

# Weird Tales

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## Contents for November, 1924

- Teoquitla the Golden**.....**Ramón de las Cuevas** 6  
*Complete Novelle—Aztec Sacrifice*
- The Brain in the Jar**...**N. E. Hammerstrom and R. F. Searight** 31  
*Astounding Surgery—French Spy in Germany*
- Adventure of Souls**.....**Robert Lee Heiser** 36  
*Spirit Tale of the Sea*
- Well, I'll Tell You, Ma**.....**W. McKeown** 46  
*He Wanted Adventure—and Got It*
- The Desert Lich**.....**Frank Belknap Long, Jr.** 49  
*A Necrophilic Tale*
- To a Dreamer**.....**H. P. Lovecraft** 54  
*Verse*
- The Great Panjandrum**.....**Francis Hard** 55  
*African Voodoo and Chicago Spirit*

(Continued on Next Page)

*African Voodoo and Chicago Spirit Made  
a Hero Out of George Washington*

# The Great Panjandrum

By FRANCIS HARD

*Author of "The Teakwood Shrine"*

**G**EORGE WASHINGTON was feeling ill. George Washington had the rheumatiz. That was why he had not responded to his country's call with the alacrity that might have been expected from one with so valiant a name.

Martha Washington, his wife, gave him no sympathy in his misery.

"Why yo' all doan' amount to sumpin'f'" she shrilled. "Why yo' all didn't go an' 'list in de ahmy an' come back f'um France a hero, like Mandy Johnson's man, so's I could be proud ob yo'f? I've plumb tired ob scein' de same ol' face, day aftah day, day aftah day. Ah sho wishes yo' had gone an' 'listed."

"Ah was dead sot on dat hero stuff," George opined, "but you knows ah couldn't nevah have gotten in no ahmy wif mah rheumatiz. Ef hit warn't fo' de misery in mah back, ah sholy woulda ben in France. Ah sholy would."

"Go long, yo' lazy good-fo'-nuffin' black trash! Yo' was jes' plumb scairt to death, dat's all. 'Coz ef yo' wasn't, yo'd frow back dem shoulders, an' all dat rheumatiz'd jes' dry up an' blow 'way."

"Huh!" snorted George Washington, scornfully. "Whah hit gwine go to, woman! Answer me dat! Ah nevah heard of sech ig'orance. How you specs mah misery gwine leave me, w'en hit ain't got no place fo' to go?"

He curled his lips in infinite contempt for the feeble mental powers of his spouse. But Martha Washington was not so easily put down.

"Ah hain't got no time to listen to no fool argments," she said with decision. "Yo' hain't got no mo' rheumatiz dan a fresh-laid aig. Now yo' jes' hurry along an' take dis bundle o' close to Missis Jackson's house, an' come right back, 'coz ah'm gettin' out a big washin' an' ah gotta hab yo' heah to hep me. De good Lawd knows yo' hain't much hep, bein' all hunched ovah like a ol' man, but you'se de on'y hep ah got, an' ah has to make de bes' ob it."

George Washington shouldered the bundle of laundry. An expression of pain flitted across his face.

"Whah mah misery gwine go to?" he repeated as he went out. "Jes' figgah dat out, an' mebbe yo' kin tell me wen ah gets back. Pouf!"

He walked up the street with his shoulders a little less hunched together than usual, for he had subdued Martha Washington with an unanswerable argument. He delivered the clean clothes to Mrs. Jackson, and started back, to help his wife with the washing.

But his mind was troubled. He had pitied Martha Washington for her feeble intellect. But was his own intellect any stronger than hers? His misery must go somewhere, if it left him. He knew of

eases where rheumatism had disappeared. Tandy Williams had lost his, for instance. Where had it gone?

George Washington's face became a puzzle, for he was unable to answer his own question, which he had propounded to Martha Washington with such finality. What if Martha should point to Tandy Williams as an example?

