DEAR CELIE, THE FIRST LETTER SAY,

You've got to fight and get away from Albert. He ain't no good. When I left you all's house, walking, he followed me on his horse. When we was well out of sight of the house he caught up with me and started trying to talk. You know how he do. You sure is looking fine. Miss Nettie, and stuff like that. I tried to ignore him and walk faster, but my bundles was heavy and the sun was hot. After while I had to rest, and that's when he got down from his horse and started to try to kiss me, and drag me back in the woods. Well, I started to fight him, and with God's help, I hurt him bad enough to make him let me alone. But he was some mad. He said because of what I'd done I'd never hear from you again, and you would never hear from me. I was so mad myself I was shaking. Anyhow, I got a ride into town on somebody's wagon. And that same somebody pointed me in the direction of the Reverend Mr. 's place. And what was my surprise when a little girl opened the door and she had your eyes set in your face. love, Nettie

NEXT ONE SAID,

Dear Celie, I keep thinking it's too soon to look for a letter from you. And I know how busy you is with all Mr. ' s children. But I miss you so much. Please write to me, soon as you have a chance. Every day I think about you. Every minute. The lady you met in town is name Corrine. The little girl's name is Olivia. The husband's name is Samuel. The little boy's name is Adam. They are sanctified religious and very good to me. They live in a nice house next to the church where Samuel preaches, and we spend a lot of time on church business. I say "we" because they always try to include me in everything they do, so I don't feel so left out and alone. But God, I miss you, Celie. I think about the time you laid yourself down for me. I love you with all my heart. Your sister, Nettie

NEXT ONE SAY,

Dear Celie, By now I am almost crazy. I think Albert told me the truth, and that he is not giving you my letters. The only person I can think of who could help us out is Pa, but I don't want him to know where I am. I asked Samuel if he would visit you and Mr. , just to see how you are. But he says he can't risk putting himself between man and wife, especially when he don't know them. And I felt bad for having to ask him, he and Corrine have been so nice to me. But my heart is breaking. It is breaking because I can not find any work in this town, and I will have to leave. After I leave, what will happen to us? How will we ever know what is going on? Corrine and Samuel and the children are part of a group of people called Missionaries, of the American and African Missionary Society. They have ministered to the Indians out west and are ministering to the poor of this town. All in preparation for the work they feel they were born for, missionary work in Africa. I dread parting from them because in the short time we've been together they've been like family to me. Like family might have been, I mean. Write if you can. Here are some stamps. love, Nettie

NEXT ONE, FAT, DATED TWO MONTHS LATER, SAY,

Dear Celie, I wrote a letter to you almost every day on the ship coming to Africa. But by the time we docked I was so down, I tore them into little pieces and dropped them into the water. Albert is not going to let you have my letters and so what use is there in writing them. That's the way I felt when I tore them up and sent them to you on the waves. But now I feel different. I remember one time you said your life made you feel so ashamed you couldn't even talk about it to God, you had to write it, bad as you thought your writing was. Well, now I know what you meant. And whether God will read letters or no, I know you will go on writing them; which is guidance enough for me. Anyway, when I don't write to you I feel as bad as I do when I don't pray, locked up in myself and choking on my own heart. I am so lonely, Celie. The reason I am in Africa is because one of the missionaries that was supposed to go with Corrine and Samuel to help with the children and with setting up a school suddenly married a man who was afraid to let her go, and refused to come to Africa with her. So there they were, all set to go, with a ticket suddenly available and no missionary to give it to. At the same time, I wasn't able to find a job anywhere around town. But I never dreamed of going to Africa! I never even thought about it as a real place, though Samuel and Corrine and even the children talked about it all the time. Miss Beasley used to say it was a place overrun with savages who didn't wear clothes. Even Corrine and Samuel thought like this at times. But they know a lot more about it than Miss Beasley or any of our other teachers, and besides, they spoke of all the good things they could do for the downtrodden people from whom they sprang. People who need Christ and good medical advice. One day I was in town with Corrine and we saw the mayor's wife and her maid. The mayor's wife was shopping— going in and out of stores— and her maid was waiting for her on the street and taking the packages. I don't know if you have ever seen the mayor's wife. She looks like a wet cat. And there was her maid looking like the very last person in the world you'd expect to see waiting on anybody, and in particular not on anybody that looked like that. I spoke. But just speaking to me seemed to make her embarrassed and she suddenly sort of erased herself. It was the strangest thing, Celie! One minute I was saying howdy to a living woman. The next minute nothing living was there. Only its shape. All that night I thought about it. Then Samuel and Corrine told me what they'd heard about how she got to be the mayor's maid. That she attacked the mayor, and then the mayor and his wife took her from the prison to work in their home. In the morning I started asking questions about Africa and started reading all the books Samuel and Corrine have on the subject. Did you know there were great cities in Africa, greater than Milledgeville or even Atlanta, thousands of years ago? That the Egyptians who built the pyramids and enslaved the Israelites were colored? That Egypt is in Africa? That the Ethiopia we read about in the Bible meant all of Africa? Well, I read and I read until I thought my eyes would fall out. I read where the Africans sold us because they loved money more than their own sisters and brothers. How we came to America in ships. How we were made to work. I hadn't realized I was so ignorant, Celie. The little I knew about my own self wouldn't have filled a thimble! And to think Miss Beasley always said I was the smartest child she ever taught! But one thing I do thank her for, for teaching me to learn for myself, by reading and studying and writing a clear hand. And for keeping alive in me somehow the desire to know. So when Corrine and Samuel asked me if I would come with them and help them build a school in the middle of Africa, I said yes. But only if they would teach me everything they knew to make me useful as a missionary and someone they would not be ashamed to call a friend. They agreed to this condition, and my real education began at that time. They have been as good as their word. And I study everything night and day. Oh, Celie, there are colored people in the world who want us to know! Want us to grow and see the light! They are not all mean like Pa and Albert, or beaten down like Ma was. Corrine and Samuel have a wonderful marriage. Their only sorrow in the beginning was that they could not have children. And then, they say, "God" sent them Olivia and Adam. I wanted to say, "God" has sent you their sister and aunt, but I didn't. Yes, their children, sent by "God" are your children, Celie. And they are being brought up in love, Christian charity and awareness of God. And now "God" has sent me to watch over them, to protect and cherish them. To lavish all the love I feel for you on them. It is a miracle, isn't it? And no doubt impossible for you to believe. But on the other hand, if you can believe I am in Africa, and I am, you can believe anything. Your sister, Nettie