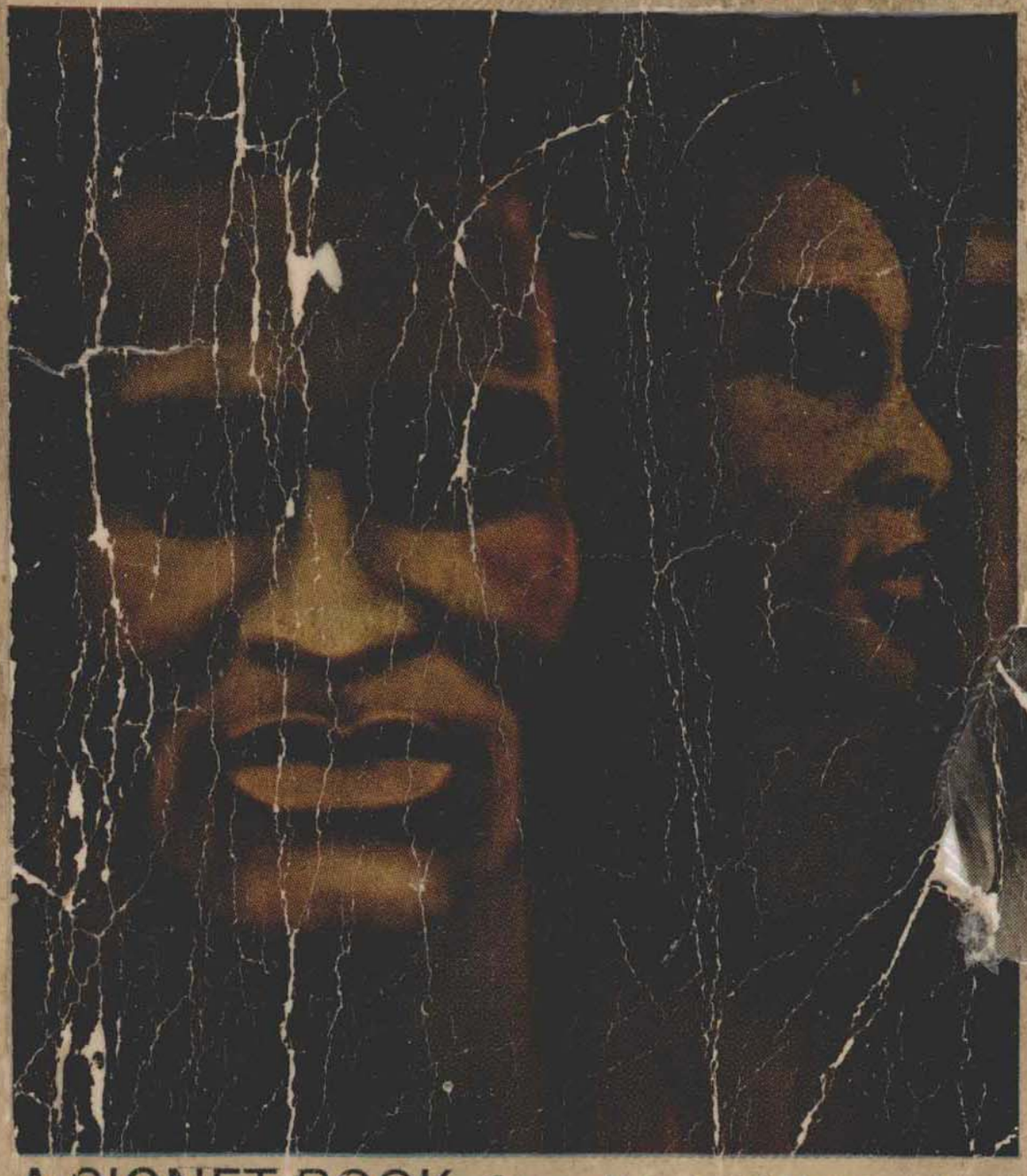
SIGNET
T2532

The Third Generation

A Novel by CHESTER HIMES

"By far the most intense and compassionate probing of the psychological predicament of a middle-class Negro family yet written."
—*Ralph Ellison, author of* ***Invisible Man***



A SIGNET BOOK · Complete and Unabridged

THE THIRD GENERATION

Not since D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* has the desperate tie between a mother and her son been revealed with such agonizing power and psychological depth. Lillian Taylor had love, beauty, security; everything, in fact, except the one thing she wanted—acceptance in a white world.

