



# **THE HEART OF HAPPY HOLLOW**

by

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**Chapter 3: The Mission of Mr. Scatters**

It took something just short of a revolution to wake up the sleepy little town of Miltonville. Through the slow, hot days it drowsed along like a lazy dog, only half rousing now and then to snap at some flying rumour, and relapsing at once into its pristine somnolence.

It was not a dreamless sleep, however, that held the town in chains. It had its dreams—dreams of greatness, of wealth, of consequence and of growth. Granted that there was no effort to realise these visions, they were yet there, and, combined with the memory of a past that was not without credit, went far to give tone to its dormant spirit.

It was a real spirit, too; the gallant Bourbon spirit of the old South; of Kentucky when she is most the daughter of Virginia, as was evidenced in the awed respect which all Miltonvillians, white and black alike, showed to Major Richardson in his house on the hill. He was part of the traditions of the place. It was shown in the conservatism of the old white families, and a certain stalwart if reflected self-respect in the older coloured inhabitants.

In all the days since the school had been founded and Mr. Dunkin's marriage to the teacher had raised a brief ripple of excitement, these coloured people had slumbered. They were still slumbering that hot August day, unmindful of the sensation that lay at their very doors, heedless of the portents that said as plain as preaching, "Miltonville, the time is at hand, awake!"

So it was that that afternoon there were only a few loungers, and these not very alert, about the station when the little train wheezed and puffed its way into it. It had been so long since anyone save those whom they knew had alighted at Miltonville that the loungers had lost faith, and with it curiosity, and now they scarcely changed their positions as the little engine stopped with a snort of disgust. But in an instant indifference had fled as the mist before the sun, and every eye on the platform was staring and white. It is the unexpected that always happens,

and yet humanity never gets accustomed to it. The loafers, white and black, had assumed a sitting posture, and then they had stood up. For from the cars there had alighted the wonder of a stranger—a Negro stranger, gorgeous of person and attire. He was dressed in a suit of black cloth. A long coat was buttoned close around his tall and robust form. He was dead black, from his shiny top hat to his not less shiny boots, and about him there was the indefinable air of distinction. He stood looking about the platform for a moment, and then stepped briskly and decisively toward the group that was staring at him with wide eyes. There was no hesitation in that step. He walked as a man walks who is not in the habit of being stopped, who has not known what it is to be told, “Thus far shalt thou go and no further.”

“Can you tell me where I can find the residence of Mr. Isaac Jackson?” he asked sonorously as he reached the stupefied loungers. His voice was deep and clear.

Someone woke from his astonishment and offered to lead him thither, and together the two started for their destination, the stranger keeping up a running fire of comment on the way. Had his companion been a close observer and known anything about the matter, he would have found the newcomer’s English painfully, unforgivably correct. A language should be like an easy shoe on a flexible foot, but to one unused to it, it proves rather a splint on a broken limb. The stranger stalked about in conversational splints until they arrived at Isaac Jackson’s door. Then giving his guide a dime, he dismissed him with a courtly bow, and knocked.

It was a good thing that Martha Ann Jackson had the innate politeness of her race well to the fore when she opened the door upon the radiant creature, or she would have given voice to the words that were in her heart: “Good Lawd, what is dis?”

“Is this the residence of Mr. Isaac Jackson?” in the stranger’s suavest voice.

“Yes, suh, he live hyeah.”

“May I see him? I desire to see him upon some business.” He handed her his card, which she carefully turned upside down, glanced at without understanding, and put in her apron pocket as she replied:

“He ain’t in jes’ now, but ef you’ll step in an’ wait, I’ll sen’ one o’ de chillen aftah him.”

“I thank you, madam, I thank you. I will come in and rest from the fatigue of my journey. I have travelled a long way, and rest in such a pleasant and commodious abode as your own appears to be will prove very grateful to me.”

She had been half afraid to invite this resplendent figure into her humble house, but she felt distinctly flattered at his allusion to the home which she had helped Isaac to buy, and by the alacrity with which the stranger accepted her invitation.

