



THE HEART OF HAPPY HOLLOW

by

Paul Laurence Dunbar

Chapter 6: The Race Question

Scene—Race track. *Enter old coloured man, seating himself.*

“Oomph, oomph. De work of de devil sho’ do p’ospah. How ‘do, suh? Des tol’able, thankee, suh. How you come on? Oh, I was des a–sayin’ how de wo’k of de ol’ boy do p’ospah. Doesn’t I frequent the racetrack? No, suh; no, suh. I’s Baptis’ myse’f, an’ I ‘low hit’s all devil’s doin’s. Wouldn’t ‘a’ be’n hyeah to–day, but I got a boy named Jim dat’s long gone in sin an’ he gwine ride one dem hosses. Oomph, dat boy! I sut’ny has talked to him and labohed wid him night an’ day, but it was allers in vain, an’ I’s feahed dat de day of his reckonin’ is at han’.

“Ain’t I nevah been intrusted in racin’? Humph, you don’t s’pose I been dead all my life, does you? What you laffin’ at? Oh, scuse me, scuse me, you unnerstan’ what I means. You don’ give a ol’ man time to splain hisse’f. What I means is dat dey has been days when I walked in de counsels of de on–gawdly and set in de seats of sinnahs; and long erbout dem times I did tek most ovahly strong to racin’.

“How long dat been? Oh, dat’s way long back, ‘fo’ I got religion, mo’n thuty years ago, dough I got to own I has fell from grace several times sense.

“Yes, suh, I ust to ride. Ki–yi! I nevah furgit de day dat my ol’ Mas’ Jack put me on ‘June Boy,’ his black geldin’, an’ say to me, ‘Si,’ says he, ‘if you don’ ride de tail offen Cunnel Scott’s mare, “No Quit,” I’s gwine to larrup you twell you cain’t set in de saddle no mo’.’ Hyah, hyah. My ol’ Mas’ was a mighty han’ fu’ a joke. I knowed he wan’t gwine to do nuffin’ to me.

“Did I win? Why, whut you spec’ I’s doin’ hyeah ef I hadn’ winned? W’y, ef I’d ‘a’ let dat Scott maih beat my ‘June Boy’ I’d ‘a’ drowned myse’f in Bull Skin Crick.

“Yes, suh, I winned; w’y, at de finish I come down dat track lak hit was de Jedgment Day an’ I was de las’ one up! Ef I didn’t race dat maih’s tail

clean off, I 'low I made hit do a lot o' switchin'. An' aftah dat my wife Mandy she ma'ed me. Hyah, hyah, I ain't bin much on hol'in' de reins sence.

“Sh! dey comin' in to wa'm up. Dat Jim, dat Jim, dat my boy; you nasty putrid little rascal. Des a hundred an' eight, suh, des a hundred an' eight. Yas, suh, dat's my Jim; I don't know whaih he gits his dev'ment at.

“What's de mattah wid dat boy? Whyn't he hunch hisse'f up on dat saddle right? Jim, Jim, whyn't you limber up, boy; hunch yo'se'f up on dat hoss lak you belonged to him and knowed you was dah. What I done showed you? De black raskil, goin' out dah tryin' to disgrace his own daddy. Hyeah he come back. Dat's bettah, you scoun'ril.

“Dat's a right smaht-lookin' hoss he's a-ridin', but I ain't a-trustin' dat bay wid de white feet—dat is, not altogethah. She's a favourwright too; but dey's sumpin' else in dis worl' sides playin' favourwrights. Jim bettah had win dis race. His hoss ain't a five to one shot, but I spec's to go way fum hyeah wid money ernuff to mek a donation on de pa'sonage.

“Does I bet? Well, I don' des call hit bettin'; but I resks a little w'en I t'inks I kin he'p de cause. 'Tain't gamblin', o' co'se; I wouldn't gamble fu nothin', dough my ol' Mastah did ust to say dat a honest gamblah was ez good ez a hones' preachah an' mos' nigh ez skace.

“Look out dah, man, dey's off, dat nasty bay maih wid de white feet leadin' right fu'm 'de pos'. I knowed it! I knowed it! I had my eye on huh all de time. Oh, Jim, Jim, why didn't you git in bettah, way back dah fouf? Dah go de gong! I knowed dat wasn't no staht. Troop back dah, you raskils, hyah, hyah.

“I wush dat boy wouldn't do so much jumming erroun' wid dat hoss. Fust t'ing he know he ain't gwine to know whaih he's at.

“Dah, dah dey go ag’in. Hit’s a sho’ t’ing dis time. Bettah, Jim, bettah. Dey didn’t leave you dis time. Hug dat bay mare, hug her close, boy. Don’t press dat hoss yit. He holdin’ back a lot o’ t’ings.

“He’s gainin’! doggone my cats, he’s gainin’! an’ dat hoss o’ his’n gwine des ez stiddy ez a rockin’-chair. Jim allus was a good boy.

“Confound these spec’s, I cain’t see ‘em skacely; huh, you say dey’s neck an’ neck; now I see ‘em! now I see ‘em! and Jimmy’s a-ridin’ like — — Huh, huh, I laik to said sumpin’.

“De bay maih’s done huh bes’, she’s done huh bes’! Dey’s turned into the stretch an’ still see-sawin’. Let him out, Jimmy, let him out! Dat boy done th’owed de reins away. Come on, Jimmy, come on! He’s leadin’ by a nose. Come on, I tell you, you black rapsCALLION, come on! Give ‘em hell, Jimmy! give ‘em hell! Under de wire an’ a len’th ahead. Doggone my cats! wake me up w’en dat othah hoss comes in.

“No, suh, I ain’t gwine stay no longah, I don’t app’ove o’ racin’, I’s gwine ‘roun’ an’ see dis hyeah bookmakah an’ den I’s gwine dreckly home, suh, dreckly home. I’s Baptis’ myse’f, an’ I don’t app’ove o’ no sich doin’s!”