurance as to her guest’s fine qualities did not do all that might have been expected to reassure Mrs. Hamilton in the face of the difficulties of the gentleman’s manner.

The Berrys went to a theatre one day. Thomas and Mrs. Jones, the owner of the house went too. Mrs. Berry, however, did not like Thomas’s behaviour with Kitty. The black members got good seats, which they would never get in their southern native town. Again the displeasure was Thomas’s forcing Kitty to sit beside
him, while all the other sat in scattered places. Joe had his own feeling. The black people’s drama began and the music was enthralling. Mrs. Hamilton was uneasy of the spectacle’s mad behaviour.

Mr. Thomas was the only cool one in the party. He was quietly taking stock of his young companion,--of her innocence and charm. She was a pretty girl, little and dainty, but well developed for her age. Her hair was very black and wavy, and some strain of the South’s chivalric blood, which is so curiously mingled with the African in the veins of most coloured people, had tinged her skin to an olive hue.

‘Are you enjoying yourself?’ he leaned over and whispered to her. His voice was very confidential and his lips near her ear, but she did not notice.

‘Oh, yes,’ she answered, ‘this is grand. How I’d like to be an actress and be up their!’

‘Maybe you will some day.’

‘Oh, no, I’m not smart enough.’

‘We’ll see,’ he said wisely; ‘I know a thing or two’ (Ch-VIII, p. 3).

Between the first and second acts a number of Thomas’s friends strolled up to where he sat and began talking, and again Kitty’s embarrassment took possession of her as they were introduced one by one. They treated her with a half-courteous familiarity that made her blush. Her mother was not pleased with the many acquaintances that her daughter was making, and would have interfered had not Mrs. Jones assured her that the men clustered about their host’s seat were some of the ‘best people in town.’ Joe looked at them hungrily, but the man in front with his sister did not think it necessary to include the brother or the rest of the party in his miscellaneous introductions.

When the performance was over she forced her way to Kitty’s side, where she remained in spite of all Thomas’s palpable efforts to get her away. Finally he
proposed that they all go to supper at one of the coloured cafes. But the Hamiltons went home.

Whatever else his visit to the theatre may have done for Joe, it inspired him with a desire to go to work and earn money of his own, to be independent both of parental help and control, and so be able to spend as he pleased. With this end in view he set out to hunt for work. It was a pleasant contrast to his last similar quest, and he felt it with joy. He was treated everywhere he went with courtesy, even when no situation was forthcoming. Finally he came upon a man who was willing to try him for an afternoon. From the moment the boy rightly considered himself engaged, for he was master of his trade. He began his work with heart elate. Now he had within his grasp the possibility of being all that he wanted to be. Thomas might take him out at any time and not be ashamed of him.

Now Thomas decided to befriend Joe, instead of his mother for the sake of Kitty. He took him to a hotel. As they stood at the bar, the men began strolling up one by one. Each in his turn was introduced to Joe. They were very polite. They treated him with a pale, dignified, high-minded respect that menaced his pocket-book and possessions. The proprietor, Mr. Turner, asked him why he had never been in before. He really seemed much hurt about it, and on being told that Joe had only been in the city for a couple of weeks expressed emphatic surprise, even disbelief, and assured the rest that any one would have taken Mr. Hamilton for an old New Yorker.

They took a drink. There was quite a line of them. Joe asked the bartender what he would have. The men warmed towards him. They took several more drinks with him and he was happy. Sadness put his arm about his shoulder and told him, with tears in his eyes, that he looked like a cousin of his that had died.

The Banner Club was an institution for the lower education of negro youth. It drew its pupils from every class of people and from every part of the country. It was
composed of all sorts and conditions of men, educated and uneducated, dishonest and less so, of the good, the bad, and the-unexposed. Parasites came there to find victims, politicians for votes, reporters for news, and artists of all kinds for colour and inspiration. It was the place of assembly for a number of really bright men, who after days of hard and often unrewarded work came there and drank themselves in each other’s company, and when they were drunk talked of the eternal verities.

It was into this atmosphere that Thomas had introduced the boy Joy, and he sat there now by his side, firing his mind by pointing out the different celebrities who came in and telling highly flavoured stories of their lives or doings. Joe heard things that had never come within the range of his mind before: ‘Aw, there ‘s Skaggsy an’ Maudie—Maudie’s his girl, y’ know, an’ he s’ a reporter on the N’ Yawk Universe. Fine fellow, Skaggsy’ (Ch-IX, p. 4).

Maudie—a portly, voluptuous-looking brunette—left her escort and went directly to the space by the piano. Here she was soon dancing with one of the coloured girls who had come in.

About eleven o’clock, when the people began to drop in from the plays, the master of ceremonies opened proceedings by saying that ‘The free concert would now begin, and he hoped that all present, ladies included, would act like gentlemen, and not forget the waiter. Mr. Meriweather will now favour us with the latest coon song, entitled ‘Come back to yo’ Baby, Honey.’ The dancing of Hattie Sterling fascinated Joe. He befriended her. It was late the next morning when Joe got home. He had a headache and a sense of triumph that not even his illness and his mother’s reproof could subdue.