She ushered him into the front room, mentally thanking her stars that she had forced the reluctant Isaac to buy a bright new carpet a couple of months before.

A child was despatched to find and bring home the father, while Martha Ann, hastily slipping out of her work–dress and into a starched calico, came in to keep her visitor company.

His name proved to be Scatters, and he was a most entertaining and ingratiating man. It was evident that he had some important business with Isaac Jackson, but that it was mysterious was shown by the guarded way in which he occasionally hinted at it as he tapped the valise he carried and nodded knowingly.

Time had never been when Martha Ann Jackson was so flustered. She was charmed and frightened and flattered. She could only leave Mr. Scatters long enough to give orders to her daughter, Lucy, to prepare such a supper as that household had never seen before; then she returned to sit again at his feet and listen to his words of wisdom.

The supper progressed apace, and the savour of it was already in the stranger's nostrils. Upon this he grew eloquent and was about to divulge his secret to the hungry-eyed woman when the trampling of Isaac's boots upon the walk told him that he had only a little while longer to contain himself, and at the same time to wait for the fragrant supper.

Now, it is seldom that a man is so well impressed with a smooth-tongued stranger as is his wife. Usually his hard-headedness puts him on the defensive against the blandishments of the man who has won his better half's favour, and, however honest the semi-fortunate individual may be, he despises him for his attainments. But it was not so in this case. Isaac had hardly entered the house and received his visitor's warm handclasp before he had become captive to his charm. Business, business—no, his guest had been travelling and he must be both tired and hungry. Isaac would hear of no business until they had eaten. Then, over a pipe, if the gentleman smoked, they might talk at their ease.

Mr. Scatters demurred, but in fact nothing could have pleased him better, and the open smile with which he dropped into his place at the table was very genuine and heartfelt. Genuine, too, were his praises of Lucy's cooking; of her flaky biscuits and mealy potatoes. He was pleased all through and he did not hesitate to say so.

It was a beaming group that finally rose heavily laden from the supper table.

Over a social pipe a little later, Isaac Jackson heard the story that made his eyes bulge with interest and his heart throb with eagerness.

Mr. Scatters began, tapping his host's breast and looking at him fixedly, "You had a brother some years ago named John." It was more like an accusation than a question.

"Yes, suh, I had a brothah John."

"Uh, huh, and that brother migrated to the West Indies."

"Yes, suh, he went out to some o' dem outlandish places."

"Hold on, sir, hold on, I am a West Indian myself."

"I do' mean no erfence, 'ceptin' dat John allus was of a rovin' dispersition."

"Very well, you know no more about your brother after his departure for the West Indies?"

"No, suh."

"Well, it is my mission to tell you the rest of the story. Your brother John landed at Cuba, and after working about some years and living frugally, he went into the coffee business, in which he became rich."

"Rich?"

"Rich, sir."

"Why, bless my soul, who'd 'a evah thought that of John? Why, suh, I'm sho'ly proud to hyeah it. Why don't he come home an' visit a body?"

"Ah, why?" said Mr. Scatters dramatically. "Now comes the most painful part of my mission. 'In the midst of life we are in death.'" Mr. Scatters sighed, Isaac sighed and wiped his eyes. "Two years ago your brother departed this life."

“Was he saved?” Isaac asked in a choked voice. Scatters gave him one startled glance, and then answered hastily, “I am happy to say that he was.”

“Poor John! He gone an’ me lef’.”

“Even in the midst of our sorrows, however, there is always a ray of light. Your brother remembered you in his will.”

“Remembered me?”

“Remembered you, and as one of the executors of his estate,” — Mr. Scatters rose and went softly over to his valise, from which he took a large square package. He came back with it, holding it as if it were something sacred, — “as one of the executors of his estate, which is now settled, I was commissioned to bring you this.” He tapped the package. “This package, sealed as you see with the seal of Cuba, contains five thousand dollars in notes and bonds.”

Isaac gasped and reached for the bundle, but it was withdrawn. “I am, however, not to deliver it to you yet. There are certain formalities which my country demands to be gone through with, after which I deliver my message and return to the fairest of lands, to the Gem of the Antilles. Let me congratulate you, Mr. Jackson, upon your good fortune.”