The smoke hung heavily over Chicago, and the smell of the stock yards, two miles away, lay like a blanket over the South Side. The heat weighed oppressively on George Washington, and he turned aside into the little park on Cottage Grove avenue near Thirty-fifth street, to solve the problem of where rheumatism goes when it disappears, before Martha Washington could vanquish him with his own argument.

The odor from the stock yards did not greatly distress him, for, truth to tell, he was used to it. But the prospect of being thrashed in an argument by Martha Washington was gall and wormwood to his proud spirit, for he believed firmly in the superiority of the masculine brain, and regarded man as the natural lord of creation. He dropped down, dispirited, on one of the benches which a kindly park commission allows to exist for the repose of wearied mortals, and proceeded to drink deep draughts of desperate thought. But the draughts were not cooling, for the day was hot, and his mind was not used to grappling with such tremendous problems.

Where, indeed, would his rheumatism go if it left him? Where *could* it go?

He lifted his eyes in distress. His gaze roved furtively over the little park, as if seeking an answer to his question. A passing Illinois Central train poured black smoke into his eyes, but this was hardly a drop in the infinite ocean of his misery. For he was about to be crushed

by Martha Washington on the field of argument. It was too much.

Voices from the other bench (the park boasts of two) came to his ears. Having removed the cinders from his eye, he now removed his thumb, and looked irritably at the two speakers. But his irritation vanished immediately into thin air, and he forgot the cinders. There on the other bench, not fifteen feet away, was the man who could solve his problem for him, if anybody could. This was Dr. Elusha Jones, the most penetrating intellect (in George Washington's opinion) that had ever graced the South Side.

George had listened to him, awestruck, in several debates, and become a hero worshiper in the presence of that master mind. Why, only two weeks ago he had heard the doctor annihilate his adversary in a public debate as to whether baptism were absolutely essential to salvation, or whether it were merely an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual change. Dr. Jones had proved conclusively that without baptism there can be no inner change, and therefore the act itself, the application of the water, is necessary to the saving of the soul.

Having had this auricular proof of the surpassing power of the doctor's mentality, George Washington did not doubt that it would be but play for the gentleman to solve his problem of the ultimate destination of rheumatism when it leaves its abode in the human body. He would state his problem to the doctor, and return in triumph to Martha Washington with the solution.

Feeling much happier, now that he was about to prove to Martha the superiority of masculine brains over feminine, he slid softly to the other end of the bench, to be nearer Dr. Jones and his companion, and pick up any stray pearls

of thought that might fall from their lips. His change of position was not noticed by the two men. They continued their discussion, and their voices rose by degrees from the subdued murmur which had first come to the ears of George Washington.

The men had looked with disfavor on George's intrusion, when he first entered the park, but they had lost interest as they saw him slouch down, a drooping flower, on the park bench. They had lowered their voices, momentarily, but the excitement that was mastering them soon found its way into their speech, and became audible to the listener on the other bench.

George suddenly sat bolt upright, for he thought he heard Dr. Jones mention the Great Panjandrum. Now the Great Panjandrum, as everyone knew, was the high priest of voodoo. But was this mighty being a real person? And was he a friend of Dr. Jones and his companion?

His pulse beat faster, and he edged closer to the other bench. But his heart went into his mouth at what he heard, and he left his bench and crawled on hands and knees, until he was directly behind the two men. His tongue was dry, and he swallowed with difficulty. His eyes were starting from their sockets. All thought of propounding his problem to Dr. Elusha Jones had left him, for the man seemed no longer a great intellect. He was, rather, a avenger being, sent to destroy the colored race. For he was planning an African republic in Chicago, which would surely bring the fires of the white man's vengeance upon every colored man and woman on the South Side. The whole city, perhaps the nation, would be involved in a race war more terrible than anything ever known in the United States before.

A street address dropped from Dr. Jones' lips. George Washington's ears drank it in, and he fastened his mind on it, for it was the home of the Great Panjandrum, the fanatic whose chief instrument for spreading sedition was this doctor of philosophy there before him, Elusha Jones. The Great Panjandrum, then, was a living being, and not a mere myth.