Mrs. Hamilton began to question very seriously whether she had done the best thing in coming to New York as she saw her son staying away more and more and growing always farther away from her and his sister. Had she known how and where
he spent his evenings, she would have had even greater cause to question the wisdom of their trip. She knew that although he worked he never had any money for the house. Realising this, she herself set out to find something to do.

It was a hard matter, for wherever she went seeking employment, it was always for her and her daughter, for the more she saw of Mrs. Jones, the less she thought it well to leave the girl under her influence. Mrs. Hamilton was not a keen woman, but she had a mother’s intuitions, and she saw a subtle change in her daughter. At first the girl grew wistful and then impatient and rebellious. She complained that Joe was away from them so much enjoying himself, while she had to be housed up like a prisoner. She had receded from her dignified position, and twice of an evening had gone out for a car-ride with Thomas; but as that gentleman never included the mother in his invitation, she decided that her daughter should go no more, and she begged Joe to take his sister out sometimes instead. He demurred at first, for he now numbered among his city acquirements a fine contempt for his woman relatives. Finally, however, he consented, and took Kit once to the theatre and once for a ride. Each time he left her in the care of Thomas as soon as they were out of the house, while he went to find or to wait for his dear Hattie. But his mother did not know all this, and Kit did not tell her. The quick poison of the unreal life about her had already begun to affect her character. She had grown secretive and sly. The innocent longing which in a burst of enthusiasm she had expressed that first night at the theatre was growing into a real ambition with her, and she dropped the simple old songs she knew to practice the detestable coon ditties which the stage demanded. Gradually the old woman sank. She wrote fever letters to her husband. Her children almost forgot him. Nor did he reply their letters.

After Joe’s first night at the Banner Club he had kept his promise to Hattie Sterling and had gone often to meet her. She had taught him much, because it was to her advantage to do so. His greenness had dropped from him like a garment, but no
amount of sophistication could make him deem the woman less perfect. He knew that she was much older than he, but he only took this fact as an additional sign of his prowess in having won her. He was proud of himself when he went behind the scenes at the theatre or waited for her at the stage door and bore her off under the admiring eyes of a crowd of gapers. And Hattie? She liked him in a half-contemptuous, half-amused way. He was a good-looking boy and made money enough, as she expressed it, to show her a good time, so she was willing to overlook his weakness and his callow vanity.

Meanwhile, Joe’s happy mood was broken. One Miss Minty Brown, his old girl friend from the southern town met Hattie. Hattie spoke of this to Joe, as if Minty wanted to deprive her of Joe. All that afternoon, after going to the barber-shop, Joe was driven by a tempest of conflicting emotions. If Minty Brown had not told his story, why not. Would she yet tell, and if she did, what would happen? He tortured himself by questioning if Hattie would cast him off. At the very thought his hand trembled, and the man in the chair asked him if he had not been drinking.

Indeed, Minty met both Joe and Hattie the next day. They spoke of each other’s welfare. Then Minty liked to visit Fannie, again for informality. But she, instead, backbit. She told the landlady Mrs. Jones that Mr. Berry Hamilton was in penitentiary. This shocked Mrs. Jones and the latter asked Mrs. Fannie to vacate her room. She accused Fannie of letting Kitty go with Thomas who has not yet divorced his wife. Of course, Jones herself encouraged Thomas for that. Later Fannie spoke to Joe and Kitty about the storm. Joe preferred to go alone. Kitty remained silent. The two did not understand their mother.

What Joe Hamilton lacked more than anything else in the world was some one to kick him. Many a man who might have lived decently and become a fairly
respectable citizen has gone to the dogs for the want of some one to administer a
good resounding kick at the right time. It is corrective and clarifying.

Joe needed especially its clarifying property, for though he knew himself a
cur, he went away from his mother's house feeling himself somehow aggrieved, and
the feeling grew upon him the more he thought of it. His mother had ruined his
chance in life, and he could never hold up his head again. Yes, he had heard that
several of the fellows at the club had shady reputations, but surely to be the son of a
thief or a supposed thief was not like being the criminal himself. Joe's mind was
filled with bitter thoughts. How long had he been away from home? he asked
himself. Nearly a year. Nearly a year passed in New York, and he had come to be
what he so much desired,—a part of its fast life,—and now in a moment an old
woman's stubbornness had destroyed all that he had built.

What would Thomas say when he heard it? What would the other fellows
think? And Hattie? It was plain that she would never notice him again. He had no
doubt but that the malice of Minty Brown would prompt her to eek out all of his
friends and make the story known.

