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## The Tie that Used to Bind; A Mid-Victorian Negro Marriage

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The Tie that used to bind,

A mid-Victorian Negro Marriage,  
by Anna J. Cooper.

She did not cry. Her eyes were dry & her lips trembled & twisted just a little as she tried to smile.

With native courtesy she bent at the waist to greet me,  
How you do, Sis Annie. Whe'eh's Ander?

I told her as gently as I could that the body could not have come thro on the same train with me, altho I had tho't that every arrangement was complete & the station master at Old Point assured me when I bought the tickets for myself & — the box that it would be put in the baggage car of my train to Raleigh. She asked only one question:

"Does he look 'po'?"

Oh no, I answered with brave cheerfulness.

"He looks all right."

At the same time visions of the shrunken figure in army blue trousers, long rows of metal file cases like compartments of a huge oven, drawer upon drawer, drawer upon drawer, all ticketed & provided with knobs so that the efficient attendant could conveniently pull out one or shove in another as easily as the baker man looks into the compartments of his huge stacks of browning bread, & when the right one ticketed Andrew J. Anderson; disease pre-



monia; department" & so on & so on, I said quietly: 2  
His wife wants me to bring him home for burial.

You will have to see an undertaker over in town for that. We provide just the plainest interment here at the Home."

I choked back my visions & dwelt only on how natural & peaceful he looked. She turned to the kitchen to prepare a meal for me in spite of my repeated insistence that I wanted nothing. I heard her mutter to herself:

"Dat po' soul out dere in all dis rain by hisself."

She went thro the funeral with the same more than natural calm. Chose the hymns herself from the Hymnal: No. 660

"Oh for a closer walk with God" & "How firm a foundation"  
'Cause, she said, Ander always liked dat one."

I had slipped to the undertakers & ordered suitable clothes & a handsome casket so that he would not "look po'."

Friends sent flowers - not stiff set pieces from florists, but familiar loving blooms from home gardens & friendly yards; & the little front room of that humble cottage where

her Ander lay in state was as dignified & solemnly beautiful as a millionaire's castle could have been made.

The impressive burial service of the Prayer Book, the same alike for Prince or peasant, the rich harmony of full throated voices unspoiled by instrumental accompaniment, the simple dignity of that silent form

lying there seemed to await & claim as its just & fitting due the final homage & ultimate tribute of reverential

due the final homage & ultimate tribute of reverential



adoration from all the living.

I had to get back to my work almost immediately & in Washington busied myself at once to secure a pension for her as a Spanish American War Widow. As the cottage in which she lived free of rent was mine & she seemed physically fit to look after herself, I felt the pension tho small was sufficient for her simple wants the rest of her natural life. To prove her marriage I had the frayed & yellow leaves of the family Bible: Andrew J. Anderson married to Caroline M. Therson Jan. 1, 1867. No need, for every citizen of Raleigh, white or black knew her & could testify that from the time that memory runneth not to the contrary she had always been a faithful & devoted wife, a loyal & even ostentatiously proud supporter & defender of her liege lord as any mediaval vassal. For 50 years they had lived together in an ideal union & not even the vilest ever dared a breath of suspicion against her fidelity to her marriage vows. Tho wise gossips would shake slanderous heads with "Colline's plum crazy 'bout her Ander as she calls him, & he aint no better'n he ought to be. She'd sell her soul to de debble jes to please him. Jes' look a' dat bastard o' his'n she took to raise"



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"Aint he de very spit o' Ander? She would say proudly, "jes' look a' de way he walks & de way he throws his hands, & dem eyes - jes' Ander right over agin". Then she would chuckle to herself & hang her head self consciously; "Well I reckon de Lawd took dat chile to punish me. Hit dont do to set your heart too much on nothin nor nobody in dis worl."

In an altercation once with a very important personage she was told "You must remember, Caroline I am Mrs. So & So." "Yes sum", she replied bending at the waist as always in her courtly fashion "An; an; you mus' member, Ma'am, dat I am Mrs. Ander Anderson", which was no joke for this Mrs. So & So could have consigned both Mr. & "Mrs." Anderson to the poor house by the flick of a pen. In the way the love begins as often happens she had pitied & mothered Andrew, who was several years younger than she, thro a spell of sickness in a hospital for contagious diseases in a lonely deserted spot outside the city limits. She was not a nurse & of course not allowed to enter. But love finds a way & Caroline would take her kniskknacks to the woods



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x give the signal by firing a pistol. If by any chance  
she was caught, she was shooting at a big black  
snake that "jes run right under dem bushes there".

Absorbed in my own affairs I dismissed this case  
from my mind, easily assuming that with the  
house x garden (she was fond of gardening) x her  
regular pension money for food x simple necessities  
her life would resume its even tenor - neither poverty nor  
riches, the happiest ideal. But one day a letter from a social  
worker at Raleigh brought a shock to my smug satisfaction.  
"Aunt Calline was surely not herself. Found wandering in the  
woods looking for 'Ander'. Obviously demented." I wrote Dr. Dr.  
x tried every expedient to avoid a trip to Raleigh for myself.  
When finally I had to go I found her to all appearances so  
docile x simply childlike, I concluded the symptoms of insanity  
that had alarmed the neighbors must have been due solely  
to lack of normal social contacts x that what she needed  
was the renewal of her accustomed home associations in an  
ordinary comfortable home wherein her presence would be  
taken as a matter of course where she would encounter only  
kind looks x loving words. I was not unaware of a District  
Law which forbids the bringing of insane persons from the States  
into Washington. I did not at all believe her to be insane but  
knew that she could be quickly rendered so by being put  
into an asylum with crazy people, x less quickly, perhaps



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but just as surely if left to the solitary life she had been leading since her husband's death. Again I suppose with the conceit which I hope is pardonable in an inveterate school marm, I may have overestimated the efficacy of my own powers of suggestion & mental control. I thought that kind treatment in an ideal environment & constant companionship of a potential psychiatrist would keep her as well as most minds commonly considered simply morbid.