Isaac yielded up his hand mechanically. He was dazed by the vision of this sudden wealth.

“Fi’ thousan’ dollahs,” he repeated.

“Yes, sir, five thousand dollars. It is a goodly sum, and in the meantime, until court convenes, I wish you to recommend some safe place in which to put this money, as I do not feel secure with it about my person, nor would it be secure if it were known to be in your house.”

“I reckon Albert Matthews’ grocery would be the safes’ place fu’ it. He’s got one o’ dem i’ on saftes.”

“The very place. Let us go there at once, and after that I will not encroach upon your hospitality longer, but attempt to find a hotel.”

“Hotel nothin’,” said Isaac emphatically. “Ef my house ain’t too common, you’ll stay right thaih ontwell co’t sets.”

“This is very kind of you, Mr. Jackson, but really I couldn’t think of being such a charge upon you and your good wife.”

”Tain’t no charge on us; we’ll be glad to have you. Folks hyeah in Miltonville has little enough comp’ny, de Lawd knows.”

Isaac spoke the truth, and it was as much the knowledge that he would be the envy of all the town as his gratitude to Scatters that prompted him to prevail upon his visitor to stay.

Scatters was finally persuaded, and the men only paused long enough in the house to tell the curiosity-eaten Martha Ann the news, and then started for Albert Matthews’ store. Scatters carried the precious package, and Isaac was armed with an old shotgun lest anyone should suspect their treasure and attack them. Five thousand dollars was not to be carelessly handled!

As soon as the men were gone, Martha Ann started out upon her rounds, and her proud tongue did for the women portion of Miltonville what the visit to Matthews’ store did for the men. Did Mrs. So-and-So remember brother John? Indeed she did. And when the story was told, it was a “Well, well, well! he used to be an ol’ beau o’ mine.” Martha Ann found no less than twenty women of her acquaintance for whom her brother John seemed to have entertained tender feelings.



The corner grocery store kept by Albert Matthews was the general gathering-place for the coloured male population of the town. It was a small, one-roomed building, almost filled with barrels, boxes, and casks.

Pride as well as necessity had prompted Isaac to go to the grocery just at this time, when it would be quite the fullest of men. He had not calculated wrongly when he reckoned upon the sensation that would be made by his entrance with the distinguished-looking stranger. The excitement was all the most hungry could have wished for. The men stared at Jackson and his companion with wide-open eyes. They left off chewing tobacco and telling tales. A half-dozen of them forgot to avail themselves of the joy of spitting, and Albert Matthews, the proprietor, a weazened little brown-skinned man, forgot to lay his hand upon the scale in weighing out a pound of sugar.

With a humility that was false on the very face of it, Isaac introduced his guest to the grocer and the three went off together mysteriously into a corner. The matter was duly explained and the object of the visit told. Matthews burned with envy of his neighbour's good fortune.

“I do’ reckon, Mistah Scatters, dat we bettah not let de othah folks in de sto’ know anything ‘bout dis hyeah bus’ness of ouahs. I got to be ‘sponsible fu dat money, an’ I doesn’t want to tek no chances.”

“You are perfectly right, sir, perfectly right. You are responsible, not only for the money itself, but for the integrity of this seal which means the dignity of government.”

Matthews looked sufficiently impressed, and together they all went their way among the barrels and boxes to the corner where the little safe stood. With many turnings and twistings the door was opened, the package inclosed and the safe shut again. Then they all rose solemnly and went behind the counter to sample something that Matthews had.

This was necessary as a climax, for they had performed, not a mere deed, but a ceremonial.

“Of course, you’ll say nothing about this matter at all, Mr. Matthews,” said Scatters, thereby insuring publicity to his affair.

There were a few introductions as the men passed out, but hardly had their backs turned when a perfect storm of comment and inquiry broke about the grocer’s head. So it came to pass, that with many mysterious nods and headshakings, Matthews first hinted at and then told the story.