Joe then spoke of his heart's pain to a friend called 'Sadness' (Williams) at the
Banner Club. The latter himself had sadness (hence the epithet) explained Joe
certain cases as follows:

'Now look around a bit. See that little girl over there? That's Viola. Two years
ago she wrenched up an iron stool from the floor of a lunch-room, and killed
another woman with it. She's nineteen,—just about your age, by the way. Well,
she had friends with a certain amount of pull. She got out of it, and no one
thinks the worse of Viola. You see, Hamilton, in this life we are all suffering
from fever, and no one edges away from the other because he finds him a little
warm. It's dangerous when you 're not used to it; but once you go through the
parching process, you became inoculated against further contagion. Now,
there's Barney over there, as decent a fellow as I know; but he has been indicted twice for pocket-picking. A half-dozen fellows whom you meet here every night have killed their man. Others have done worse things for which you respect them less. Poor Wallace, who is just coming in, and who looks like a jaunty ragpicker, came here about six months ago with about two thousand dollars, the proceeds from the sale of a house his father had left him. He'll sleep in one of the club chairs to-night, and not from choice. He spent his two thousand learning. But, after all, it was a good investment. It was like buying an annuity. He begins to know already how to live on others as they have lived on him. The plucked bird's beak is sharpened for other's feathers. From now on Wallace will live, eat, drink, and sleep at the expense of others, and will forget to mourn his lost money. He will go on this way until, broken and useless, the poor-house or the potter's field gets him. Oh, it's a fine, rich life, my lad. I know you'll like it. I said you would the first time I saw you. It has plenty of stir in it, and a man never gets lonesome. Only the rich are lonesome. It's only the independent who depend upon others' (Ch-XI, p. 2-3).

Then Joe met Hattie with sadness and she consoled him thus: "Now look here, Joe, if you've been drinking, I'll forgive you; if you ain't, you go on and leave me. Say, what do you take me for? Do you think I'd throw down a friend because somebody else talked about him? well, you don't know Hat Sterling. When Minty told me that story, she was back in my dressing-room, and I sent her out o' there a-flying, and with a tongue-lashing that she won't forget for a month o' Sundays' (Ch-XI, p. 4).

Matters were less easy for Joe's mother and sister than they were for him. A week or more after this, Kitty found him and told him that Minty's story had reached their employers and that they were out of work.
‘You see, Joe,’ she said sadly, ‘we’ve took a flat since we moved from Mis’ Jones’, and we had to furnish it. We’ve got one lodger, a race-horse man, an’ he’s mighty nice to ma an’ me, but that ain’t enough. Now we ‘ve got to do something.’ Joe was so smitten with sorrow that he gave a dollar and promised to speak about the matter to a friend of his. He did speak about it to Hattie. ‘You’ve told me once or twice that your sister could sing. Bring her down here to me, and if she can do anything, I’ll get her a place on the stage,’ was Hattie’s answer. When Kitty heard it she was radiant, but her mother only shook her head and said, ‘De las’ hope de las’ hope’ (Ch-XI, p.6).

The next chapter is aptly called ‘All the World’s Stage.’ Kitty proved herself Joe’s sister by falling desperately in love with Hattie Sterling the first time they met. The actress was very gracious to her, and called her ‘child’ in a pretty, patronizing way. She said, ‘It’s shame that Joe has n’t brought you around before. We’ve been good friends for quite some time.’ Kitty replied: ‘He told me you an’ him was right good friends’ (Ch-XII, p.1).

Miss Hattie talked as if she were a manager and had only to snap her fingers to be obeyed. When Joe came back with the beer, Kitty drank a glass. She did not like it, but she would not offend her hostess. After this she sang, and Miss Sterling applauded her generously, although the young girl’s nervousness kept her from doing her best. The encouragement helped her, and she did better as she became more at home. ‘Now, what I was going to say,’ Hattie resumed after several contemplative puffs, ‘is that you ‘ll have to begin in the chorus any way and work your way up. It would n’t take long for you, with your looks and voice, to put one of the ‘up and ups’ out o’ the business. Only hope it won’t be me. I’ve had people I ‘ve helped try to do it often enough’” (Ch-XII, p.2).
Kitty returned home happy of Hattie’s liberality. But Fannie asked Kitty not to yield to Hattie’s wooing, Kitty however, stuck to her gun. The poor woman Fannie said that her husband might remain long in penitentiary, so that he may become too old, or may not get released. In that case, she liked to marry Mister Gibson for old age-caring. This sounded rather painful. The mother – daughter’s dialogue is yet most interesting:

‘Kit,’ her mother went on, ‘dey’s somep’n I ain’t nevah tol’ you dat I ‘m goin’ to tell you now. Mistah Gibson ust to come to Mis’ Jones’s lots to see me befo’ we moved hyeah, an’ he’s been talkin’ bout a good many things to me,’ she hesitated. ‘He say dat I ain’t noways ma’ied to my po’ husban’, dat a pen’tentiary sentence is de same as a divo’ce, an’ if Be’y should live to git out, we’d have to ma’y ag’in. I would n’t min’ dat, Kit, but he say dat at Be’y age dey ain’t much chanst of his livin’ to git out, an’ hyeah I’ll live all dis time alone, an’ den have no one to tek keer o’ me w’en I git ol’. He wants me to ma’y him, Kit. Kit, I love yo’ fathah; he’s my only one. But Joe, he’s gone, an’ ef yo go, befo’ Gawd I’ll tell Tawm Gibson yes.’