I brought her into the bosom of my own family, ministering personally & directly to her wants physical & mental. I bathed her, dieted her, coiffured her hair becomingly, took her out for walks & sight seeing, to church every Sunday - & at night when she had had a nice warm dip in the big tub, her face shining with the clean smell of good wholesome toilet soap & she was cosily tucked in bed, together we would repeat the good old 23<sup>d</sup> Psalm; her voice trembling naturally & pathetically with the emphasis: The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want; He resto'eth my soul - & after my cheery "Good night, Sleep tight" she would sink peacefully & happily into a restful natural, childlike sleep.

Indeed as I remember her in those early days in our home, she seemed perfectly normal, tractable as a sweet & trustful child, responsive, ready to obey, kindly & open minded to guidance. Those were to me the happy



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days of fulfillment of a teacher's task with a mind  
under apparently perfect control, a mind less distracting  
than a group of youngsters, however intelligent, more  
challenging to originality of method, more inspiring to  
the urge for experimenting on a tabula rasa with a  
new untried method, more satisfying from the unexpected  
thrill of having met a real human need & at the same moment  
receiving adequate & grateful appreciation. True I recognized  
at times a confusion of places & persons between Raleigh &  
Washington - a blending of present & past associations that  
did not always yield to treatment. One day for instance  
when Griffith Stadium was mentioned as the Base Ball  
Park, she startled me by saying knowingly "Oh yes; That's  
where Ander, my husband works. I said you mean he  
used to work at the Park in Raleigh. This you know is  
Washington." "Yesum, I know but Ander is at the Park  
right up the street here. I been there many a time. Oh  
yes ma'am I understand. But Ander aint dead. He works  
up here at the Base Ball Park. I been intendin' to go up  
dere & see him but I been sorter sick & kept puttin'  
it off." Then without arguing the point I tried to call  
to mind the day of the funeral. "Dont you remember  
the hymns you chose for the service that day &  
the beautiful long stem Chrysanthemums Miss



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Phoebe sent & how we laid him to rest beside grand-  
ma & Big Brother. I'm sure you remember how  
sweetly your Miss A - sang "Oh rest in the Lord Wait  
patiently for him". You said it was the sweetest thing  
you had ever heard."

"Yes'm. I know there's some says Ander's dead,  
but — " & after that she would watch her chances with  
the utmost cunning & steal out of the house to find  
the Base Ball Park. That one expression seemed to stick.  
The chance change on a word had upset the entire fabric I  
that I was building. I seemed to have lost all power to start her  
over again. I plead with her to stay in the house, telling her  
that the City Fathers would not leave her to stay with me if  
she kept running away & had to be brought home by  
the police. Thinking to convince her that this was not  
Raleigh & that the Ball Park in Washington was not  
the place where "Ander" had worked. I let her follow her  
bent one day & meekly walked beside her without  
trying to direct or in anyway hinder her route. She  
stopped a strange man to ask if "this was it the right way  
to the Base Ball Park & added didactically: "de place where  
de teams comes to play Ball." He pointed to the Park  
which was not far & she kept on triumphantly. Our roles  
had changed completely. She was the teacher & naturally  
enough mistook my silence for docility. "You see Sis Annie"  
& she would go on into details of Ander's history & why she  
hadn't been up to see him &c. &c. Finally we reached the Park &



went inside. They've changed it," she said & pitifully  
"They've sent Aude somewhere else to work." I took the  
whip hand again & made her promise to give up these  
excursions to the Base Ball Park. I told her honestly <sup>that</sup>  
they would say she was crazy & send her to the Asylum  
& I would be powerless to keep her any longer. She seemed  
to understand for the time being & promised sweetly  
as ever that she would stay in the house till I came  
from work every day & then we would take our  
walk together. This promise however, she was  
wholly incapable of keeping. The police were very  
considerate & brought her home several times but  
finally she was taken to Gallinger, adjudged insane  
by the Court & sent to St. Elizabeth's & after that to the hospital  
for the colored insane in North Carolina her native State.

The nurse who brought her in on my first visit to her  
there whispered: "She is such a nice patient. Such a perfect  
lady." So clean & comfy she looked - & there was the same  
unforgettable bending at the waist curtsy. "How you do, Sis  
Annie. I never can forget you." We sat holding hands for a  
while & repeated together our old familiar Psalm while the  
hospital attendant stood at a respectful distance with  
moist sympathetic eyes. "I shall not want. He badeth me beside  
Yea tho I walk - He resto'ith my soul -" then breaking off  
she pinned me with a piercing look: "Sis Annie there's jes one  
thing I want to ast you." It was the look a judge might give a culprit with  
the command to tell the truth, the whole truth & nothing but the truth:  
"I want to know is Aude dead or is he not?"