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Black No More i

Preface

Over twenty years ago a gentleman in Asbury Park, N.J. began manufacturing and advertising a preparation for the immediate and unfailing straightening of the most stubborn Negro hair. This preparation was called Kink-No-More, a name not wholly accurate since users of it were forced to renew the treatment every fortnight.

During the intervening years many chemists, professional and amateur, have been seeking the means of making the downtrodden Aframerican resemble as closely as possible his white fellow citizen. The temporarily effective preparations placed on the market have so far proved exceedingly profitable to manufacturers, advertising agencies, Negro newspapers and beauty culturists, while millions of users have registered great satisfaction at the opportunity to rid themselves of kinky hair and grow several shades lighter in color, if only for a brief time. With America's constant reiteration of the superiority of whiteness, the avid search on the part of the black masses for some key to chromatic perfection is easily understood. Now it would seem that science is on the verge of satisfying them.

Dr Yusaburo Noguchi, head of the Noguchi Hospital in Beppu, Japan, told American newspaper reporters in October 1929, that as a result of fifteen years of painstaking research and experiment he was able to change

a Negro into a white man. While he admitted that this racial metamorphosis could not be effected overnight, he maintained that 'Given time, I could change the Japanese into a race of tall blue-eyed blonds.' The racial transformation, he asserted, could be brought about by glandular control and electrical nutrition.

Even more positive is the statement of Mr Bela Cati, an electrical engineer residing in New York City, who, in a letter dated August 18, 1930, and addressed to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said, in part:

Once I myself was very strongly tanned by the sun and a European rural population thought that I was a Negro, too. I did not suffer much but the situation was disagreeable. Since that time I have studied the problem and I am convinced that the surplus of the pigment could be removed. In case you are interested and believe that with the aid of your physicians we could carry out the necessary experiments, I am willing to send you the patent specification . . . and my general terms relating to this invention . . . The expenses are so to say negligible.

I wish to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to Mr V. F. Calverton for his keen interest and friendly encouragement and to my wife, Josephine Schuyler, whose cooperation and criticism were of great help in completing *Black No More*.

GEORGE S. SCHUYLER

New York City,
September 1, 1930

**Black
No More**

One

Max Disher stood outside the Honky Tonk Club puffing a panatela and watching the crowds of white and black folk entering the cabaret. Max was tall, dapper and smooth coffee-brown. His negroid features had a slightly satanic cast and there was an insolent nonchalance about his carriage. He wore his hat rakishly and faultless evening clothes underneath his raccoon coat. He was young, he wasn't broke, but he was damnably blue. It was New Year's Eve, 1933, but there was no spirit of gaiety and gladness in his heart. How could he share the hilarity of the crowd when he had no girl? He and Minnie, his high 'yallah' flapper, had quarreled that day and everything was over between them.

'Women are mighty funny,' he mused to himself, 'especially yallah women. You could give them the moon and they wouldn't appreciate it.' That was probably the trouble; he'd given Minnie too much. It didn't pay to spend too much on them. As soon as he'd bought her a new outfit and paid the rent on a three-room apartment, she'd grown uppity. Stuck on her color, that's what was the matter with her! He took the cigar out of his mouth and spat disgustedly.

A short, plump, cherubic black fellow, resplendent in a narrow-brimmed brown fedora, camel's hair coat and spats, strolled up and clapped him on the shoulder: 'Hello,

Max!' greeted the newcomer, extending a hand in a fawn-colored glove, 'What's on your mind?'

'Everything, Bunny,' answered the debonair Max. 'That damn yallah gal o' mine's got all upstage and quit.'

'Say not so!' exclaimed the short black fellow. 'Why I thought you and her were all forty.'

'Were, is right, kid. And after spending my dough, too! It sure makes me hot. Here I go and buy two covers at the Honky Tonk for tonight, thinkin' surely she'd come and she starts a row and quits!'

'Shucks!' exploded Bunny. 'I wouldn't let that worry me none. I'd take another skirt. I wouldn't let no dame queer my New Year's.'

'So would I, Wise Guy, but all the dames I know are dated up. So here I am all dressed up and no place to go.'

'You got two reservations, ain't you? Well, let's you and me go in,' Bunny suggested. 'We may be able to break in on some party.'

Max visibly brightened. 'That's a good idea,' he said. 'You never can tell, we might run in on something good.'

Swinging their canes, the two joined the throng at the entrance of the Honky Tonk Club and descended to its smoky depths. They wended their way through the maze of tables in the wake of a dancing waiter and sat down close to the dance floor. After ordering ginger ale and plenty of ice, they reared back and looked over the crowd.