The mother looked up to see just what effect her plea would have on her daughter. She hoped that what she said would have the desired result. But the girl turned around from fixing her neck-ribbon before the glass, her face radiant. ‘Why, it’ll be splendid. He’s such a nice man, an’ racehorse men ‘most always have money. Why don’t you marry him, ma? Then I’d feel that you was safe an’ settled, an’ that you would n’t be lonesome when the show was out of town’” (Ch-XII, p.4).

On the next morning Kitty was up early and practicing hard for her interview with the managing star of ‘Martin’s Blackbirds.’ When she arrived at the theatre, Hattie met her with frank friendliness. ‘I ‘m glad you came early, Kitty,’ she remarked, ‘for maybe you can get a chance to talk with Martin before he begins rehearsal and gets all worked up. He’ll be a little less like a bear then. But even if you
don’t see him before then, wait, and don’t get scared if he tries to bluff you. His bark is a good deal worse than his bite’ (Ch-XII, p. 4).

There Martin came. He was the task-master. Dunbar describes him vividly. He disappeared behind a screen, whence he emerged arrayed, or only half arrayed, in a thick absorbing shirt and a thin pair of woolen trousers. Then the work began. The man was indefatigable. He was like the spirit of energy. He was in every place about the stage at once, leading the chorus, showing them steps, twisting some awkward girl into shape, shouting, gesticulating, abusing the pianist.

Kitty contemplated the scene with a mind equally divided between fear and anger. What should she do if he should so speak to her? Like the others, no doubt, smile sheepishly and obey him. But she did not like to believe it. She felt that the independence which she had known from babyhood would assert itself, and that she would talk back to him, even as Hattie did. She felt scared and discouraged, but every now and then her friend smiled encouragingly upon her across the ranks of moving singers. Finally, however, her thoughts were broken in upon by hearing Mr. Martin cry:

‘Oh, quit, quit, and go rest yourselves, you ancient pieces of hickory, and let me forget you for a minute before I go crazy. Where’s that new girl now?’

Kitty rose and went toward him, trembling so that she could hardly walk.

‘What can you do?’

‘I can sing,’ very faintly.

‘Well, if that’s the voice you’re going to sing in, there won’t be many that’ll know whether it’s good or bad. Well, let’s hear something. Do you know any of these?’
And he ran over the titles of several songs. She knew some of them, and he selected one. "Try this. Here, Tom, play it for her" (Ch-XII, p. 5).

It was an ordeal for the girl to go through. She had never sung before at anything more formidable than a church concert, where only her immediate acquaintances and townspeople were present. Now to sing before all these strange people, themselves singers, made her feel faint and awkward. But the courage came to her, and she started the song. At the first her voice wavered and threatened to fail her. She choked back her fright and forced the music from her lips. When she was done, she was startled to hear Martin burst into a raucous laugh. She had failed, and instead of telling her, he was bringing her to shame before the whole company. The tears came into her eyes, and she was about giving way when she caught a reassuring nod and smile from Hattie and seized on this as a last hope: "'Haw, haw, haw!' laughed Martin, 'haw, haw, haw! The little one was scared, see? She was scared, d' you understand? But did you see the grit she went at it with? Just took the bit in her teeth and got away. Haw, haw, haw! Now, that's what I like. If all you girls had that spirit, we could do something in two weeks. Try another one, girl" (Ch-XII, p. 6).

On the first night of the show little Kitty was pointed out as a girl who would not be in the chorus long. The mother, who was soon to be Mrs. Gibson, sat in the balcony, a grieved, pained look on her face. Joe was in a front row with some of the rest of the gang. He took many drinks between the acts, because he was proud. Mr. Thomas was there. He also was proud.

A year after the arrest of Berry Hamilton, and at a time when New York had shown to the eyes of his family so many strange new sights, there were few changes to be noted in the condition of affairs at the Oakley place. Maurice Oakley was perhaps a shade more distrustful of his servants, and consequently more testy with them. Mrs. Oakley was the same acquiescent woman, with unbounded faith in her
husband's wisdom and judgment. With complacent minds both went their ways, drank their wine, and said their prayers, and wished that brother Frank's five years were past. They had letters from him now and then, never very cheerful in tone, but always breathing the deepest love and gratitude to them. His brother found deep cause for congratulation in the tone of their letters. "'Frank is getting down to work,' he would cry exultantly. 'He is past the first buoyant enthusiasm of youth. Ah, Leslie, when a man begins to be serious, then he begins to be something.' And her only answer would be, 'I wonder, Maurice, if Claire Lessing will wait for him?'" (Ch-XIII, p.1).