"And do not write it down," Dr. Jones was saying to his companion, "for it there should be any miscarriage of our plans, no one must know where to find the master. If not today, then his dream must be realized at another date. For we shall try, again and again, until the African race comes into its own, as our superior abilities entitle us to do."

George Washington, flat on his face behind the two speakers, felt a cold shiver run over him. Drops of cold sweat fell unheeded on the grass. A panic fear gnawed at his vitals.

"Everything is ready," continued the doctor of philosophy. "At 2 o'clock the uprising will start. But nothing must be done until the Great Panjandrum himself gives the signal. Everything depends on that."

GEORGE WASHINGTON rose stealthily to his knees, and crept backwards, to the bench he had first occupied. Once seated there, he yawned lackadaisically, attracting the momentary attention of the two conspirators. Then he strolled nonchalantly out of the park. Once on the street, he turned north and ran with all his speed to the Cottage Grove Avenue police station.

A florid-faced desk sergeant, wearing with what dignity he could an aureole of flame-colored hair and a closely cropped mustache of the same color, stopped him in the midst of a breathless recital of the Great Panjandrum's plans.

Perspiring, panting from running, the excited negro breathlessly began again to stammer out fragmentary details of what he had heard about the uprising of blacks scheduled for that afternoon.

"Calm yerself, me boy," the arm of the law admonished him, emphasizing his words by pulling an imaginary trigger on the pencil stub which he held in his fat fingers. "Are yez gone clean crazy? Or is ut moonshine in ye that's talkin'? Slower, me lad. Now, phwat is ut ye want? Spake out."

"The Great Panjandrum!" George Washington blurted out.

Three or four coppers had strolled into the office. They listened with amused contempt to George Washington's recital.

"Phwat in the world are ye talkin' about?" continued the desk sergeant, implacably. "Has the Great Pan-what-ye-call-him shtolen anything from ye? Is he twinn' to murder ye? Hand us his name and we'll book him for ye, if ut's as serious as all that. Out with ut, me boy. Phwat's bitin' ye? Who are ye, anyway?"

"Jawge Washin'ton," stammered the unhappy negro, and attempted to resume his narration.

The listeners broke into coarse laughter.

"My regards to your wife, Martha Washington, old top," said a tall, cadaverous copper, jocularly giving George a slap on the back that almost bowled him over.

"She's at home hangin' out the washin'," said George, meekly, interrupting his narrative again.

The outburst that greeted this reply wounded his pride. He felt aggrieved. He was trying to help the forces of law and order, but they were giving him the horse laugh.

"Silence!" roared the desk sergeant, glaring at the disorderly coppers with outraged dignity. "Where d'ye think ye are, at home?"

The hilarity subsided into baritone giggles.

"Where do ye live?" obstinately continued the desk sergeant, holding the pencil as if it were a pistol, and taking careful aim with it at George's breast.

"On Fo'tieth street, jes' off Cottage Grove avenue, your Honor," George replied.

The hilarity broke out afresh, with unprecedented violence, at the title George so innocently bestowed on the desk sergeant, and that dignitary shot glances of fierce anger at the recalcitrant policemen. If looks were daggers, the coppers would have died on the instant.

"Ah lives in de fo'th house f'um de corner, in de rear."

"Well, phwat do ye want? Why don't ye spake up? Who is this Great Panhandler, or what d'ye call him?"

"De Great Panjandrum," George corrected him. "He's a pusson, suh. Dey's a parade of soldyahs, suh, at 2 o'clock dis aftahnoon. Dey want a bonus of sumpin. An' dey's gwine be trouble."

"Trouble, is ut? Well, bejabbers, them boys have a police permit to parade, and if anyone shtarts trouble—"

Here the sergeant took careful aim with his pencil, and again pulled the airy trigger, three times, as if shooting somebody.

"But phwat's all this got to do with the Great Panjabers? Out with ut, now. Phwat's wrong?"