Embittered, domineering, she was revolted by her husband's dark skin, scornful of his middle-class success. All her hopes were centered on her handsome son Charles. The heartbreaking love between these two mounts to tragic crisis as Charles, unable to place himself in either Negro or white society, enters a nether world of vicious debauchery and self-destruction. . . .

"This searing book, with its terrible pathos of the oppressed set against each other, shows how increasingly firm a position [Chester Himes] deserves among American novelists."

—*New York Times*

4.'7

Other SIGNET Books You Will Enjoy

GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN **by James Baldwin**

The brilliant first novel by the author of the current best-seller, *Another Country*. Set in New York's Harlem.
(#P2272—60¢)

STRANGE FRUIT **by Lillian Smith**

The great bestselling novel about two lovers in a Southern town who dare to break down age-old racial barriers.
(#D1953—50¢)

INVISIBLE MAN **by Ralph Ellison**

A novel of extraordinary power about a Negro man's desperate search for his own identity. Winner of the National Book Award. (#T1823—75¢)

NATIVE SON **by Richard Wright**

The stark, vehement, deeply moving novel about a young Negro who is hardened by life in the slums and whose every effort to free himself proves hopeless.
(#CT81—75¢)

The Third Generation

by

CHESTER HIMES

A SIGNET BOOK

Published by THE NEW AMERICAN LIBRARY

Published as a SIGNET BOOK
by arrangement with The World Publishing Company,
who have authorized this softcover edition.

FIRST PRINTING, MAY, 1956
SECOND PRINTING, JULY, 1964

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Four lines of *Memory Lane*, on page 174, Copyright 1924 by Harms, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

Two lines of *Collegiate*, on page 174, Copyright 1925 by Shapiro, Bernstein & Co., Inc. Copyright renewed. Assigned to Shapiro, Bernstein & Co., Inc.

Two lines of *Chloë*, on page 174, lyrics by Gus Kahn, music by Neil Moret, Copyright 1927 Villa Moret, Inc. Rights controlled by Robbins Music Corporation. Used by Special Permission.

Four lines of *Where'd You Get Those Eyes*, on page 189, Copyright 1926 by Leo Feist Inc. Words and music by Walter Donaldson. Used by Special Permission of Copyright Proprietor.

Two lines from *Me and My Shadow*, on page 190, Copyright 1927 by Bourne, Inc. Used by Permission of the Copyright owners.

Two lines from *Gimme a Little Kiss*, on page 195, Copyright 1926 by ABC Music Corp. Used by Permission of the Copyright owners.

Two lines of *Three O'Clock in the Morning*, on page 198, words by Dorothy Terriss, music by Julian Robledo. Copyright 1921/22 West's Ltd., London, England. Copyright Renewal 1949/50 West's Ltd., London, England. Leo Feist Inc. Sole and Exclusive Agents for United States and Canada. Used by Special Permission.

Three lines of *When Day Is Done*, on page 230, Copyright 1926 by Harms, Inc. Reprinted by Permission.

Two lines of *Among My Souvenirs* on page 260, Copyright 1927 by DeSylva, Brown & Henderson, Inc. Reprinted by Permission.

SIGNET BOOKS are published by
The New American Library of World Literature, Inc.
501 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10022

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

FOR *Jean*

". . . for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me."

—EXODUS 20:5

1

SPRING WAS IN THE AIR. THE BRIGHT morning sunshine had dried the dew and warmed the ground, and crocuses, bordering the front brick walk, bloomed in yellow flame. Rosebushes along the front picket fence were heavy with buds, and the tiny lacquered leaves of the spreading elderberry tree trembled as if in ecstasy. Everything seemed dazzlingly clean and dressed for an occasion. Beyond the vivid green of the sprouting grass the small frame house glistened with fresh white paint.

The faces of two small children pressed wistfully against the front windowpanes gave eyes to the house. It was a pleasant house, and one could imagine it having eyes, and smiling, too, on such a morning. Professor Taylor rented it from the college president.

Upstairs were three comfortable bedrooms, and downstairs the living room, library, dining room and kitchen, all furnished tastefully as befitted a teacher's home. But the library, more than any of the others, revealed both the endowments and pretensions of Professor and Mrs. Taylor. It contained four large, mahogany-stained bookcases filled with mail-order de luxe editions, leather-backed, gilt-lettered volumes, known as "sets." A set of Thackeray sat atop a set of Dickens, and a set of Longfellow nudged a set of Poe; a set of *Roman Classics* vied with a set of *Greek Classics,* and a set of the Encyclopedia contested the place of honor with a set of the *Book of Knowledge.* They were understandably very proud of their library. With the single exception of the president's, it was the only one in the community, and his was not nearly as "complete."