Between Maurice and his brother no word of the guilty servant ever passed. They each avoided it as an unpleasant subject. Frank had never asked and his brother had never spoken about it. Soon the servant brought him a letter, that was from Paris, Maurice was uneasy, because his wife was not there to read it together. He opened the letter, and soon, probably shocked by its content, lost his heart. Leslie, his wife went through the letter:

'DEAR BROTHER,' it ran, 'I know you will grieve at receiving this, and I wish that I might bear your grief for you, but I cannot, though I have as heavy a burden as this can bring to you. Mine would have been lighter to-day, perhaps, had you been more straightforward with me. I am not blaming you, however, for I know that my hypocrisy made you believe me possessed of a really soft heart, and you thought to spare me. Until yesterday, when in a letter from Esterton he casually mentioned the matter, I did not know that Berry was in prison, else this letter would have been written sooner. I have been wanting to write it for so long, and yet have been too great a coward to do so.

'I know that you will be disappointed in me, and just what that disappointment will cost you I know; but you must hear the truth. I shall never see your face again, or I should not dare to tell it even now. You will
remember that I begged you to be easy on your servant. You thought it was only my kindness of heart. It was not; I had a deeper reason. I knew where the money had gone and dared not tell. Berry is as innocent as yourself—and I—well, it is a story, and let me tell it to you.

‘You have had so much confidence in me, and I hate to tell you that it was all misplaced. I have no doubt that I should not be doing it now but that I have drunken absinthe enough to give me the emotional point of view, which I shall regret to-morrow. I do not mean that I am drunk. I can think clearly and write clearly, but my emotions are extremely active.

‘Do you remember Claire’s saying at the table that night of the farewell dinner that some dark-eyed mademoiselle was waiting for me? She did not know how truly she spoke, though I fancy she saw how I flushed when she said it: for I was already in love—madly so.’

‘I need not describe her. I need say nothing about her, for I know that nothing I say can ever persuade you to forgive her for taking me from you. This has gone on since I first came here, and I dared not tell you, for I saw whither your eyes had turned. I loved this girl, and she both inspired and hindered my work. Perhaps I would have been successful had I not met her, perhaps not.

‘I love her too well to marry her and make of our devotion a stale, prosy thing of duty and compulsion. When a man does not marry a woman, he must keep her better than he would a wife. It costs. All that you gave me went to make her happy.

‘Then, when I was about leaving you, the catastrophe came. I wanted much to carry back to her. I gambled to make more. I would surprise her. Luck was against me. Night after night I lost. Then, just before the dinner, I woke from my frenzy to find all that I had was gone. I would have asked you for
more, and you would have given it; but that strange, ridiculous something which we misname Southern honour, the honour which strains at a gnat and swallows a camel, withheld me, and I preferred to do worse. So I lied to you. The money from my cabinet was not stolen save by myself. I am a liar and a thief, but your eyes shall never tell me so.

'Tell the truth and have Berry released. I can stand it. Write me but one letter to tell me of this. Do not plead with me, do not forgive me, do not seek to find me, for from this time I shall be as one who has perished from the earth; I shall be no more.

'Your brother, FRANK' (Ch-XIII, pp. 4-5).

By the time the servants came they found Mrs. Oakley as white as her lord. But with firm hands and compressed lips she ministered to his needs pending the doctor's arrival. She bathed his face and temples, chafed his hands, forced the brandy between his lips. Finally he stirred and his hands gripped. 'The letter!' he gasped. 'Yes, dear, I have it; I have it,' she said. 'Give it to me,' he cried. She handed it to him. He seized it and thrust it into his breast. 'Did--did--you read it?' 'Yes, I did not know----' 'Oh, my God, I did not intend that you should see it. I wanted the secret for my own. I wanted to carry it to my grave with me. Oh, Frank, Frank, Frank!' (Ch-XIII, p.5).

Soon Maurice Oakley recovered. The doctor helped him. The couple kept the letter as a guarded secret. So they wrote a lie to Frank, and buried the secret in their breasts, and Oakley wore its visible form upon his heart.

Five years is but a short time in the life of a man, and yet many things may happen therein. For instance, the whole way of a family's life may be changed. Good natures may be made into bad ones and out of a soul of faith grow a spirit of unbelief. The independence of respectability may harden into the insolence of defiance, and
the sensitive cheek of modesty into the brazen face shamelessness. It may be true that the habits of years are hard to change, but this is not true of the first sixteen or seventeen years of a young person’s life, else Kitty and Joe could not so easily have become what they were. It had taken barely five years to accomplish an entire metamorphosis of their characters. In Joe’s case even a shorter time was needed. He was so ready to go down that it needed but a gentle push to start him, and once started, there was nothing within him to hold him back from the depths. For his will was as flabby as his conscience, and his pride, which stands to some men for conscience, had no definite aim or direction.

Hattie had given him both his greatest impulse for evil and for good. She had at first given him his gentle push, but when she saw that his collapse would lose her a faithful and useful slave she had sought to check his course. Her threat of the severance of their relations had held him up for a little time, and she began to believe that he was safe again. He went back to the work he had neglected, drank moderately, and acted in most things as a sound, sensible being.

This man Joe spent more than four years thus. The readers notice that Mr. Skaggs, the reporter came to know about Berry’s innocence.