For the first few minutes the men could scarcely believe what they had heard. It was so utterly unprecedented. Then it dawned upon them that it might be so, and discussion and argument ran rife for the next hour.

The story flew like wildfire, there being three things in this world which interest all sorts and conditions of men alike: great wealth, great beauty, and great love. Whenever Mr. Scatters appeared he was greeted with deference and admiration. Any man who had come clear from Cuba on such an errand to their fellow-townsman deserved all honour and respect. His charming manners confirmed, too, all that preconceived notions had said of him. He became a social favourite. It began with Mr. and Mrs. Dunkin’s calling upon him. Then followed Alonzo Taft, and when the former two gave a reception for the visitor, his position was assured. Miltonville had not yet arisen to the dignity of having a literary society. He now founded one and opened it himself with an address so beautiful, so eloquent and moving that Mr. Dunkin bobbed his head dizzy in acquiescence, and Aunt Hannah Payne thought she was in church and shouted for joy.

The little town had awakened from its long post-bellum slumber and accepted with eagerness the upward impulse given it. It stood aside and looked on with something like adoration when Mr. Scatters and Mrs.

Dunkin met and talked of ineffable things—things far above the ken of the average mortal.

When Mr. Scatters found that his mission was known, he gave up further attempts at concealing it and talked freely about the matter. He expatiated at length upon the responsibility that devolved upon him and his desire to discharge it, and he spoke glowingly of the great government whose power was represented by the seal which held the package of bonds. Not for one day would he stay away from his beloved Cuba, if it were not that that seal had to be broken in the presence of the proper authorities. So, however reluctant he might be to stay, it was not for him to shirk his task: he must wait for the sitting of court.

Meanwhile the Jacksons lived in an atmosphere of glory. The womenfolk purchased new dresses, and Isaac got a new wagon on the strength of their good fortune. It was nothing to what they dreamed of doing when they had the money positively in hand. Mr. Scatters still remained their guest, and they were proud of it.

What pleased them most was that their distinguished visitor seemed not to look down upon, but rather to be pleased with, their homely fare. Isaac had further cause for pleasure when his guest came to him later with a great show of frank confidence to request the loan of fifty dollars.

“I should not think of asking even this small favour of you but that I have only Cuban money with me and I knew you would feel distressed if you knew that I went to the trouble of sending this money away for exchange on account of so small a sum.”

This was undoubtedly a mark of special confidence. It suddenly made Isaac feel as if the grand creature had accepted and labelled him as a brother and an equal. He hastened to Matthews’ safe, where he kept his own earnings; for the grocer was banker as well.

With reverent hands they put aside the package of bonds and together counted out the required half a hundred dollars. In a little while Mr. Scatters' long, graceful fingers had closed over it.

Mr. Jackson's cup of joy was now full. It had but one bitter drop to mar its sweetness. That was the friendship that had sprung up between the Cuban and Mr. Dunkin. They frequently exchanged visits, and sat long together engaged in conversation from which Isaac was excluded. This galled him. He felt that he had a sort of proprietary interest in his guest. And any infringement of this property right he looked upon with distinct disfavour. So that it was with no pleasant countenance that he greeted Mr. Dunkin when he called on a certain night.

"Mr. Scatters is gone out," he said, as the old man entered and deposited his hat on the floor.

"Dat's all right, Isaac," said Mr. Dunkin slowly, "I didn't come to see de gent'man. I come to see you."

The cloud somewhat lifted from Isaac's brow. Mr. Dunkin was a man of importance and it made a deal of difference whom he was visiting.

He seemed a little bit embarrassed, however, as to how to open conversation. He hummed and hawed and was visibly uneasy. He tried to descant upon the weather, but the subject failed him. Finally, with an effort, he hitched his chair nearer to his host's and said in a low voice, "Ike, I reckon you has de confidence of Mistah Scatters?"

"I has," was the proud reply, "I has."

"Hum! uh! huh! Well—well—has you evah loant him any money?"

Isaac was aghast. Such impertinence!

