

MAVIS McINTOSH—ELIZABETH McKEE
LITERARY REPRESENTATIVES

COMPANY THROUGH THE PASS

by V.S. Reid

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COMPANY THROUGH THE PASS

"The name's Sudden," the stranger said wearily, looking down into the glass around which he had carefully wrapped his long, bony fingers. There were so many ifs in the whole business, he quite frankly had not known where to commence. And, with everything else, he was just plain wornout, tired down into his boots; a dragging fatigue that had almost killed him by the time he had stumbled out of the cold into the warmth of the saloon. He had hardly slept in two weeks, scouring the plain, asking questions, running down wrong leads. But, if this was the right place, and if these were the men, and if he managed to secure the help he required to take them, and if he did succeed in throwing down on them, how would he, alone and no great shakes as a gunman, shepherd two or perhaps three killers through the Pass to Dodge and a date with a rope? Yet, he had sworn that when he caught up with them, they would have no easy way out by a bullet. ■■■ He had promised his wrangler that they would swing. Only trouble now was that he was very, very tired. Please, please, he asked his driven body. Drowsily, Sudden blinked his eyes and spoke to the barkeep again:

"Joe Sudden. In from over the Pass. This place Link? Like maybe to stay a day or two."

Ben Seghars, working behind the bar, nodded, waiting. He

always waited when they came in like this. Maybe the fellow had fooled Bard Moodie's mongrel dog dozing in the fire warmth near the open hearth. Conceivably, he had even fooled a man or two at the table. But not Ben. Ben knew why the door had been whipped inward so fast, and knew why the stranger had shambled into the saloon pretending to have stumbled on the threshold. Ben had caught the swift of the stranger's eyes over Bard Moodie and the men at the table, and the way his gloveless right hand hovered at the cutdown holster. This one was lawman wary. Town shy. On the bolt. Running.

"You must have been in a hurry to have busted all through that snow," Ben commented. He was amused, thinking that this was one of the scary ones feeling his way into Link. Link was Bard Moodie's famed outfit, nothing to look at really, consisting of a two-storey frame building and a corral. But when a mount was hidden up the canyon at the back, and its rider was nodded upstairs, he was safe from sheriffs and posses as a flea in an elephant's ear. Thanks to Bard Moodie, his formidable reputation and his friends in Dodge. Some of the men entering Link for the first time, came in full to the collar buttons with the strange, harsh pride of the outlaw, until they were cuffed into line by Bard Moodie. The wild ones, Ben, a prudent man, left strictly up to Bard. He amused himself with the ones who exposed their timidity. He rested his plump forearms on the counter and appeared to be worried for Sudden.

"Well, now," he drawled, "you'd be wanting a room no doubt."

Yes. Man riding all alone like that. Tired and sore. Sure." His tiny, malicious eyes gleamed with laughter. "Only, you see, this ain't no regular hotel. Its a — "

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Then he waited for Bard to cut down on this fresh saddle tramp. Bard Moodie looked blank for a moment. His eyes narrowed on Sudden, went down Sudden's figure to his boots and then travelled up to his face and stayed there. "Texan?" he asked softly, almost shyly. At Sudden's curt nod, he chuckled and gestured him forward. Ben muttered disgustedly and worked his way from behind the counter. He still had an outside chore to do. "You walk like a cougar, boy," Bard said, watching Sudden's approach. "Relax, its alright here. Nobody rides into Link for you."

As Sudden used a foot to drag up a chair for himself, Bard Moodie began the introductions. "You ever met Sagebrush Harry? Sagebrush." Sagebrush Harry had a long lineage of evildoing docketed in his dull, brutal face. He grunted. Bard said: "And this is Wee Willie." Willie was slim, boyish, eager in a cream silk shirt clean as a new pin. "And talk to Billie Coast while I figure out this hand," Moodie said. "Where you heading, Sudden?"