Gradually Joe’s social condition worsened. All people, including Hattie and Sadness regretted about him. They felt that New York had evil influence upon the untrained negroes. They wanted to preach to these people that good agriculture is better than bad art,—that it was better and nobler for them to sing to God across the Southern fields than to dance for rowdies in the Northern halls. They wanted to dare to say that the South had its faults--no one condoned them—and its disadvantages, but that even what they suffered from these was better than what awaited them in the great alleys of New York. Not to speak of once he was put in prison. The mother had the following feeling.
Joe was not her wayward, erring, criminal son. She only remembered that he was her son, and wept for him as such. She forgot his curses, while her memory went back to the sweetness of his baby prattle and the soft words of his tenderer youth. Until the last she clung to him holding him guiltless, and to her thought they took to prison, not Joe, a convicted criminal, but Joey, Joey, her boy, her firstborn,—a martyr. Miss Kitty was less deeply impressed. The arrest and subsequent conviction of her brother was quite a blow.

From the time she went on the stage she had begun to live her own life, a life in which the chief aim was the possession of good clothes and the ability to attract the attention which she had learned to crave. The greatest sign of interest she showed in her brother’s affair was, at first, to offer her mother money to secure a lawyer. But when Joe confessed all, she consoled herself with the reflection that perhaps it was for the best, and kept her money in her pocket with a sense of satisfaction.

Berry Hamilton in his Southern prison knew nothing of all this, for no letters had passed between him and his family for more than two years. The very cruelty of destiny defeated itself in this and was kind.

There was, perhaps, more depth to Mr. Skaggs than most people gave him credit for having. However it may be, when he got an idea into his head, whether it were insane or otherwise, he had a decidedly tenacious way of holding to it. Sadness had been disposed to laugh at him when he announced that Joe’s drunken story of his father’s troubles had given him an idea. But it was, nevertheless, true, and that idea had stayed with him clear through the exciting events that followed on that fatal night. He thought and dreamed of it until he had made a working theory. Then one day, with a boldness that he seldom assumed when in the sacred presence, he walked into the office and laid his plans before the editor. They talked together for some time, and the editor seemed hard to convince:
‘It would be a big thing for the paper,’ he said, ‘if it only panned out; but it is such a rattle-brained, harum-scarum thing. No one under the sun would have thought of it but you, Skaggs.’

‘Oh, it’s bound to pan out. I see the thing as clear as day. There’s no getting around it.’

‘Yes, it looks plausible, but so does all fiction. You’re taking a chance. You’re losing time. If it fails——’

‘But if it succeeds?’

‘Well, go and bring back a story. If you don’t, look out. It’s against my better judgment anyway. Remember I told you that’ (Ch-XVI, p.1).

Skaggs shot out of the office, and within an hour and a half had boarded a fast train for the South.

When Skaggs reached the town which had been the home of the Hamiltons, he went at once to the Continental Hotel. He had as yet formulated no plan of immediate action and with a fool’s or a genius’ belief in his destiny he sat down to await the turn of events. His first move would be to get acquainted with some of his neighbours. Skaggs made an enquiry of old Berry’s case with Mr. Talbot, Beachfield and Col. Saunders at Continental Hotel. The last one Col. Saunders spoke thus:

‘Now, in the first people, Mr. Skaggs,’ he said when the tale was done, I am lawyer enough to see for myself how weak the evidence was upon which the negro was convicted, and later events have done much to confirm me in the opinion that he was innocent.’

‘Later events?’

‘Yes.’ The Colonel leaned across the table and his voice fell to whisper. ‘Four years ago a great change took place in Maurice Oakley. It happened in the space of a day, and no one knows the cause of it. From a social, companionable man, he became a recluse, shunning visitors and dreading
society. From an open-hearted, unsuspicious neighbor, he became secretive and distrustful of his own friends. From an active business man, he has become a retired brooder. He sees no one if he can help it. He writes no letters and receives none, not even from his brother, it is said. And all of this came about in the space of twenty-four hours' (Ch-XVI p. 3).

Skaggs enquired him further. Col. Saunders added that Mr. Maurice remained like that because he had got back his 500 dollars. Skaggs decided to meet Maurice the next day. Unfortunately Leslie Oakley did not allow him to meet him. When he said that he was from Paris, he was allowed. Then Skaggs secretly met Oakley, spoke of a lie that he came from Paris. He stole Oakley’s letter and dashed out. He said to Mrs. Oakley that they had harmed some family badly.

Skaggs moved towards the door, but Leslie sprang in front of him with the fierceness of a tigress protecting her young. She attacked him with teeth and nails. She was pallid with fury, and it was all he could do to protect himself and yet not injury her. Finally, when her anger had taken her strength, he succeeded in getting out. He flew down the hall-way and out of the front door, the woman’s screams following him. He did not pause to read the precious letter until he was safe in his room at the Continental Hotel. Then he sprang to his feet, crying, ‘Thank God! thank God! I was right, and the Universe shall have a sensation. The brother is the thief, and Berry is an innocent man. Now, who is it that has come on a wild-goose chase? Who is it that ought to handle his idea carefully? Heigho, Saunders my man, the drinks’ll be on you, and old Skaggsy will have done some good in the world’ (Ch-XVI, p. 3).