Occasionally Professor Taylor would recline there in his easy chair and nod over a volume, the brightly burning gas mantle hissing him awake from time to time. Or he would have his cronies in for a glass of elderberry wine and pace

back and forth, recounting some story. But the children really enjoyed it. Thomas, at eleven, loved to read, while the tots, five-year-old William Lee Jr. and Charles Manning, sixteen months younger, were enthralled by the pictures. For her part, Mrs. Taylor preferred to read in the living room because of the grand piano. Music had always been her sanctuary and the nearness of the piano gave her a sense of security. Besides, owning a grand piano had always seemed to her indicative of good breeding.

The dining room was rarely used except for Sunday dinners or when they had company. Most of the time they ate in the kitchen at a table covered with printed oilcloth. It was a large bright kitchen looking onto the back garden, equipped with a huge wood-burning range. Twice weekly a woman came in and did the washing and heavy cleaning, but Mrs. Taylor did her own cooking.

At the precise moment the children were staring so longingly at the front yard, she paused in the act of wiping the dishpan to listen. It was not like them to be quiet. Hastily, she hung the pan on its nail beside the table and went forward to investigate. They pounced on her instantly, tugging at her skirt in their excitement.

"Mama, can we go out and play? Can we go out and play?"

"*May* you," she corrected, "not *can* you. And you must call me *Mother*—how many times must I tell you?"

"*Mother* . . . May we, *Mother?* May we go out and play?"

"Let Mother see first," she said, crossing to the window as they clung to her. It would be a blessing if they could, she thought—they were like caged tiger cubs.

For an instant her gaze went toward the entrance to the college, directly across the street, flanked by fieldstone pillars. It was an old college with a fine tradition and had been founded by a regiment of Negro soldiers who had fought in the Civil War. The campus was enclosed by a high thick hedge but there was a knoll beyond and she saw several shirt-sleeved students hurrying along the paths. Then she glanced appraisingly at the blue, cloudless sky. It promised to be a beautiful day, the first warm day of spring.

"Yes, children, you may go out for an hour before lunch," she consented, but called them back as they dashed off. "You must wear your woolen playsuits. There's still

原书缺页

原书缺页

the most part he was disarmingly ingratiating, not only toward his superiors but toward most persons.

Mrs. Taylor detested this latter characteristic most of all. Anything which, to her way of thinking, savored of being submissive sickened her. Of late she had noticed in William an expression of vague constraint as if he were holding himself back, which seemed to reflect his father's submissive attitude. It troubled her.

On the other hand, Charles was gleeful and spontaneous with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes; he caused her more anxiety though he gave her more delight. Also, his skin was of a lighter complexion. She thought of it as "olive-colored," similar to the complexions of southern Europeans. In reality it was the rosy, sepia hue common to mulatto children. He had a round, smiling face with a small, straight nose and a pretty, well-shaped mouth. The corners of his lips were constantly turned up in a smile and dimples appeared in both cheeks when he laughed. He had straight black hair which hung to his neck in a bob and showed signs of much care.

It was one of Mrs. Taylor's deepest regrets that none of her sons had inherited her own soft, straight hair, which, to the same degree as her straight nose and fair complexion, was indicative of her white blood. She had been reared in the tradition that Negroes with straight hair and light complexions were superior to dark-complexioned Negroes with kinky hair. This conviction was supported by the fact that light-complexioned skin and straight hair did give Negroes a certain prestige within their race.

Of her three sons, Charles was her last hope in this respect. She longed for him to resemble her own father, after whom he had been named. From his birth she had taken great pains with his hair, nursing it along as if his life depended on it being straight. Every night she massaged his scalp with warm olive oil and gave his hair a hundred strokes with an imported brush; and several times each day she gently pinched the bridge of his nose to keep it from flattening out. At times Professor Taylor complained, "What are you trying to do, make a girl out of him?" But she ignored him and continued to do all within her power to cultivate her son's white features.

Although she tried to love her sons equally, deep within her she loved Charles best.

As she stood behind the front screen door, watching the children play, she recalled what a seven-day sensation she

had caused by engaging a white doctor at their births. It had incurred the animosity of all the Negro physicians and had provoked great consternation among the faculty. Her face hardened with a vague bitterness and she derived a fleeting sense of pleasure from the memory of her husband's tremendous trepidation at the time. He was afraid of his own shadow, she thought.

The children were crouching down behind the rosebushes, peering through the picket fence. A dog trotted by on the cinder path outside.

"Bang! Bang!" screamed the children.