Sudden found himself looking into the brilliant black eyes of Billie Coast, the narrow shoulders and dead white hands lying palm up on the table. Somberly, Joe Sudden provoked his own anger^{by thinking} that all these killers ran to dramatics every minute of their short, violent lives. Like Coast here, who was dressed in black from head to foot and kept his deadly hands clean as his guns. He had no doubt that Billie Coast was one of the fast ones, gun-swift. It was an indefinable quality you could smell like grave earth. Billie Coast said softly:

"Where are you heading? Didn't you hear Bard ask it?"

Where am I heading? These could be the men he sought, but he could also be wrong. He could find out by telling them where he was heading. He hoped these were not the men. He had not counted on there being three of them. Little Joe had said there had been two, but the boy could have been mistaken. It had been a dark night. This Coast was snake-quick. Sagebrush could break your neck with a blow. Wee Willie was an unknown quantity. Perhaps he could find out about them if he told them the story slowly; perhaps Sagebrush Harry would ride along with him. Sagebrush looked like a cowhand and he would know the sweat and bone weariness of men trailing cattle through Beeville and past Austin and San Antone, of fording the Colorado and swimming the Brazos and waiting at nights for the Comanches to come hooting down.

"You going to talk?" Billie Coast asked gently beside him. And what about Wee Willie? Perhaps if he told Wee Willie about Little Joe, his new wrangler, who had gone about learning the business with a gravity on his face that only a ten-year-old could muster, perhaps Wee Willie would side him if later somebody called for a vote on one Joe Sudden. And what of Billie Coast? What about his ballot? And Bard; he would look for an opportunity to probe the man. By the grace of God, something would give. Joe Sudden swallowed on the pain he felt, and said coldly: "Where I am heading, I'm at. You hear me, Bard?"

"Sure," Bard Moodie said, riffing the cards. "So how are we sure you aint got a law badge hidden in your saddlebag?"

Sudden said: "Because if I had, Ben who has been outside to check my mount, would have flashed it, and I would have been cold meat by now."

Bard Moodie chuckled; he did not look at Sudden. "So maybe we should search your clothes," Billie Coast said.

"Suit yourself," Sudden said. He was nervous and tired, so badly

hurt inside it was hard to keep from shaking. He wanted to kill, to smash, batter. "Alright, Sudden, you're alright here," Bard Moodie said while he inspected his cards. "No marshal rides into Link ."

Joe Sudden shrugged and said casually: "I know. I heard of you."

"Now what would you be meaning by that?" Moodie asked as casually.

"I heard you are a Texas man," Sudden said, praying. He thought that Billie Coast would laugh if he told him how one time, by the Red River, when the Comanches stormed down from the ridge, he had prayed superbly, powerfully, that he would have the strength to shoot Anne if the Indians broke through. Oh, yeah, Billie would be amused.

"Nobody is nothing north of the Brazos," Moodie said sharply. "Stop fighting the war."

"All Americans again," Billie Coast said. "All share the same Great White Father."

Joe Sudden's tired eyes seemed to drop farther back in their sockets. "One time, two-three years ago," he said, "I remember a Texas man named Luke Short. Ran a saloon in Dodge. Townies were giving him a bad time, him being from down home. Then one time when the politicians really put wire right in his backyard, why, this Texan reared on his hindlegs and sent for a couple of fellows, Texans too, named Wyatt Earp and Bat Masterton — and another whose name I disremember for sure. Three of them made it decent for Luke. Just to seeing that none of those back-shooting gents got behind him."

Bard Moodie, gazing down at the cards in his hand, asked as if it did not matter: "You know Luke?"

"We been up the Chisholm together," Sudden said.

"All the way?"

"From San Antone to Abilene. That's all the way there is."

"Then maybe you've seen Luke lately?"

"Reckon I haven't been in Dodge for some time," he replied

truthfully. He twisted wearily on the chair, moved the glass away with his fingers. He didn't want the whisky Ben had served. He had ridden into the owlhoot place casually as a cattle buyer going into the dining car of the Atchison, Topeka and Sante Fe, but suppose Bard had changed? Bard was long out of Texas. Maybe he had a new code. "Reckon I didn't make Dodge. I lit out along the Cimarron."