He had his story. It was vivid, interesting, dramatic. It meant the favor of his editor, a big thing for the Universe, and a fatter lining for his own pocket. He sat
down to put his discovery on paper before he attempted anything else, although the
impulse to celebrate was very strong within him.

Skaggs told his story well, with an eye to every one of its salient points. He
sent an alleged picture of Berry as he had appeared at the time of his arrest. He sent a
picture of the Oakley home and of the cottage where the servant and his family had
been so happy. There was a strong pen-picture of the man, Oakley, grown haggard
and morose from carrying his guilty secret, of his confusion when confronted with
the supposed knowledge of it. The old Southern city was described, and the opinions
of its residents in regard to the case given. It was there-clear, interesting, and strong.
One could see it all as if every phase of it were being enacted before one’s eyes.
Skaggs surpassed himself.

The Universe had always claimed to be the friend of all poor and oppressed
humanity, and every once in a while it did something to substantiate its claim,
whereupon it stood off and said to the public, ‘Look you what we have done, and
behold how great we are, of the people!’

Then Skaggs received a telegram that made him leap for joy. He was to do it.
He was to go to the capital of the state. He was to beard the Governor in his den, and
he, with the force of a great paper behind him, was to demand for the people the
release of an innocent man. Then there would be another write-up and much glory
for him. In an hour after he had received his telegram he was on his way to the
Southern capital.

Meanwhile in the house of Maurice Oakley there were sad times. From the
moment that the master of the house had fallen to the floor in impotent fear and
madness there had been no peace within his doors. At first his wife had tried to
control him alone, and had humored the wild babblings with which he woke from his
swoon. But these changed to shrieks and cries and curses, and she was forced to
throw open the doors so long closed and call in help. The neighbors and her old friend went to her assistance, and what the reporter’s story had not done, the ravings of the man accomplished; for, with a show of matchless cunning, he continually clutched at his breast, laughed, and babbled his secret openly. Even then they would have smothered it in silence, for the honor of one of their best families; but too many ears had heard, and then came the yellow journal bearing all the news in emblazoned headlines.

Colonel Saunders was distinctly hurt to think that his confidence had been imposed on, and that he had been instrumental in bringing shame upon a Southern name.

The trial was reviewed; the evidence again brought up and examined. The dignity of the state was threatened. At this time the state did the one thing necessary to save its tottering reputation. It would not surrender, but it capitulated, and Berry was pardoned.

Berry heard the news with surprise and a half-bitter joy. He had long ago lost hope that justice would ever be done to him. He marveled at the word that was brought to him now, and he could not understand the strange cordiality of the young white man who met him at the warden’s office. Five years of prison life had made a different man of him:

‘This is a very happy occasion, Mr. Hamilton,’ said Skaggs, shaking his hand heartily.

Berry did not answer. What had this slim, glib young man to do with him? What had any white man to do with him after what he had suffered at their hands?

‘You know you are to go to New York with me?’

‘To New Yawk? What fu?’

Skaggs did not tell him that, now that the Universe had done its work. He said only, ‘You want to see your wife, of course’ (Ch-XVII, p. 3).
Berry had forgotten Fannie, and for the first time his heart thrilled within him at the thought of seeing her again.

‘I ain’t heahed f’om my people fu’ long time. I did n’t know what had become of’em. How’s Kit an’ Joe?’

‘They’re all right,’ was the reply. Skaggs could not tell him, in his first hour of freedom. Let him have time to drink the sweetness of that all in. There would be time afterwards to taste all of the bitterness.

Once in New York, Berry found that people came to see him, some fools, some philanthropists, and a great many reporters. He had to be photographed—all this before he could seek those whom he longed to see. They printed his picture as he was before he went to prison and as he was now, a sort of before—and-after-taking comment, and in the morning that it all appeared, when the Universe spread itself to tell the public what it had done and how it had done it, they gave him his wife’s address.

It would be better, they thought, for her to tell him herself all that happened. No one of them was brave enough to stand to look in his eyes when he asked for his son and daughter, and they shifted their responsibility by pretending to themselves that they were doing it for his own good: that blow would fall more gently upon coming from her who had been his wife. Berry took the address and inquired his way timidly, but with a swelling heart, to the door of the flat where Fannie lived.

Had not Berry’s years of prison life made him forget what little he knew of reading, he might have read the name Gibson on the door-plate where they told him to ring for his wife. But he knew nothing of what awaited him as he confidently pulled the bell. Fannie herself came to the door. The news the papers held had not escaped her, but she had suffered in silence, hoping that Berry might be spared the
pain of finding her. Now he stood before her, and she knew him at a glance, in spite of his haggard countenance:

‘Fannie,’ he said, holding out his arms to her, and all of the pain and pathos of long yearning was in his voice, ‘don’t you know me?’

