

## **FOLK STUFF, FLORIDA**

**Jules A. Frost  
Tampa, Florida  
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### **JOSEPHINE ANDERSON**

#### **HANTS**

"I kaint tell nothin bout slavery times cept what I heard folks talk about. I was too young to remember much but I recleck seein my granma milk de cows an do de washin. Granpa was old, an dey let him do light work, mosly fish an hunt.

"I doan member nothin bout my daddy. He died when I was a baby. My stepfather was Stephen Anderson, an my mammy's name was Dorcas. He come fum Vajinny, but my mammy was borned an raised in Wilmington. My name was Josephine Anderson fore I married Willie Jones. I had two half-brothers youngern me, John Henry an Ed, an a half-sister, Elsie. De boys had to mind de calves an sheeps, an Elsie nursed de missus' baby. I done de cookin, mosly, an helped my mammy spin.

"I was ony five year old when dey brung me to Sanderson, in Baker County, Florida. My stepfather went to work for a turpentine man, makin barrels, an he work at dat job till he drop dead in de camp. I reckon he musta had heart disease.

"I doan recleck ever seein my mammy wear shoes. Even in de winter she go barefoot, an I reckon cold didn't hurt her feet no moran her hands an face. We all wore dresses made o' homespun. De thread was spun an de cloth wove right in our own home. My mamy an granmamy an me done it in spare time.

"My weddin dress was blue—blue for true. I thought it was de prettiest dress I ever see. We was married in de court-house, an dat be a mighty happy day for me. Mos folks dem days got married by layin a broom on de floor an jumpin over it. Dat seals de marriage, an at de same time brings em good luck.

"Ya see brooms keeps hants away. When mean folks dies, de old debbil sometimes doan want em down dere in da bad place, so he makes witches out of em, an sends em back. One thing bout witches, dey gotta count everthing fore dey can git acrosst it.

You put a broom acrosst your door at night an old witches gotta count ever straw in dat broom fore she can come in.

"Some folks can jes nachly see hants bettern others. Teeny, my gal can. I reckon das cause she been borned wid a veil—you know, a caul, sumpum what be over some babies' faces when dey is borned. Folks borned wid a caul can see sperrits, an tell whas gonna happen fore it comes true.

"Use to worry Teeny right smart, seein sperrits day an night. My husban say he gonna cure her, so he taken a grain o' corn an put it in a bottle in Teeny's bedroom over night. Den he planted it in de yard, an driv plenty sticks roun da place. When it was growin good, he put leaf-mold roun de stalk, an watch it ever day, an tell us don't nobody touch de stalk. It raise three big ears o' corn, an when dey was good roastin size he pick em off an cook em an tell Teeny eat ever grain offn all three cobs. He watch her while she done it, an she ain never been worried wid hants no more. She sees em jes the same, but dey doan bother her none.

"Fust time I ever knowed a hant to come into our quarters was when I was jes big nough to go out to parties. De game what we use to play was spin de plate. Ever time I think on dat game it gives me de shivers. One time there was a strange young man come to a party where I was. Said he name Richard Green, an he been takin keer o' horses for a rich man what was gonna buy a plantation in dat county. He look kinda slick an dressed-up—diffunt from de rest. All de gals begin to cast sheep's eyes at him, an hope he gonna choose dem when day start playin games.

"Pretty soon dey begin to play spin de plate an it come my turn fust thing. I spin it an call out 'Mister Green!' He jumps to de middle o' de ring to grab de plate an 'Bang'—bout four guns go off all at oncet, an Mister Green fall to de floor plum dead shot through de head.

"Fore we knowed who done it, de sheriff an some more men jump down from de loft, where dey bean hidin an tell us quit hollerin an doan be scairt. Dis man be a bad deeper—you know, one o' them outlaws what kills folks. He some kinda foreigner, an jes tryin make blieve he a niggah, so's they don't find him.

"Wall we didn't feel like playin no more games, an f'ever after dat you coundn't git no niggahs to pass dat house alone atter dark. Dey say da place was hanted, an if you look through de winder any dark night you could see a man in dere spinnin de plate.

"I sho didn't never look in, cause I done seen more hants aready dan I ever wants to see agin. One night I was goin to my granny's house. It was jes comin dark, an when I got to de crick an start across on de foot-log, dere on de other end o' dat log was a man

wid his haid cut off an layin plum over on his shoulder. He look at me, kinda pitiful, an don't say a word—but I closely never waited to see what he gonna talk about. I pure flew back home. I was so scairt I couldn't tell de folks what done happened till I set down an get my breath.