Wee Willie cut in sharply: "Where did you make trouble then? Wichita? Caldwell?" Joe Sudden pushed his hat from his forehead, sighed and grinned wolfishly at the youngster. This could do it. Wee Willie was hardly more than a boy, but Sudden had to buy knowledge and somebody had to pay. He had to find out about each of the three, Wee Willie, Sagebrush Harry and Billie Coast. He said softly, dangerously at Wee Willie: "Where are you from, son? We dont make them so small down where I come from."

The boy's eyes darkened at the insult and he half rose to his feet before Moodie's hand was clamped hard on his shoulder. "Forget it, Sudden," Bard Moodie said coldly, evenly, "the kid's with me. He's alright but he talks everything that comes into his mind. Almost had Coast throwing down on him last week for asking the same fool question." He chuckled. "Perhaps I didn't introduce you right, Sudden. Full name, William Bloor McKenzie, college boy from Canada seeing the Wild West."

Joe Sudden sat very still. That put Wee Willie on the outside. And Bard had not been obliged to offer him this explanation. What Bard had done was to give him a picture. Joe Sudden grinned raggedly and put out a hand. "No harm done, Willie," he said. "Benn riding so long alone, dont even mind talking about it. I'm from Brownsville, the brush country."

Moodie, his cold grey eyes warming a little, nodded. "Brownsville, sure. Went back there too, after the war, to pick up what I could."

"We were all picking up what we could," Sudden said, looking down at his hands. "Hungry as hell most of the time, sweating with work and with fear while we went to roping those wild critters that would

as soon gut you as run. During the war they had gone back into the brush and had become lean and mean as mountain lions." He looked with friendly interest at Sagebrush Harry. "They ever had you off your pony, down in the thicket with nothing between you and the horns except for how quickly you could get out your gun?"

Sagebrush Harry, after a preliminary rumble in his throat and a fast look at Billie Coast, said: "I am from ~~Kansas~~." Joe Sudden nodded gravely, said: "Nice country, Kansas. After the war, Luke and me made the first trail, pointing them north past Austin, took them sweet and slow through the fat spring grass up the old Beef Trail, eating all the way so by the time we got to the Brazos, you could have floated a house on their backs. Stocked up at Forth Worth in those days then went into Indian country primed for the red devils. Remember how they looked, Bard? The multitude of them, your own capital on the hoof, stretched out as far as the eye could see, the long horns moving in a kind of dance, smelling nicer than a fancy woman, hardly bawling so contented they are, the creeks running full of clear water and the sky smiling blue every morning as if the whole earth is glad that your beef is walking the Chisholm Trail."

"Sometimes it wasn't as pretty as that," Bard said grimly.

Billie Coast said: "You one of these poets or something, mister?"

"Yeah, I hear you get some rough times," Sudden said, adding the lie behind a hollow little laugh, "guess we've been lucky."

Moodie grunted, inspecting the cards. "Couple of times, Comanches got restless with us. Kiowas and Cheyennes too. Had to shoot our way out, by the Red River, when a big band in war paint jumped us at the fording," Moodie said.

"Luke told me about that time," Sudden said. Assuming it was these two, Sagebrush and Billie Coast, and even if he buffaloed them,

he still did not see how alone he could herd them through the snow-filled Pass with maybe a blizzard lashing through there by morning. "Remember he said you lost fifty-sixty head in the quicksand. Seems to me I heard something about chasing the redskins to their village and rescuing a couple of white kids they had been holding. Reckon the Indians were more decent than some white men I know. They didn't kill the kids."

Bard Moodie looked up sharply. "Never heard of any white man doing such a thing," he said. Sudden shrugged. "Maybe the trail isn't what it used to be. You heard about the fever?" he asked Bard.

Moodie looked puzzled. "Cant blame the Kansans for wanting to keep the fever out of their territory — but what has cattle fever got to do with it?"