She shrank away from him, back in the hall-way.

‘Yes, yes, Be’y, I knows you. Come in’ (Ch-XVIII, p. 1).

She led him through the passage-way and into her room, he following with a sudden sinking at his heart. This was not the reception he had expected from Fannie.

When they were within the room he turned and held out his arms to her again, but she did not notice them. ‘Why, is you ‘shamed o’ me?’ he asked brokenly.

‘Shamed? No! Oh, Be’y,’ and she sank into a chair and began rocking to and fro in her helpless grief.

‘What’s de mattah, Fannie? Ain’t you glad to see me?’

‘Yes, yes, but you don’t know nothin’, do you? Dey lef me to tell you?’

‘Lef’ you to tell me? What’s de mattah? Is Joe or Kit daid? Tell me.’

‘No, not daid. Kit dances on de stage fu’ a livin’, an’, Be’y, she ain’t de gal she ust to be. Joe—Joe—Joe—he’s in pen’entiary fu’ killin’ a ooman.’

Berry started forward with a cry, ‘My Gawd! my little gal! my boy!’

‘Dat ain’t all,’ she went on dully, as if reciting a rote lesson; ‘I ain’t yo’ wife no mo’. I’s ma’ied ag’in. Oh Be’y, don’t look at me lak dat. I could n’t he’p it. Kit an’ Joe lef’ me, an’ dey said de pen’entiary divo’ced you an’ me, an’ dat you’d nevah come out nohow. Don’t look at me alk dat, Be’y.’

‘You ain’t my wife no mo’? Hit ‘s a lie, a damn lie! You is my wife. I’s a innocent man. No pen’entiay kin tek you erway f’om me. Hit’s enough what dey’ve done to my chillen.’ He rushed forward and seized her by the arm. ‘Dey sha’n’t do no mo’, by Gawd! dey sha’n’t, I say!’ His voice had risen to a fierce roar, like that of a hurt beast, and he shook her by the arm as he spoke.
‘Oh, don’t, Be’y, don’t, you hu’t me. I could n’t he’p it.’

He glared at her for a moment, and then the real force of the situation came full upon him, and he bowed his head in his hands and wept like child. The great sobs came up and stuck in his throat (Ch- XVIII, pp. 1-2).

In the dialogue that follows Fannie explained Berry that she married one Mr. Gibson, and she was not his wife any more. He said that he would compromise with Gibson. She said no and asked him to go. He turned to the door, murmuring, ‘My wife gone, Kit a nobody, an’ Joe, little Joe, a murderer, an’ then I--I--use to pray to Gawd an’ call him ‘Ouah Fathah.’ He laughed hoarsely. It sounded like nothing Fannie had ever heard before.

He staggered down the steps, blinded by his emotions, and set his face towards the little lodging that he had taken temporarily. There seemed nothing left in life for him to do. Yet he knew that he must work to live, although the effort seemed hardly worthwhile. He remembered now that the *Universe* had offered him the under janitorship in its building. He would go and take it, and some day, perhaps—He was not quite sure what the ‘perhaps’ meant. But as his mind grew clearer he came to know, for a sullen, fierce anger was smouldering in his heart against the man who through lies had stolen his wife from him. It was anger that came slowly, but gained in fierceness as it grew.

Yes, that was it, he would kill Gibson. It was no worse than his present state. Then it would be father and son murderers. They would hang him or send him back to prison. Neither would be hard now. He laughed to himself.

He went to work for the *Universe*, but night after night, armed, he patrolled the sidewalk in front of Fannie’s house. He did not know Gibson, but he wanted to see them together. Then he would strike. His vigils kept him from his bed, but he went to the next morning’s work with no weariness. The hope of revenge sustained
him, and he took a savage joy in the thought that he should be the dispenser of justice to at least one of those who had wounded him.

Finally he grew impatient and determined to wait no longer, but to seek his enemy in his own house. The end of the novel turns on as if to set every wrong right. Unfortunately Mr. Gibson was killed in a race.

When Gibson was laid away, there were no formalities between Berry and his wife; they simply went back to each other. New York held nothing for them now but sad memories. It was on the road, and the father could not bear to see his son; so they turned their faces southward, back to the only place they could call home. Surely the people could not be cruel to them now, and even if they were, they felt that after what they had endured no wound had power to give them pain.

Leslie Oakley heard of their coming, and with her own hands re-opened and refurnished the little cottage in the yard for them. There the white-haired woman begged them to spend the rest of their days and be in peace and comfort. It was the only amend she could make. As much to satisfy her as to settle themselves, they took the cottage, and many a night thereafter they sat together with clasped hands listening to the shrieks of the madman across the yard.

It was not a happy life, but it was all that was left to them, and they took it up without complaint, for they knew they were powerless against some Will infinitely stronger than their own.
References:


2. Ch-I, p.2 All the textual references are from Paul Laurence Dunbar’s *The Sport of the Gods*, Wiki source.