Max Disher and Bunny Brown had been pals ever since the war when they soldiered together in the old 15th regiment in France. Max was one of the Aframerican Fire Insurance Company's crack agents, Bunny was a teller in the Douglass Bank and both bore the reputation of gay

blades in black Harlem. The two had in common a weakness rather prevalent among Aframerican bucks: they preferred yellow women. Both swore there were three things essential to the happiness of a colored gentleman: yellow money, yellow women and yellow taxis. They had little difficulty in getting the first and none at all in getting the third but the yellow women they found flighty and fickle. It was so hard to hold them. They were so sought after that one almost required a million dollars to keep them out of the clutches of one's rivals.

'No more yallah gals for me!' Max announced with finality, sipping his drink. 'I'll grab a black gal first.'

'Say not so!' exclaimed Bunny, strengthening his drink from his huge silver flask. 'You ain't thinkin' o' dealin' in coal, are you?'

'Well,' argued his partner, 'it might change my luck. You can trust a black gal; she'll stick to you.'

'How do you know? You ain't never had one. Ever' gal I ever seen you with looked like an ofay.'

'Humph!' grunted Max. 'My next one may be an ofay, too! They're less trouble and don't ask you to give 'em the moon.'

'I'm right with you, pardner,' Bunny agreed, 'but I gotta have one with class. None o' these Woolworth dames for me! Get you in a peck o' trouble . . . Fact is, Big Boy, ain't none o' these women no good. They all get old on the job.'

They drank in silence and eyed the motley crowd around them. There were blacks, browns, yellows, and whites chatting, flirting, drinking; rubbing shoulders in the democracy of night life. A fog of tobacco smoke

wreathed their heads and the din from the industrious jazz band made all but the loudest shrieks inaudible. In and out among the tables danced the waiters, trays balanced aloft, while the patrons, arrayed in colored paper caps, beat time with the orchestra, threw streamers or grew maudlin on each other's shoulders.

'Looky here! Lawdy Lawd!' exclaimed Bunny, pointing to the doorway. A party of white people had entered. They were all in evening dress and in their midst was a tall, slim, titian-haired girl who had seemingly stepped from heaven or the front cover of a magazine.

'My, my, my!' said Max, sitting up alertly.

The party consisted of two men and four women. They were escorted to a table next to the one occupied by the two colored dandies. Max and Bunny eyed them covertly. The tall girl was certainly a dream.

'Now that's my speed,' whispered Bunny.

'Be yourself,' said Max. 'You couldn't touch her with a forty-foot pole.'

'Oh, I don't know, Big Boy,' Bunny beamed self-confidently, 'You never can tell! You never can tell!'

'Well, I can tell,' remarked Disher, 'cause she's a cracker.'

'How you know that?'

'Man, I can tell a cracker a block away. I wasn't born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia, for nothin', you know. Just listen to her voice.'

Bunny listened. 'I believe she is,' he agreed.

They kept eyeing the party to the exclusion of everything else. Max was especially fascinated. The girl was the prettiest creature he'd ever seen and he felt irresistibly

drawn to her. Unconsciously he adjusted his necktie and passed his well-manicured hand over his rigidly straightened hair.

Suddenly one of the white men rose and came over to their table. They watched him suspiciously. Was he going to start something? Had he noticed that they were staring at the girl? They both stiffened at his approach.

‘Say,’ he greeted them, leaning over the table, ‘do you boys know where we can get some decent liquor around here? We’ve run out of stuff and the waiter says he can’t get any for us.’

‘You can get some pretty good stuff right down the street,’ Max informed him, somewhat relieved.

‘They won’t sell none to him,’ said Bunny. ‘They might think he was a Prohibition officer.’

‘Could one of you fellows get me some?’ asked the man.

‘Sure,’ said Max, heartily. What luck! Here was the very chance he’d been waiting for. These people might invite them over to their table. The man handed him a ten-dollar bill and Max went out bareheaded to get the liquor. In ten minutes he was back. He handed the man the quart and the change. The man gave back the change and thanked him. There was no invitation to join the party. Max returned to his table and eyed the group wistfully.

‘Did he invite you in?’ asked Bunny.

‘I’m back here, ain’t I?’ answered Max, somewhat resentfully.

The floor show came on. A black-faced comedian, a corpulent shouter of mammy songs with a gin-roughened

voice, three chocolate soft-shoe dancers and an octette of wriggling, practically nude, mulatto chorines.

Then midnight and pandemonium as the New Year swept in. When the din had subsided, the lights went low and the orchestra moaned the weary blues. The floor filled with couples. The two men and two of the women at the next table rose to dance. The beautiful girl and another were left behind.

‘I’m going over and ask her to dance,’ Max suddenly announced to the surprised Bunny.

‘Say not so!’ exclaimed that worthy. ‘You’re fixin’ to get in dutch, Big Boy.’

‘Well, I’m gonna take a chance, anyhow,’ Max persisted, rising.