"That's right," Billie Coast said at his ear. "I am Kansas myself and I say, what have you against us?"

Joe Sudden allowed himself to look confused. He shook his head. "No, cant blame them for protecting their herds. Maybe that's why they chased us off. Told my own folks that too. Something went wrong and now they are waiting out there on the Chisholm for me to right it."

Moodie's thick eyebrows drew together in a frown. "Who is waiting?" he asked.

"My wife, kid. Cant figure it out." He was holding their attention now. He had suddenly become an enigma. Who had ever heard of a man leaving his family holding down a trail herd while he went outlaw? "Wife and kid and me, and a couple of boys. We had come up the old Shawnee Trail. Good season; sedge and mesquite thicker than money in a bank. Cattle fat, thirty-five dollars a head up in Dodge. Had the best remuda in the territory too. Mustangs and quarter horses under a fine little wrangler. Kid named Little Joe. Real good trail."

A real good trail. Antelope, deer and buffalo for the pot. No sickness; weather like silk, even the trail dust tasted different. A Sunday afternoon on the bank of the Canadian, an easy wind like pretty ribbons blowing through the live oaks; sitting beside Anne and watching the way her hair lifted to the wind and the tenderness at her mouth; thinking how this herd would set them up, with nothing owed and a lifetime of building again before them. Soon, a forgotten war.

"You ever been in a stampede, Willie?" Sudden asked. "Eard ever told you? When those longhorns storm out, and you are riding alongside trying to squeeze them into a mill, boy you're riding through the furnaces of hell. They look like a million devils too, with the horns swaying and clashing and the big eyes rolling back — maybe that's why the heat coming off their hides can put blisters on your face."

Moodie asked: "Where was this stampede?" He knew that this talking Texan had been hurt somewhere, you caught it in his voice and the way his words came out, ~~as if something in his~~ ~~throat~~ as if something in his throat was cutting them off short. He knew that Sudden was asking for help. Well, then, he had cleared Willie for him.

"We were camped near Polecat Creek," Sudden said. "Clear night, small cloud drift. Longhorns got restive around midnight. Always restive about then. Always get up, stretch, browse a while, down again, if nothing bothers them. This night they soon settled again, no trouble in a million miles. I must have dozed off, woke to what sounded like a thunderclap at first. In that instant, the cattle were off." Sudden cracked his knuckles, rubbed his hands over his face, clasped his hands and squeezed his elbows against his ribs as if the room was chilly. "They broke out hot, swarmed through the camp. Had a top notch crew and we were out after them fast, some of us riding ~~bar~~ bareback-and-halter. Even so, took us seven or eight

hours to crowd 'em."

Wee Willie said: "But how come it took you that long with the crew of tophands you say you had?"

Bard Moodie said slowly, his eyes on Sudden: "It happens so, Willie. Spooked badly enough, cattle will run tail out for a day."

"But he said they were bedding down easily," Willie protested. "Must have been one hell of a spook."

"Yeah," Joe Sudden said, his eyes wearily half closed, "sixgun spook."

Sagebrush Harry looked at Sudden. Sagebrush was a slow man in the head, but he had lived through too many bad elections not to be aware when voting time neared. He had been in deep thought about liquor and women. He had been thinking it was about time that Billie decided to leave the hideout. The noise would have died down by this, and they had sold the horses for plenty. But/ ~~deep in mid thought,~~ deep in mid thought, Joe Sudden's story had brushed against him. He wrinkled his forehead and looked across at Billie and saw a warning in the brilliant black eyes. Except that it could not make sense. This Sudden has said his folk were waiting for him back there on the Chisholm. However, he had always left the ~~planning~~ planning up to Billie. He leaned back and allowed his thumb to fall naturally to his gun belt.

