

George's Garden

by

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I don't remember my mother, but she worked on the farm of Moses Carver, near Diamond, Missouri. I was only a week old when Mother and I were kidnapped. Mr. Carver sent a man to rescue us, but Mother was never found.

The Carvers raised me and my brother, Jim. Jim, big and strong as an older brother should be, looked after me. I was a skinny and sickly child, suffering from colds, whooping cough, and the croup. While Jim worked hard in the fields, I found other ways to help.

Mrs. Carver said, "George, you're about the slowest farmer I've ever seen. Come inside, and let's see how you are at helping in the kitchen."

Mrs. Carver was a patient teacher who knew about many things. I was a whiz at cleaning, helping with the laundry, and cooking. Crafts like carving and knitting were easy for me, and with Mrs. Carver's guidance I learned to sew clothes. I taught myself to paint using bunched twigs for brushes and crushed berries for the colors.

"George, that's some painting!" Mr. Carver said.

He pounded a nail through the board I used as my canvas and hung my work on the wall.

Those painted peaches added a splash of life to the drab cabin we called home.

Some days, while Mrs. Carver cooked, she wanted to be alone.

“George, go outside, and leave me be. Child, you ask so many questions I have a headache,” she said.

I roamed the countryside and collected anything that looked interesting. Mrs. Carver shook her head and laughed when I returned with a collection of rocks. I spread them on the table.

“George, get those dirty rocks off my table. Stack them in the corner behind that chair,” she said.

Mrs. Carver understood my curiosity about the world around me, and she encouraged my studies. She was not happy when I discovered the frogs living in the swamp, though.

“George Carver! Chase those frogs out of my house, or I will whack them with my broom,” she warned.

I built a pen for my pet frogs in the yard beside the wood pile. Mrs. Carver was happier with that arrangement.

The fields around my home were dotted with wildflowers and, of course, I had to collect my own. I dug a garden and learned what plants like and don't like. Neighbors stopped by to admire my plantings, and ask questions I was happy to answer. Helping people and sharing my knowledge made me feel warm inside. Some brought sick plants, asking my advice. Others left prized plants in my care. I earned the nickname, “The Plant Doctor”.

As I grew, I had more questions than answers and sought to learn from others who knew more than I did. I was hungry for knowledge, but black children were not welcome at the school near my farm. Mr. Carver told me it was time to leave home.

“George, there’s a school for black children in the next town. You’re on this earth to do important work, and you must learn all you can,” he said.

I was going to school! My heart thumped with excitement, but clouds of worry cast shadows as I wondered what unknowns awaited a twelve-year-old. Walking the dusty eight miles, I vowed to be a good student.

The woods bordering the road beckoned me to explore, and soon night was falling. An old cow, her bell clanking, ambled across the pasture toward an inviting red barn. Lightning streaked the sky and thunder rumbled. I hopped over the fence and followed. What more could a boy want than a dry barn, a feed sack pillow, and a soft hay blanket?

“Boy, wake up. Who are you? What are you doing here?”

I blinked against the bright sunlight dancing across the dirt floor. The large man holding the pitchfork glared. Tears streamed down my face.

“Please, sir, I never meant any harm. I’m George Carver, and I’ve come to town to go to school.”

He sat beside me and placed his big hand on my back.

“George, I’m Andrew Watkins. Would you like some breakfast?”

I wiped the tears from my cheeks as I walked toward the cabin with Mr. Watkins. That was some breakfast, and by the time I helped wash the dishes, I had a new home. Mr. Watkins and his wife, Mariah, gave me a room, and I agreed to help with chores when I was not in school. The Watkins had no children of their own, and I became their adopted son.

Mrs. Watkins watched as I dug a garden and prepared the soil with all the things I knew plants liked. As I worked, I shared the gardening lessons I had learned. We grew so many vegetables that we had plenty to share with other farms.

“George, I had no idea that red clay could grow such nice plants. I’m glad God sent you to stay with us,” Aunt Mariah said.

Aunt Mariah talked about God all the time, and she loved attending church on Sunday mornings. I held her hand as we walked there. I did not know much about God, but I was curious.

I learned that God is really special. He doesn’t care that my skin is dark or my feet are bare or my pockets are empty. God loves me just because I’m George Carver. I figure anyone who cares that much about me is worth knowing.

God placed creation all around me so I could learn about him, and nature is my classroom. I want to know the name of ever flower, bird, and insect the Great Creator brings my way. Most mornings I tramp across the countryside exploring, discovering, and investigating.

And talking to God.