"De Great Panjandrum done lib on Federal street," went on George Washington, desperately. "Two dolz no'th f'um Thirty-second, on de uppah story. An' he's gwins organize a cullud republic. Yes, suh, dat's jes' wot he's callatin' fo' to do. An' hit means

trouble. 'Coz ef he succeeds, or ef he doan' succeed, hit's all de same. Fo' de wite folks will sholy put dat republic down in blood, lots of it, an' hit means dat hundreds of po' cullud folks an' po' wite folks dat ain't nevah hahm'd nobody in dair lives is gwine git murdered. Dat's jes' wot hit means. Yes, suh."

"Say, nigger," retorted the sergeant with heat, "how do ye get that way? You leave that moonshine alone. It's whisky that's shpakin' in ye. If your Great Panjoobers is such a punkins that he thinks he can set up a nigger republic, why don't you help him? You're a fine nigger, you are!"

The coppers laughed again. George Washington felt sick at heart. But he threw back his shoulders and looked the desk sergeant squarely between the eyes.

"Yes, suh," he said, "I'se cullud. I'se black. Ah ain't no mulatto, neithah. But I'se an American citizen, an' ah ain't gwine stan' fo' no fumadiddles. Ah doan' want to see no race riots in dis year town, but I'se tellin' you right now, dat ef you doan' go an' get de Great Panjandrum an' lock him up in a good safe jail dat he cain't git out of, dey's gwine be de worstes' an' bloodies' race riot dat you evah heard tell of. Yes, suh. Fo' de Great Panjandrum done been gwine give de signal at 2 dis aftahnoon, an' den de po' fools dat believes in him is gwine attack de parade an' staht de fightin'. Dey aims to set up a republic an' kill de wite people. Yes, suh."

"D'ye get that?" asked the desk sergeant sarcastically, talking to the coppers, and screwing his fiery eyebrows into a fierce scowl. Then, turning his attention to George Washington again: "Clear out o' this, now, with yer moonshine about the Great Pajamas, or I'll book ye fer bein' drunk. Why don't ye arrest him yerself, if ye can find him?

The Great Pajamas! Ha, ha! That's good!"

"Dat's jes' wot ah'm fixin' fo' to do," retorted George Washington. "De good Lawd knows ah done tried mah bestes' to get you to stop dis race riot, an' now I'se got to stop it all by mahse'f."

He beat a hasty retreat from the station, and wandered along the streets, his mind working at fever heat. The officers of the law had refused to aid him, and his race was in terrible danger. There were three million people in Chicago. What could the less than half-million negroes of the South Side do against all those white men? It would mean a bloody war, in which he visioned the extermination of his race, the death of Martha Washington (he shuddered at the suggestion), and the end of every-thing.

**T**ORMENTED with these thoughts, and with his own helplessness, he walked for what seemed a very long time, tracing and retracing his steps. Martha Washington and his argument with her were both forgotten. Forgotten, also, was his rheumatism. The only thing that mattered was to stop the impending trouble.

He looked at the clock in a barber shop as he passed, and started in terrified alarm. He had been wandering for hours. It was already a quarter past one. For a minute he thought of appealing to the mayor, but there was no time for that. The Great Panjandrum would give the signal at 2 o'clock, and the uprising would be on.

George looked about him, and found himself at the corner of Federal street and Thirty-third. He was only one block away from the fountain-head of the revolt.

Hardly daring to express in definite form the resolve that flashed across his mind, for fear he would reject it if he

saw it in its naked reality, he ran down the street, and stopped in front of the three-story frame building where dwelt the grand mogul of sedition. Up the stairs he went, three steps at a time, and burst into a small room where three colored men were engaged in excited conference, with their heads close together, speaking in agitated whispers. They leaped to their feet as George Washington rushed in.

The three men were robed in white garments, cowed like monks, with the hoods thrown back, revealing their heads. One was fat, and squinted at the intruder through puffy folds of flesh around his dull black eyes. The other two men were lean and malign. Their robes were spotted with dabs of fresh blood, and red crosses had been drawn in blood over the men's hearts.

George Washington shuddered as he confronted the sinister trio.

"I has a message fo' de Great Panjandrum," he panted. "Wich is him?"