"It was a shot from a sixgun that had set them running," Sudden said. Bard Moodie moved angrily on the chair. Hell, men lost cattle every day on the Chisholm. It was the risk you took. He could not break Link's good name even for a poor patched-pant fellow-Texan who had stumbled out of a lost war and had hunted up a trail herd in the brush. And if he allowed this fellow to come into Link and point a gun at his clients because he had lost a few head of cattle, the good name of Link would be lost. "Mister," he said harshly at

Sudden, "You said you had heard of Link? What I do out here?"

Hold your vote, Bard Moodie, Joe Sudden thought wildly. He knew there had been an easing of the tension in Billie Coast. The man would now be in some uncertainty, for although all the lines of the story would appear to lead to the job he had pulled with Sagebrush, they had differed in an important detail. Sudden was a family man whose people were waiting for him on the Chisholm. Couldn't be the same party at all.

"But who stampeded the herd?" Wee Willie asked. "Indians?"

Joe Sudden smiled wryly at him. "No, not Indians. Redskins dont like sixguns. Alright for rifles, but no sixguns. Prefer a tomahawk. These were white men after the horses — and got them all."

"Hard luck," Bard Moodie said shortly. "But you saved the cattle?"

"Real hard. Hard on my wrangler too, watching them tear down his rope corral. Couldn't do anything about it. Yeah, we saved the cattle."

"Then for a bunch of horses ____!" Bard began angrily. "Sudden, you must be out of your mind!"

Sudden was tired so far inside, he could feel it crawling around. Would he be able to handle it when the men acted? He thought despairingly, Watch now, Bard. Help me, Bard. He could not count on Wee Willie, a stranger to the west and just a boy anyway. He said in a low voice:

"Maybe I was what you'd call crazy with grief, Bard, riding into Link this way. But — you see, I had to leave my folks out there. My wrangler, Little Joe Sudden, and — my wife. Buried them by the Chisholm. Cattle had gone over her and my boy was burnt down by the rustlers when they sneaked into camp for the remuda while we were out chasing the herd. My son, Bard — and — and — my wife — both."

"Christ!" Wee Willie exclaimed, going forward to the edge of his chair; and sat still when he heard the menacing oaths coming from Billie Coast. "Yeah, Sudden," Bard Moodie said, his voice crackling like a new

lit re, "Yeah, Sudden." And there was movement from Sagebrush Harry.

But Bard Woodie was also moving, exploding, his big hands levering the table to crash into Sagebrush Harry's stomach. So also was Wee Willie, as with a shout and a wild kick he sent Billie Coast's gun arm swinging off target. Joe Sudden rammed to his feet and hurtled sideways. The gun in Billie Coast's hand boomed forth again and Sudden heard the whisper of the bullet past his head. Coast's draw had been magic, a flexing of the wrist, a marvel of speed and only the youngster's quick thinking had saved him. As Billie Coast turned for his third shot, Sudden left the floor in a flatout jump that skidded him below the trajectory of the bullet and then his work-toughened shoulder struck the gunman. Sudden bore him backward to the floor, the gun flying, and kicked the heel of his hand, hard, twice on Billie Coast's nose. The man howled like an animal and the tired Sudden, the anger in him turned into frightening power, doubled his fist and poleaxed the killer on the bloody organ.

When Billie Coast recovered consciousness, he was already stoutly tied and Sagebrush Harry was in no better shape. "You will share a tree with your partner," Joe Sudden said, terribly quiet. "I am taking you two into Dodge. I promised my wrangler to see you hanged." Coast thought of the long haul through the blinding snow of the Pass. A long way to go, and there would be two against one. He felt a murderous smile opening inside him.

"Wait a minute. Guess me and Wee Willie will have to ride in with the man, Billie," Bard said regretfully, shaking his head. "Guess I'll have to explain to the fellows, Luke, Wyatt, Bat and the rest about Sudden taking you out. Otherwise Link will get a bad name." Coast just lay and swore helplessly. Sudden grinned back at Willie and said: "Hi, Canada!"