This fair beauty had hypnotized him. He felt that he would give anything for just one dance with her. Once around the floor with her slim waist in his arm would be like an eternity in heaven. Yes, one could afford to risk repulse for that.

‘Don’t do it, Max!’ pleaded Bunny. ‘Them fellows are liable to start somethin’.’

But Max was not to be restrained. There was no holding him back when he wanted to do a thing, especially where a comely damsel was concerned.

He sauntered over to the table in his most shiekish manner and stood looking down at the shimmering strawberry blonde. She was indeed ravishing and her exotic perfume titillated his nostrils despite the clouds of cigarette smoke.

‘Would you care to dance?’ he asked, after a moment’s hesitation.

She looked up at him haughtily with cool green eyes, somewhat astonished at his insolence and yet perhaps secretly intrigued but her reply lacked nothing in definiteness.

‘No,’ she said icily, ‘I never dance with niggers!’ Then turning to her friend, she remarked: ‘Can you beat the nerve of these darkies?’ She made a little disdainful grimace with her mouth, shrugged daintily and dismissed the unpleasant incident.

Crushed and angry, Max returned to his place without a word. Bunny laughed aloud in high glee.

‘You said she was a cracker,’ he gurgled, ‘an’ now I guess you know it.’

‘Aw, go to hell,’ Max grumbled.

Just then Billy Fletcher, the headwaiter, passed by. Max stopped him. ‘Ever see that dame in here before?’ he asked.

‘Been in here most every night since before Christmas,’ Billy replied.

‘Do you know who she is?’

‘Well, I heard she was some rich broad from Atlanta up here for the holidays. Why?’

‘Oh, nothing; I was just wondering.’

From Atlanta! His home town. No wonder she had turned him down. Up here trying to get a thrill in the Black Belt but a thrill from observation instead of contact. Gee, but white folks were funny. They didn’t want black folks’ game and yet they were always frequenting Negro resorts.

At three o’clock Max and Bunny paid their check and ascended to the street. Bunny wanted to go to the breakfast

dance at the Dahomey Casino but Max was in no mood for it.

‘I’m going home,’ he announced laconically, hailing a taxi. ‘Good night!’

As the cab whirled up Seventh Avenue, he settled back and thought of the girl from Atlanta. He couldn’t get her out of his mind and didn’t want to. At his rooming house, he paid the driver, unlocked the door, ascended to his room and undressed, mechanically. His mind was a kaleidoscope: Atlanta, sea-green eyes, slender figure, titian hair, frigid manner. ‘I never dance with niggers.’ Then he fell asleep about five o’clock and promptly dreamed of her. Dreamed of dancing with her, dining with her, motoring with her, sitting beside her on a golden throne while millions of manacled white slaves prostrated themselves before him. Then there was a nightmare of grim, gray men with shotguns, baying hounds, a heap of gasoline-soaked faggots and a screeching, fanatical mob.

He awoke covered with perspiration. His telephone was ringing and the late morning sunshine was streaming into his room. He leaped from bed and lifted the receiver.

‘Say,’ shouted Bunny, ‘did you see this morning’s *Times*?’

‘Hell no,’ growled Max, ‘I just woke up. Why, what’s in it?’

‘Well, do you remember Dr Junius Crookman, that colored fellow that went to Germany to study about three years ago? He’s just come back and the *Times* claims he’s announced a sure way to turn darkies white. Thought you might be interested after the way you fell for that ofay broad last night. They say Crookman’s going to open a

sanitarium in Harlem right away. There's your chance, Big Boy, and it's your only chance.' Bunny chuckled.

'Oh, ring off,' growled Max. 'That's a lot of hooey.'

But he was impressed and a little excited. Suppose there was something to it? He dressed hurriedly, after a cold shower, and went out to the newsstand. He bought a *Times* and scanned its columns. Yes, there it was:

NEGRO ANNOUNCES
REMARKABLE DISCOVERY
CAN CHANGE BLACK TO WHITE IN
THREE DAYS.

Max went into Jimmy Johnson's restaurant and greedily read the account while awaiting his breakfast. Yes, it must be true. To think of old Crookman being able to do that! Only a few years ago he'd been just a hungry medical student around Harlem. Max put down the paper and stared vacantly out of the window. Gee, Crookman would be a millionaire in no time. He'd even be a multi-millionaire. It looked as though science was to succeed where the Civil War had failed. But how could it be possible? He looked at his hands and felt at the back of his head where the straightening lotion had failed to conquer some of the knots. He toyed with his ham and eggs as he envisioned the possibilities of the discovery.

Then a sudden resolution seized him. He looked at the newspaper account again. Yes, Crookman was staying at the Phyllis Wheatley Hotel. Why not go and see what there was to this? Why not be the first Negro to try it out? Sure, it was taking a chance, but think of getting