The taller of the two lean men looked at him skeptically.

"The Great Panjandrum cannot be seen," he said. "From whom is the message?"

"F'um Doctah Elusha Jones, suh," replied George Washington.

The name proved a talisman, an "open sesame" to the inner temple of voodoo. The desperate colored man felt that sinister rites must be going on behind the heavy black curtain that covered one side of the room. This curtain was now drawn back by unseen hands, revealing a small door, covered with weird and horrible symbols. A painted green serpent writhed malevolently across the paneling, crushing in its folds a white infant, and menaced by a charging black ram with short, sharp horns. George experienced acute nausea. A sensation of cold fear attacked the pit

of his stomach, for he realized that he was about to stand in the presence of the high priest of voodoo.

The door swung slowly back. In George's disordered fancy the painted snake moved, drawing its folds tighter about the form of the child, and the black ram seemed to shake its sharp horns. The tall, lean man who had questioned him now shoved him forward, and the door swung shut behind him.

For a minute George could make out nothing, for a brilliant electric arc light dazzled his eyes. Then he saw, standing before him, a coal-black negro, scarcely more than five feet tall, wizened, and apparently very old. Fuzzy tufts of gray hair showed behind his ears. His face was carved by a thousand wrinkles. His thin hands, ending in carefully polished nails, clutched nervously at a tract that he had been reading when George Washington entered the chamber. He was loosely garbed in a white robe, dabbled in fresh blood, like the garments of his aids in the outer room. A tall stove-pipe hat sat on his thin temples.

The room was hung with heavy black curtains, which shut out all light from outside. It was illuminated solely by the arc light that had dazzled George when he first came into the room. On the table was a bowl filled with blood from a small black goat, freshly killed. The animal's carcass lay alongside on the table, and its heart was floating in the bowl. The table, like the walls, was shrouded in black cloth.

The cunning eyes of the wizened negro looked searchingly into the face of the intruder, as if seeking to read his errand there.

"Is you de Great Panjandrum?" asked George, struggling for words, and frightened nearly to death.

"I am he," replied the other.

"Says wich!"

"I am he. What do you want? Be quick, fool; I can't talk to you all day."

"Oh, mistah, Doctah Jones done sen' dis message by me, dat hit ain't no use fo' to staht dat dere revoloooshion nohow. Hit ain't got no chance fo' to succeed, an' you is jes gwine frow away de lives of de cullud people. Yes, suh."

The high priest's face took on a terrible expression.

"This to me?" he roared. "This from Elusha Jones? He dares dictate to me?"

"Yes, suh. I mean, no, suh."

"We will proceed without him. It is time to strike, and at once."

The Great Panjandrum began to divest himself of the blood-streaked robe of his voodoo priesthood, revealing a neat business suit underneath.

"No, suh, hit ain't Doctah Jones. Hit's me, an' hit's de othah cullud folks dat will be kilt in dis yeer foolish revolt! No, suh, you cain't mean you is gwine staht to fire on de soldyahs dat's out paradin' fo' to get a bonus f'um Congress. Cain't you see, beggin' youah pahdon, suh, but cain't you see dat hit ain't no use? Dat dey ain't no chanst fo' hit to succeed? No, suh. Dey ain't no chanst. An' you ain't gwine move f'um dis yeer room, till you promises me dat dey ain't gwine be no revoloooshion. 'Coz nobody ain't gwine staht nuffin' less you gives 'em de signal."

The Great Panjandrum raised his voice in a sharp command. The door swung open, and the three men from the outer room entered.

"Bind him and gag him and drop him into the hole," the high priest ordered, abruptly.

The robed figures moved forward to obey, but George Washington, in an agony of desperation, clung to the robe of the leader in a last entreaty.

"No, suh. Ah ain't gwine leave you till you promises. Hit cain't do no good, suh, to de cullud folks. Hit cain't do no good nohow."

The three men leaped upon him, but he clung with the grip of despair to the Great Panjandrum. The table crashed over on its side. The bowl upset, and drenched George in the blood of the black goat. His shabby felt hat fell to the floor, and was kicked to one side in the scuffle.