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Then he waited for Bard to cut down on this fresh saddle tramp. Bard Moodie looked blank for a moment. His eyes narrowed on Sudden, went down Sudden's figure to his boots and then travelled up to his face and stayed there. "Texan?" he asked softly, almost shyly. At Sudden's curt nod, he chuckled and gestured him forward. Ben muttered disgustedly and worked his way from behind the counter. He still had an outside chore to do. "You walk like a cougar, boy," Bard said, watching Sudden's approach. "Relax, it's alright here. Nobody rides into Link for you."

As Sudden used a foot to drag up a chair for himself, Bard Moodie began the introductions. "You ever met Sagebrush Harry? Sagebrush." Sagebrush Harry had a long lineage of evil-doing docketed in his dull, brutal face. He grunted. Bard said: "And this is Wee Willie." Willie was slim, boyish, eager in a cream silk shirt clean as a new pin. "And talk to Billie Coast while I figure out this hand," Moodie said. "Where you heading, Sudden?"

Sudden found himself looking into the brilliant black eyes of Billie Coast, the narrow shoulders and dead white hands lying palm up on the table. Somberly, Joe Sudden provoked his own anger ^{by thinking} that all these killers ran to dramatics every minute of their short, violent lives. Like Coast here, who was dressed in black from head to foot and kept his deadly hands clean as his guns. He had no doubt that Billie Coast was one of the fast ones, gun-swift. It was an indefinable quality you could smell like grave earth. Billie Coast said softly:

"Where are you heading? Didn't you hear Bard ask it?"

Where am I heading? These could be the men he sought, but he could also be wrong. He could find out by telling them where he was heading. He hoped these were not the men. He had not counted on there being three of them. Little Joe had said there had been two, but the boy could have been mistaken. It had been a dark night. This Coast was snake-quick. Sagebrush could break your neck with a blow. Wee Willie was an unknown quantity. Perhaps he could find out about them if he told them the story slowly; ~~perhaps Sagebrush Harry would ride along with him.~~ perhaps Sagebrush Harry would ride along with him. Sagebrush looked like a cowhand and he would know the sweat and bone weariness of men trailing cattle through Beeville and past Austin and San Antone, of fording the Colorado and swimming the Brazos and waiting at nights for the Comanches to come hooting down.

"You going to talk?" Billie Coast asked gently beside him. And what about Wee Willie? Perhaps if he told Wee Willie about Little Joe, his new wrangler, who had gone about learning the business with a gravity on his face that only a ten-year-old could muster, perhaps Wee Willie would side him if later somebody called for a vote on one Joe Sudden. And what of Billie Coast? What about his ballot? And Bard; he would look for an opportunity to probe the man. By the grace of God, something would give. Joe Sudden swallowed on the pain he felt, and said coldly: "Where I am heading, I'm at. You hear me, Bard?"

"Sure," Bard Moodie said, riffing the cards. "So how are we sure you aint got a law badge hidden in your saddlebag?"

Sudden said: "Because if I had, Ben who has been outside to check my mount, would have flashed it, and I would have been cold meat by now."

Bard Moodie chuckled; he did not look at Sudden. "So maybe we should search your clothes," Billie Coast said.

"Suit yourself," Sudden said. He was nervous and tired, so badly

hurt inside it was hard to keep from shaking. He wanted to kill, to smash, batter. "Alright, Sudden, you're alright here," Bard Moodie said while he inspected his cards. "No marshal rides into Link."

Joe Sudden shrugged and said casually: "I know. I heard of you."

"Now what would you be meaning by that?" Moodie asked as casually.

"I heard you are a Texas man," Sudden said, praying. He thought that Billie Coast would laugh if he told him how one time, by the Red River, when the Comanches stormed down from the ridge, he had prayed superbly, powerfully, that he would have the strength to shoot Anne if the Indians broke through. Oh, yeah, Billie would be amused.

"Nobody is nothing north of the Brazos," Moodie said sharply. "Stop fighting the war."

"All Americans again," Billie Coast said. "All share the same Great White Father."