"Mistah Dunkin," he began, "I considah— —"

“Hol’ on, Ike!” broke in Dunkin, laying a soothing hand on the other’s knee, “don’ git on yo’ high hoss. Dis hyeah’s a impo’tant mattah.”

“I ain’t got nothin’ to say.”

“He ain’t never tol’ you ‘bout havin’ nothin’ but Cuban money on him?”

Isaac started.

“I see he have. He tol’ me de same thing.”

The two men sat staring suspiciously into each other’s faces.

“He got a hun’ed an’ fifty dollahs f’om me,” said Dunkin.

“I let him have fifty,” added Jackson weakly.

“He got a hun’ed an’ fifty dollahs f’om thews. Dat’s how I come to git ‘spicious. He tol’ him de same sto’y.”

Again that pregnant look flashed between them, and they both rose and went out of the house.

They hurried down to Matthews’ grocery. The owner was waiting for them there. There was solemnity, but no hesitation, in the manner with which they now went to the safe. They took out the package hastily and with ruthless hands. This was no ceremonial now. The seal had no longer any fears for them. They tore it off. They tore the wrappers. Then paper. Neatly folded paper. More wrapping paper. Newspapers. Nothing more. Of bills or bonds—nothing. With the debris of the mysterious parcel scattered about their feet, they stood up and looked at each other.

“I nevah did believe in furriners nohow,” said Mr. Dunkin sadly.

“But he knowed all about my brothah John.”

“An’ he sho’ly did make mighty fine speeches. Maybe we’s missed de money.” This from the grocer.

Together they went over the papers again, with the same result.

“Do you know where he went to–night, Ike?”

“No.”

“Den I reckon we’s seed de las’ o’ him.”

“But he lef’ his valise.”

“Yes, an’ he lef’ dis,” said Dunkin sternly, pointing to the paper on the floor. “He sho’ly is mighty keerless of his valybles.”

“Let’s go git de constable,” said the practical Matthews.

They did, though they felt that it would be unavailing.

The constable came and waited at Jackson’s house. They had been there about half an hour, talking the matter over, when what was their surprise to hear Mr. Scatters’ step coming jauntily up the walk. A sudden panic of terror and shame seized them. It was as if they had wronged him.

Suppose, after all, everything should come right and he should be able to explain? They sat and trembled until he entered. Then the constable told him his mission.

Mr. Scatters was surprised. He was hurt. Indeed, he was distinctly grieved that his friends had had so little confidence in him. Had he been to them anything but a gentleman, a friend, and an honest man? Had he not come a long distance from his home to do one of them a favour? They hung their heads. Martha Ann, who was listening at the door, was sobbing audibly. What had he done thus to be humiliated? He saw the

effect of his words and pursued it. Had he not left in the care of one of their own number security for his integrity in the shape of the bonds?

The effect of his words was magical. Every head went up and three pairs of flashing eyes were bent upon him. He saw and knew that they knew. He had not thought that they would dare to violate the seal around which he had woven such a halo. He saw that all was over, and, throwing up his hands with a despairing gesture, he bowed graciously and left the room with the constable.

All Miltonville had the story next day, and waited no less eagerly than before for the “settin’ of co’t.”

To the anger and chagrin of Miltonvillians, Fox Run had the honour and distinction of being the county seat, and thither they must go to the sessions; but never did they so forget their animosities as on the day set for the trial of Scatters. They overlooked the pride of the Fox Runners, their cupidity and their vaunting arrogance. They ignored the indignity of showing interest in anything that took place in that village, and went in force, eager, anxious, and curious. A horse, a foot, by oxcart, by mule-wagon, white, black, high, low, old, and young of both sexes invaded Fox Run and swelled the crowd of onlookers until, with pity for the very anxiety of the people, the humane judge decided to discard the now inadequate court-room and hold the sessions on the village green. Here an impromptu bar was set up, and over against it were ranged the benches, chairs, and camp-stools of the spectators.

Every man of prominence in the county was present. Major Richardson, though now retired, occupied a distinguished position within the bar. Old Captain Howard shook hands familiarly with the judge and nodded to the assembly as though he himself had invited them all to be present. Former Judge Durbin sat with his successor on the bench.