The fat man turned his attention to a hidden push-button under the carpet, waiting for the other two to pry George loose from the Great Panjandrum. But the four men rolled and scuffled and kicked and bit, and the fat man could not press the button without dropping all four of them into the black hole that yawned beneath the carpet. The flying legs of one of the men struck the fat man on the back of the head. With a howl of pain, he involuntarily pressed the button. The floor opened. George, whose right hand had been pried loose, clutched frantically at the leg of the fat man, and pulled him down. All five fell through the floor, and the bowl rolled after them, together with the remains of the black goat. The trap-door closed above them.

**H**ARDLY had the Great Panjandrum and his men fallen into the dark hole with their prisoner, when a shuffling of feet was heard overhead. Several men burst into the room. The votaries of voodoo clapped their hands over George Washington's mouth, to silence him. They listened intently.

The men, who had entered the room with drawn revolvers, were a detail of police, sent to arrest the Great Panjandrum, after a later warning than George's had wakened them to a sense of the peril confronting the South Side.



Dr. Jones and his companion were already in custody, and several others had admitted their part in the scheduled uprising. But the head-spring of the movement was gone, for the room of the Great Panjandrum was empty. The carpet, perfectly synchronizing with the edges of the trap-door, concealed the tell-tale crevice that would otherwise have led the police to find the high priest and his captive in the dark hole directly beneath their feet.

George heard their exclamations of disappointment, as they caught sight of the overturned table, and other evidences of a struggle. One of the coppers picked up George's blood-stained hat.

"Don't this belong to that nigger who came to the station this morning, the one who told us where the Great Panjandrum could be found?" he asked.

The coppers passed the hat from hand to hand. It was drenched in the goat's blood that had poured on it from the overturned bowl. The carpet was dabbled in blood. Evidently the struggle had been desperate.

"Poor devil," said one of the coppers. "He's dead enough now, I guess. The damn fool must have tried to capture the Grand Panjabrum all by himself! He had nerve, anyway, that bird had."

George swelled with pride. Not visibly, for it was very dark in the hole; but he swelled nevertheless. Why, he was a hero! Or at least he would be if he got out of this scrape alive. He tore at the hands of his captors, who held him fast by the mouth, effectually gagging him. He tried to scream out, to tell the coppers that he was there, just under their feet. But the tall, lean man pressed his thumb tight against the unhappy captive's windpipe, and shut off his breath. George struggled hard for a minute, and then lost consciousness.

How long afterwards he awoke from his swoon he did not know, but it seemed to him that a long time had elapsed, for his dreams had been long and troubled. He was still in the black hole, and a hand was held tightly over his mouth. But there was no longer a pressure on his windpipe. The men with him—the Great Panjandrum and his aids—were as silent as death. Not a whisper passed between them. Even their breathing was inaudible.

George opened his eyes. All was as dark as the pit. He heard a slight noise over his head, as if someone were rolling pebbles over the floor. Voices made themselves audible to him, and he distinctly heard a man cursing. The noise of pebbles stopped, then began again.

"Little Phoebe!" said a voice. "Come to papa!"

"A dollar he comes," said another voice.

"A dollar he doesn't."

By the voices George knew there were three men in the room above. They were coppers who had been left behind to seize the Great Panjandrum if he should return. George knew well enough what their conversation signified, for rolling the spotted cubes was one of his proudest accomplishments. He had lost more money that way than he had ever spent on all the other necessities of life put together. He had even been forced to put in many extra hours soliciting washing for Martha, to get the wherewithal to fling the flying dominoes.

The sound of the rolling dice recalled him to a sense of life and the pleasures thereof. He could not die like a rat in a trap, when liberty, life, joy, were flaunting themselves just a few feet above his head.

Wrenching himself free for an instant, he screamed for help. Instantly the struggle was renewed in the black hole, but the coppers had heard his cry. They

tore up the carpet, and the hidden push-button was revealed. Standing back from the trap, they pushed the button, and the door fell back. One of the coppers held it from springing into place again by inserting the dice in the springs, and another flashed his pocket light into the dark hole.

