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## The Luckiest Time of All

by Lucille Clifton

Mrs. Elzie F. Pickens was rocking slowly on the porch one afternoon when her Great-granddaughter, Tee, brought her a big bunch of dogwood blooms, and that was the beginning of a story.

“Ahhh, now that dogwood reminds me of the day I met your Great-granddaddy, Mr. Pickens, Sweet Tee.

“It was just this time, spring of the year, and me and my best friend Ovella Wilson, who is now gone, was goin’ to join the Silas Greene. Usta be a kinda show went all through the South, called it the Silas Greene show. Somethin’ like the circus. Me and Ovella wanted to join that thing and see the world. Nothin’ wrong at home or nothin’, we just wanted to travel and see new things and have high times. Didn’t say nothin’ to nobody but one another. Just up and decided to do it.

“Well, this day we plaited our hair and put a dress and some things in a rucksack and started out to the show. Spring day like this.

“We got there after a good little walk and it was the world. Baby, such music and wonders as we never had seen! They had everything there, or seemed like it.

“Me and Ovella thought we’d walk around for a while and see the show before goin’ to the office to sign up and join.

“While we was viewin’ it all we come up on this dancin’ dog. Cutest thing in the world next to you. Sweet Tee, dippin; and movin’ and head bowin; to that music. Had a little ruffly skirt on itself and up on two back legs twistin’ and movin’ to the music. Dancin’, dancin’, dancin’ till people started throwin’ pennies out of their pockets.

“Me and Ovella was caught up too and laughin’ so. She took a penny out of her pocket and threw it to the ground where that dog was dancin’, and I took two pennies and threw ’em both.

“The music was faster and faster and that dog was turnin’ and turnin’. Ovella reached in her sack and threw out a little pin she had won from never being late at Sunday school. And me, laughin’ and all excited, reached in my bag and threw out my lucky stone!

“Well, I knew right off what I had done: Soon as it left my hand it seemed like I reached back out for it to take it back. But the stone was gone from my hand and Lord, it hit that dancin’ dog right on his nose!

“Well, he lit out after me, poor thing. He lit out after me and I flew! Round and round the Silas Greene Show we run, through every place me and Ovella had walked before, but now that dancin’ dog was a runnin’ dog and all the people was laughin’ at the new show, which was us!

“I felt myself slowin’ down after a while and I thought I would turn around a little bit to see how much gain that cute little dog was makin’ on me. When I did I got inch a surprise! Right behind me was the dancin’ dog and light behind him was the finest fast runnin’ hero in Virginia.

“And that was Mr. Pickens when he was still a boy! He had a length of twine in his hand and he was twirlin’ it around in the air just like the cowboy at the Silas Greene and grinnin’ fit to bust.

“While I was watchin’ how the sun shined on him and made him look like an angel come to help a poor sinner girl, why, he twirled that twine one extra fancy twirl and looped it right around one hind leg of that dancin’ dog and brought him low.

“I stopped then and walked slow and shy to where he had picked up that poor dog to see if he was hurt, cradlin’ him and talkin’ to him soft and sweet. That showed me how kind and gentle he was,

and when we walked back to the dancin dog’s place in the show he let the dog loose and helped me to find my stone. I told him how shiny black it was and how it had the letter A scratched on one side. We searched and searched and at last he spied it!

“Ovella and me lost interest in shows then and we walked on home. And a good little way, the one who was gonna be your Great-granddaddy was walkin’ on behind. Seein’ us safe. Us walkin’ kind of slow. Him seein’ us safe. Yes.” Mrs. Pickens’ voice trailed off softly and Tee noticed she had a little smile on her face.

“Grandmama, that stone almost got you bit by a dog that time. It wasn’t so lucky that time, was it?”

Tee’s Great-grandmother shook her head and laughed out loud.

That was the luckiest time of all. Tee Baby. It got me acquainted with Mr. Amos Pickens, and if that ain’t luck, what could it be! Yes, it was luckier for me than for anybody, I think. Least mostly I think it.”

Tee laughed with her Great-grandmother though she didn’t exactly know why.

“I hope I have that kind of good stone luck one day,” she said.

“Maybe you will someday,” her Great-grandmother said.

And they rocked a little longer and smiled together.