"Nother time, not so long ago, when I live down in Gary, I be walkin down de railroad track soon in de mornin an fore I knowed it, dere was a white man walkin long side o' me. I jes thought it were somebody, but I wadn't sho, so I turn off at de fust street to git way from dere. De nex mawnin I be boin[TR: goin?] to work at de same time. It were kinda foggy an dark, so I never seen nobody till I mighty nigh run into dis same man, an dere he goes, bout half a step ahead o' me, his two hands restin on his behind.

"I was so close up to him I could see him plain as I see you. He had fingernails dat long, all cleaned an polished. He was tull, an had on a derby hat, an stylish black clothes. When I walk slow he slow down, an when I stop, he stop, never oncet lookin roun. My feets make a noise on de cinders tween de rails, but he doan make a mite o' noise. Dat was de fust thing got me scairt, but I figger I better find out for sho ifen he be a sperrit; so I say, gook an loud: 'Lookee here, Mister, I jez an old colored woman, an I knows my place, an I wisht you wouldn't walk wid me counta what folks might say.'

"He never looked roun no moren if I wan't there, an I cut my eyes roun to see if there is somebody I can holler to for help. When I looked back he was gone; gone, like dat, without makin a sound. Den I knowed he be a hant, an de nex day when I tell somebody bout it dey say he be de genman what got killed at de crossin a spell back, an other folks has seen him jus like I did. Dey say dey can hear babies cryin at de trestle right near dere, an ain't nobody yit ever found em.

"Dat ain de ony hant I ever seen. One day I go out to de smokehouse to git a mess o' taters. It was after sundown, but still purty light. When I gits dere de door be unlocked an a big man standin half inside. 'What you doin stealin our taters!' I hollers at him, an pow! He gone, jes like dat. Did I git back to dat house! We mighty glad to eat grits an cornbread dat night.

"When we livin at Titusville, I see my old mammy comin up de road jus as plain as day. I stan on de porch, fixin to run an meet her, when all of a sudden she be gone. I begin to cry an tell de folks I ain't gonna see my mammy agin. An sho nuff, I never did. She die at Sanderson, back in West Florida, fore I got to see her.

"Does I believe in witches? S-a-a-y, I knows more bout em den to jes 'believe'—I been rid by em. Right here in dis house. You ain never been rid by a witch? Well, you

mighty lucky. Dey come in de night, ginnerly soon after you drop off to sleep. Dey put a bridle on your head, an a bit in your mouth, an a saddle on your back. Den dey take off their skin an hang it up on de wall. Den dey git on you an some nights dey like to ride you to death. You try to holler but you kaint, counta the iron bit in your mouth, an you feel like somebody holdin you down. Den dey ride you back home an into your bed. When you hit de bed you jump an grab de kivers, an de witch be gone, like dat. But you know you been rid mighty hard, cause you all wet wid sweat, an you feel plum tired out.

"Some folks say you jus been dreamin, counta de blood stop circulatin in yaur back. Shucks! Dey ain never been rid by a witch, or dey ain sayin dat.

"Old witch docter, he want ten dollers for a piece of string, what he say some kinda charm words over. Tells me to make a image o' dat old witch outa dough, an tie dat string roun its neck; den when I bake it in de oven, it swell up an de magic string shet off her breath. I didn't have no ten dollar, so he say ifen I git up five dollar he make me a hand—you know, what colloed folks cals a jack. Dat be a charm what will keep de witches away. I knows how to make em, but day doan do no good thout de magic words, an I doan know dem. You take a little pinch o' dried snake skin an some graveyard dirt, an some red pepper an a lock o' your hair wrapped roun some black rooster feathers. Den you spit whiskey on em an wrap em in red flannel an sew if into a ball bout dat big. Den you hang it under your right armpit, an ever week you give it a drink o' whiskey, to keep it strong an powful.

"Dat keep de witches fum ridin you; but nary one o' dese charms work wid dis old witch. I got a purty good idee who she is, an she got a charm powfuller dan both of dem. But she kaint git acrosst flaxseed, not till she count ever seed. You doan believe dat? Huh! I reckon I knows—I done tried it out. I gits me a lil bag o' pure fresh flaxseed, an I sprinkle it all roun de bed; den I put some on top of da mattress, an under de sheet. Den I goes to bed an sleeps like a baby, an dat old witch doan bother me no more.

"Ony oncet. Soon's I wake up, I light me a lamp an look on de floor an dere, side o' my bed was my dress, layin right over dat flaxseed, so's she could walk over on de dress, big as life. I snatch up de dress an throw it an de bed; den I go to sleep, an I ain never been bothered no more.

"Some folks reads de Bible backwards to keep witches fum ridin em, but dat doan do me no good, cause I kaint read. But flaxseed work so good I doan be studyin night-ridin witches no more."