Resistance was futile, and the Great Panjandrum and his aids surrendered. One by one they gave their hands to the coppers, and were pulled out of the hole and handcuffed. George was last. He stood upon his two feet, a hero, and told his story, which he had to repeat later at the police station.

**B**UT IN the meantime there was wailing and weeping at Martha Washington's. She had received the news of George Washington's death with the grief that was becoming and proper to a faithful and loving wife. First she buried her face in a pillow-slip that she had just ironed, and drenched it with tears, making a further ironing necessary. Then she took the blood-stained hat from the policeman who had brought it, and wept over it, and called upon heaven to witness that she had always loved this wonderful hero husband of hers with a love that surpassed all understanding.

The news of his death had spread rapidly, together with the story of his incredible heroism in attempting to take the Great Panjandrum single-handed, after the police had refused to help him. One report had it that he had slain the Great Panjandrum in mortal combat, and was thereupon foully done to death from behind by a craven disciple of voodoo, and dragged away and his body thrown down a well. But all accounts agreed that he had been a hero. And the blood-stained hat, still red from the life-fluid of the black goat, was mute witness that he had been murdered.

"Oh, mah man, mah man!" moaned Martha. "He was a hero, mah man was! An' naow he done lef' me! He won't nevah come back to me, nevah no mo'! An' all his life he was so kind, an' we nevah ain't had one cross word pass between us all our lives. An' naow he's dead! Ain't it awful!"

Her grief was sincere. There could be no doubt of that, although some of her neighbors thought she was overdoing it just a little.

"Wy, you Martha, doan' tell so many lies, ef you wants to git to heb'n wen you dies," Mandy Williams reproached her. "Jawge warn't no hero, else he'd a gone in de shmy. An' you was *always* quarrelin', you two. Lan' sakes, ah nevah knowed two sech people fo' callin' each othah names as Jawge Washin'ton an' you."

"Mandy, yo' quit talkin' dat way! I'se enjoyin' mah misery, an' heah yo' comes an' tries to spoil it all!"

**B**UT George Washington was far from dead. He walked homeward with a sprightly step, after he left the police station, for the world was his. He had vanquished the Great Panjandrum, and now and henceforth forever he would be a hero. What would Martha Washington say now?

She was almost alone when he burst in upon her grief. She looked up through scared eyes, and blinked. The woman with her, who had come to console her and gather the latest news, shrank away.

"Watsa mattah?" asked George. "Wy you-all lookin' dat way? You-all sho' does look skeered o' sumpin. Watsa mattah, Martha?"

"Jawge Washin'ton! Yo' hain't no ghost! Yo'se all heah in de flesh! An' yo' hain't ben murdered! Prate be!"

This was something like what he had expected. George's chest swelled higher, with pride. But there was something else on Martha's mind. Her eyes were as big as saucers. She was looking at his manly shoulders, and the devil-may-care toss of his head.

"Jawge Washin'ton!" she scolded him. "Whah yo' ben all day? An' whah yo' rheumatiz done gone? Haow come yo' frows yo' shouldahs back lak dat, wen yo' hain't nevah ben good fo' nuffin' wid de rheumatiz?"

George was stunned.

"W-wy, Martha," he stammered. "Ah guess ah done fergot about de misery in mah back. Leastwise hit ain't botherin' me none now. But Martha, ain't you

kinda glad to see me back again? Ain't you proud of me, Martha?"

"Well," said Martha, relenting, "mebbe ah is. Mebbe ah is proud ob yo'. But yo' hurry up naow"—her voice rose querulously—"an' get dem close offn de line, 'coz ah got a big ironin' an' ah got to git it done. Git a move on, niggah; yo' heahs me?"

George Washington obediently shouldered the basket and went out into the back yard. Martha Washington's high-pitched voice followed him. But there was a happy gleam in his dark eyes as he took down the clothes and threw them into the basket. For at last, after all these years, Martha Washington was proud of him.