

Written in 1976

① Nannie Rebecca Meadows Strength. 1884-1912. (mother)

One day last summer, Sister, Em and I visited Aunt Betty, in her lovely new home. It was new to her, and us anyway. We sat in the sun room. Aunt Betty had <sup>a profusion of</sup> every kind <sup>house</sup> of plants in there, and they were beautiful. She had <sup>served</sup> brought us cokes. I said, "This is perfect. And the perfect time for you and Em to tell us about our mother."

Em said, "Your mother? - What do you want to know about your mother? She's been dead more than sixty years."

"That's just it Em," I said. "Do you know I know more about Esau's mother than I do my own. Aunt Betty did you know mother?"

"Of course. Your uncle Sebie and I ~~was~~ married long before Nannie died."

"Good - Now tell us everything you know. What she was like - Do you remember any conversations you had with her - just everything".

"Hum, lets see - Well, one thing I know, she was a good woman - and a pretty woman, wasn't she Emma Mae? And smart. She could beat anybody sewing I ever seen. Lord, she'd make you all

② the prettiest clerk and hers too. She'd even  
seen her Vernon. Let's see, she was flirty and  
"Hey, what do you mean, flirty?"

"Well she was. She loved everybody and  
everybody loved her. She had lots of friends  
and lots of beau's. Emma Mae who was  
it Nannie was going with the same time  
her and Vernon was going together?"

"Ed Burnly."

"Yeah, Ed Burnly. She was crazy  
about him too, but Vernon said he'd  
kill hisself if Nannie didn't marry  
him."

"Good Night! - Mother probably married  
the wrong man."

"No she didn't either," Em said "And  
I don't know why you want to know  
about all this. You'll worry about it."

"Em, I won't do it. I don't know  
why we haven't ask years before now -  
You all never even mentioned her - why?"

"Well, at first you all missed her  
so much. We missed her and talked  
about her all the time, but not in front  
of you and Laree. And Vernon was  
so pitiful."

"Go on Aunt Betty, what then?"

③ " Well - they's been married a long time before you was born here - two or three years. Wasn't you born in Birmingham? Yee, you was. Vernon was up there laying brick with Frank Fuller. Mr. Jam and your Aunt Della lived up there too. Then Nannie got pregnant with Quintilla right straight - (there are two years between us) and they moved back - Lets see, Quintilla you was borned right this side of Goddard's Hill. Right close to Miss Annas and Mr. Jackie. Right, Emma Mae? "

" That's right "

" Then we just all moved, one after the other to Montgomery. Vernon was the best brick mason I ever seen, and he built you all the prettiest brick bungalow - "

④ " Oh, I remember that - not the house, but the side of the house, where the fig trees were, and how we'd sit on the low limbs and swing up and down and - "

" Sister you can't swing up and down. "

" Em, make sister hush. "

" And our house was right across "

④ from the park. The band stand was there and every - whenever they played, we'd swing or skip, and dance and bow, waving our arms to the music. I can hear records now of: Pomp and Circumstance; The Flight of the Bumble Bee; Triumphant March, or any of those pieces, and I know that was what they played in the band stand. I can see those men - plain as day, with their white straw hats, and they had sleeve bands on their arms - "Oh well. So on Aunt Betty."

"Well, that's where your mother died. I was there when she died. Lord it was so pitiful. Nannie didn't want to die - and she told them, 'Take every bit of that literature and books and everything and burn it'."

"Hey, what literature and books?"

"Well, you know she was a Christian ~~Scientist~~. And -"

"Hey, I didn't know that."

"Yes you did too, Sister, I told you."

"You did not."

"I know I did."

"Em make Sister hush - And who

⑤ told you?"

"I don't know. Somebody."

"See"

"I told her, and you too," Em said, "you have forgotten."

"A Christian Scientist - tell me about that."

"Well, after Nannie knew she was going to die - she said, 'if she'd had a doctor and taken medicine and all, it might have been different.' And she didn't want you all, or any body to read those books. She told Vernon how she wanted to be fixed; who she wanted to preach her funeral; what songs she wanted them to sing and every thing."

"Your Aunt Nannie - Vernon's sister from Birmingham got there before Nannie died. She brought you and Lere the prettiest little lacy dresses and caps to match and all. When Nannie saw them she started crying, and said, 'I don't want to leave my babies.' The night Nannie died we was all there and she was telling Vernon what all she wanted him to do and everything. How to do about you and Lere, and Vernon was the pitifullest thing I ever seen."

⑥ He would rub her hands and pat her. He couldn't say nothing. Terribly, she said, 'Vernon, hold me, hold me, hold me. I can't bear any more'. Vernon was sitting on the bed with her in his arms. We knew Nannie had died and some of 'em was trying to make Vernon get up and go out of the room, but, Nannie - his sister, said, 'no, no, no, leave him alone', and she set down by him and put her arm around him. They set there a long, long time. Nannie begin talking to him and all, and terribly he laid your mother down, then they got up and went out of the room. Your daddy was one broke up man. Some of 'em said that was the reason he never remarried. Said, he said, he'd never hold another woman in his arms again.

I think he said it - it was true for sister and me when we were grown.

Perhaps, that is all I'll ever know about Mother. Once I asked Daddy some little something about her, and he said, "Your mother was all peaches - I'll have to tell you about her sometimes".