The dog jumped as if he had been stung and fled down the gulley. The children ran in wild pursuit as far as the yard permitted. She wondered absently what the dog represented.

Her gaze lingered on Charles. She'd wanted a girl when he was born, she recalled, thinking, he looked enough like a girl to have been one. It reminded her of what the doctor had laughingly remarked at his birth, "He is almost a girl, at that."

Unconsciously she sniffed for the scent of flowers, a habit left over from her girlhood when she had tried to tell what flowers were blooming when she passed a garden at night. She had loved flowers and had addressed them as if they were human, scolding those that grew poorly and praising those that did well. There was a wonderful, earthy scent in the air, she noticed. It reminded her of the Easter Rambles held in her home town when she was a little girl. For a moment she reveled in the memory of the good times she had had during her girlhood. "Such good times," she murmured, the words escaping from her lips. She smiled strangely; then the present invaded her consciousness again and the smile saddened and slowly vanished.

Sighing, she smoothed her hair. She wore it parted on the left and brushed loosely across her forehead, gathered in a chignon behind. In repose her features had a slightly drawn and bitter cast and her skin had the slightly pallid hue of one who has been ill for a long time. There were dark circles about her deep-set, gray-green eyes, and the lids drooped, giving her a look of weariness.

She was a tiny woman, but she carried herself with such implacable determination that her size was seldom noticed. She had always dressed attractively, even at home. The dark woolen dress she now wore had been ordered from Chicago but she had made the gingham apron. Her hands, clasped

loosely across her waist, were slightly rough, and the knuckles were reddened and swollen from washing dishes. Her engagement ring with a solitary pearl and the plain gold wedding band which Professor Taylor had made in his shop from virgin metal gleamed brightly in the sunlight.

Absently, she watched the people pass along the street. A farmer drove by, his dilapidated wagon, pulled by a brace of mules, piled high with cordwood. She looked down across the front yards and picket fences of her neighbors. It was a pleasant street, flanked by scattered elms, and the weeds had not yet had time to grow high in the gutters. Later, all the trees and flowers would be in bloom, she thought, and when the hedge about the college bloomed it was a lovely sight. Farther down the street was the state prison, bordered by an exquisitely beautiful flower garden tended by the prisoners, and sometimes the forbidding Black Maria passed before their door.

Mrs. Barnes drove by in her new carriage, the perfectly matched team of dappled gray mares kicking up dust from the graveled roadway. It was a pretty sight. Mrs. Taylor had heard they had a new carriage, but this was the first time she saw it. Dr. Barnes must be doing very well indeed, she reflected. In addition to being head of the college hospital he had a very good private practice. They lived in a large colonial-style house in the next block.

Mrs. Taylor was not on intimate terms with the Barneses —Dr. Barnes had never forgiven her for engaging a white doctor at the birth of her sons—and she prided herself on never having "set foot" in their house. But she had heard of their expensive furnishings and she had seen their blooded horses and luxurious carriages passing along the street. And she was no different from the other women of the community who envied them. But, unlike the others, she did not consider them her superior. Despite all their possessions and their great prestige, she felt herself to be their superior. And this was due entirely to the fact that Dr. Barnes was a dark-complexioned man and his wife only a "high yellow" with kinky hair. Mrs. Barnes could have no more than three-fourths white blood at best, and that was highly improbable, Mrs. Taylor had decided. She herself was only one thirty-second part Negro. And in her veins flowed some of the most aristocratic white blood in all the South. Mrs. Taylor thought of racial strains in terms of blood, and of this blood as flowing in her veins.

Mrs. Taylor had not always been so preoccupied with

racial strains. Nor had her sense of being a superior person evoked such bitter disparagement. At first it had been protective, a shield for her wounded pride and outraged sensitivity. Quite often it had been constructive, enabling her to set her sights higher than most Negroes would have dared. It extended the limitations of her ambitions. And it also defended her from despondency and defeat. Whenever she felt the urge to give up, she reminded herself of her parents' magnificent accomplishment, of how they had come out of slavery and made a home for themselves, and after great hardship had prospered and educated all seven of their children. She had inherited their determination and stamina and their credo—to want something better, to become educated, to be somebody worthwhile. And in remembering what they had done, she always remembered how they looked.

Her father had been a tall, spare man with light brown hair and a long silky beard. His complexion was as fair as any white person's. Her mother, though slightly darker, had the coarse black hair and high cheekbones of an Indian. Both would have been accepted as white in a northern state. But it had never occurred to them to leave the South.

They had three small children when they were freed. Their one asset with which to face a new, strange life had been their ability to read and write. Both had been "body slaves" and after the Civil War their master had tried to persuade them to remain on the plantation.