Court opened and the first case was called. It gained but passing attention. There was bigger game to be stalked. A hog-stealing case fared a little better on account of the intimateness of the crime involved. But nothing was received with such awed silence as the case of the State against Joseph Scatters. The charge was obtaining money under false pretences, and the plea "Not Guilty."

The witnesses were called and their testimony taken. Mr. Scatters was called to testify in his own defence, but refused to do so. The prosecution stated its case and proceeded to sum up the depositions of the witnesses. As there was no attorney for the defence, the State's attorney delivered a short speech, in which the guilt of the defendant was plainly set forth. It was as clear as day. Things looked very dark for Mr. Scatters of Cuba.

As the lawyer sat down, and ere the case could be given to the jury, he rose and asked permission of the Court to say a few words.

This was granted him.

He stood up among them, a magnificent, strong, black figure. His eyes swept the assembly, judge, jury, and spectators with a look half amusement, half defiance.

"I have pleaded not guilty," he began in a low, distinct voice that could be heard in every part of the inclosure, "and I am not guilty of the spirit which is charged against me, however near the letter may touch me. I did use certain knowledge that I possessed, and the seal which I happened to have from an old government position, to defraud—that is the word, if you will—to defraud these men out of the price of their vanity and their cupidity. But it was not a long-premeditated thing. I was within a few miles of your town before the idea occurred to me. I was in straits. I stepped from the brink of great poverty into the midst of what you are pleased to deem a greater crime."



The Court held its breath. No such audacity had ever been witnessed in the life of Fox Run.

Scatters went on, warming to his subject as he progressed. He was eloquent and he was pleasing. A smile flickered over the face of Major Richardson and was reflected in the features of many others as the speaker burst forth:

“Gentlemen, I maintain that instead of imprisoning you should thank me for what I have done. Have I not taught your community a lesson? Have I not put a check upon their credulity and made them wary of unheralded strangers?”

He had. There was no disputing that. The judge himself was smiling, and the jurymen were nodding at each other.

Scatters had not yet played his trump card. He saw that the time was ripe. Straightening his form and raising his great voice, he cried: “Gentlemen, I am guilty according to the letter of the law, but from that I appeal to the men who make and have made the law. From the hard detail of this new day, I appeal to the chivalry of the old South which has been told in story and sung in song. From men of vindictiveness I appeal to men of mercy. From plebeians to aristocrats. By the memory of the sacred names of the Richardsons” — the Major sat bolt upright and dropped his snuffbox — “the Durbins” — the ex-judge couldn’t for his life get his pince-nez on — “the Howards” — the captain openly rubbed his hands — “to the memory that those names call up I appeal, and to the living and honourable bearers of them present. And to you, gentlemen of the jury, the lives of whose fathers went to purchase this dark and bloody ground, I appeal from the accusation of these men, who are not my victims, not my dupes, but their own.”

There was a hush when he was done. The judge read the charge to the jury, and it was favourable — very. And — well, Scatters had taught the

darkies a lesson; he had spoken of their families and their traditions, he knew their names, and—oh, well, he was a good fellow after all—what was the use?

The jury did not leave their seats, and the verdict was acquittal.

Scatters thanked the Court and started away; but he met three ominous-looking pairs of eyes, and a crowd composed of angry Negroes was flocking toward the edge of the green.

He came back.

“I think I had better wait until the excitement subsides,” he said to Major Richardson.

“No need of that, suh, no need of that. Here, Jim,” he called to his coachman, “take Mr. Scatters wherever he wants to go, and remember, I shall hold you responsible for his safety.”

“Yes, suh,” said Jim.

“A thousand thanks, Major,” said the man with the mission.

“Not at all, suh. By the way, that was a very fine effort of yours this afternoon. I was greatly moved by it. If you’ll give me your address I’ll send you a history of our family, suh, from the time they left Vuhginia and before.”

Mr. Scatters gave him the address, and smiled at the three enemies, who still waited on the edge of the green.

“To the station,” he said to the driver.