"You have never known want, and if you remain with me, you never will," he had promised them.

Dr. Jessie Manning was descended from the English peerage, and had once served in the United States Senate. According to his own lights he had tried to be a kind and just master. Both Charles and Lin loved him. But they had refused to stay. Even though the very thought of freedom had terrified them, they had wanted to be free. Deep inside them had been some compelling urge to flee from the shadow of slavery, to rear their children in the sunlight, to provide them with something better, with education and opportunity. They had heard these ideas propounded by their master; they had listened to the reverence in his voice; they had believed.

For two years they lived in a floorless, one-room cabin with a lean-to on an acre of land they had cleared. Charles had learned brick masonry and did odd jobs in the neighborhood while Lin took in washing and worked as a wet nurse.

But the proximity of the old plantation had stifled their sense of freedom. They moved to a railroad town in Georgia and took the family name of Manning. For a decade Charles worked as a brick mason. Another son and three daughters were born to them there. Mrs. Taylor's Christian name was Lillian, and she was second from the youngest.

Although she was then a little girl, not more than five, Lillian could remember the crisis that had arisen when her father went broke. He had been ill for a long time and one day he had said to Lin, "Hon, we got to sell the house."

They had moved to Atlanta and he had worked for a time as a Pullman porter before finally having to quit. For three years he had been ill with tuberculosis, and for a year he had been confined to his bed. It had fallen Lillian's lot to nurse him. All of the older children had worked desperately to make ends meet. Lillian never forgot the great piles of laundry her mother washed each day. But they had never given up.

When her father recovered, the family returned to the town in South Carolina where the parents had grown up as slaves. Once again they had cleared a plot of land and built another house. The parents were more determined than ever to bring their children up in the church, give them an education and a better start in life. They joined the Presbyterian Church; Charles became a Deacon and the Superintendent of the Sunday School, and Lin became active in missionary work. For years the church had been the center of their social life.

It had been a slow, hard struggle all the way. Despite his ill health, Charles had worked long hours as a brick mason and day laborer, while Lin did washing. But they had sent their children to college, the girls to the church seminary and the boys to a college in Atlanta.

All of the girls had been considered very talented; they played the piano and had "white folks' manners." All had fair complexions and reddish hair. The three eldest had taught at the seminary upon graduation. Tom, the eldest son, had become a successful building contractor. Both Charlie, his younger brother, and his father had worked for him.

During that time the family had gained in prestige and had become prominent throughout the town and state. Two of the girls had married doctors. Lillian's oldest sister had married a minister who had later become a bishop. Both brothers had married schoolteachers.

Lillian had taken piano lessons from the age of six and had been considered the genius of the family. She had been given to daydreaming and was moody and temperamental. When her older brothers and sisters had grown up and began earning their living the family showed signs of prosperity. After the age of ten she had been raised in very pleasant circumstances. It had been during her early teens she had first conceived the romantic notions of her heredity.

She had seen only one of her grandparents, "Grandma Mary," her father's mother, who had lived on the old plantation until her death. Her parents never spoke of the others. She had been a curious girl. Once she had asked her mother, "Where does Grandpa live, ma?"

"Your grandpa was killed in the war," Lin had replied.

"Both of them?"

Lin had stopped ironing and had sat in the rocker by the hearth. "Come here, chile, and I will tell you all 'bout your grandpas. Your Grandpa Manning, your pa's pa, was killed at Chickamauga when he threw himself in front of Ol' Mars to save his life. He caught the bullet that was 'tended for Ol' Mars' heart and fell dead at his feet. And my pa was shot trying to get through Gen'l Sherman's lines to carry orders to the cap'n of the Georgia troops. They never did find his body."

Lillian had known that this was fiction to satisfy her curiosity and had become more curious than ever. After that she had eavesdropped on her parents' conversations. One of her favorite positions was in the dark by the open kitchen window when her parents thought her in bed. Here she had learned that her father was the son of Dr. Jessie Manning, and that her mother was the daughter of an Irish overseer and an Indian slave.

She had added to the story, enlarging and changing the parts she didn't like. The resulting story was that her father was the son of Dr. Manning and a beautiful octoroon, the most beautiful woman in all the state, whose own father had been an English nobleman. Her mother was the daughter of a son of a United States President and an octoroon who was the daughter of a Confederate Army general.

At first it had been a childish game of fantasy. After having received several whippings for recounting it to her wide-eyed schoolmates she had kept it to herself, and in time had outgrown it. As a young woman she had felt a real sense of superiority which, in her home environment, had needed no support.