Joe Sudden's tired eyes seemed to drop farther back in their socket. "One time, two-three years ago," he said, "I remember a Texas man named Luke Short. Ran a saloon in Dodge. Townies were giving him a bad time, him being from down home. Then one time when the politicians really put wire right in his backyard, why, this Texan reared on his hindlegs and sent for a couple of fellows, Texans too, named Wyatt Earp and Bat Masterton — and another whose name I disremember for sure. Three of them made it decent for Luke. Just to seeing that none of those back-shooting gents got behind him."

Bard Moodie, gazing down at the cards in his hand, asked as if it did not not matter: "You know Luke?"

"We been up the Chisholm together," Sudden said.

"All the way?"

"From San Antone to Abilene. That's all the way there is."

"Then maybe you've seen Luke lately?"

"Reckon I haven't been in Dodge for some time," he replied

truthfully. He twisted tiredly on the chair. He didn't want the whisky Ben had served. He had ridden into the owlhoot place this winter's night casually as a cattle buyer going into the dining car of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe, but suppose Bard had changed? Bard had left Texas long ago. "Reckon I lit out along the Cimarron."

Wee Willie, his bright blue eyes fixed on Sudden, cut in sharply: "Where did you make trouble then? Wichita? Caldwell?"

Sudden pushed his hat from his forehead, sighed and grinned wolfishly at Wee Willie. This could do it. Wee Willie was hardly more than a boy but he had to use him to buy knowledge. He must find out about each of these three, Wee Willie, Sagebrush Harry and Billie Coast. He said softly, dangerously to Wee Willie: "Where are you from, son? We dont make them so small down where I come from."

The boy breathed hard through his nostrils at the insult, anger darkening his eyes. Then: "Forget it, Sudden," Bard said coldly, evenly. "The kid is with me. Talks everything that comes into his mind. Almost had Coast throwing down on him last week for asking the same fool question." He grinned. "College boy from Canada seeing the Wild West."

Joe Sudden sat very still. That put Wee Willie on the outside. And Bard had not been obliged to offer him this information. What Moodie had done was to give him a picture. He sat back on the chair and said: "No harm done. Been riding so long and alone, as a matter of fact I dont mind talking about it. I'm from Brownsville, the brush country."

Moodie, the cold grey eyes in his tough face warming a little, nodded and said softly: "I was down there after the war. Went back to pick up what I could."

"We were all picking up what we could get," Sudden said, looking down at his hands. "Hungry as hell most of the time, sweating with work and fear while we went to roping those wild critters that would

as soon gut you as run. During the war they had gone back into the brush and had become lean and mean as mountain lions." He looked with friendly interest at Sagebrush Harry. "They ever had you off your pony, down in the thicket with nothing between you and the horns except for how quickly you could get out your gun?"

Sagebrush Harry, after a preliminary rumble in his throat and a fast look at Billie Coast, said: "I am from Kansas." Joe Sudden nodded gravely, said: "Nice country, Kansas. After the war, Luke and me made the first trail, pointing them north past Austin, took them sweet and slow through the fat spring grass up the old Beef Trail, eating all the way so by the time we got to the Brazos, you could have floated a house on their backs. Stocked up at Forth Worth in those days then went into Indian country primed for the red devils. Remember how they looked, Bard? The multitude of them, your own capital on the hoof, stretched out as far as the eye could see, the long horns moving in a kind of dance, smelling nicer than a fancy woman, hardly bawling so contented they are, the creeks running full of clear water and the sky smiling blue every morning as if the whole earth is glad that your beef is walking the Chisholm Trail."

"Sometimes it wasn't as pretty as that," Bard said grimly.

Billie Coast said: "You one of these poets or something, mister?"

"Yeah, I hear you get some rough times," Sudden said, adding the lie behind a hollow little laugh, "guess we've been lucky."

Moodie grunted, inspecting the cards. "Couple of times, Comanches got restless with us. Kiowas and Cheyennes too. Had to shoot our way out, by the Red River, when a big band in war paint jumped us at the fording."

"Luke told me about that time," Sudden said. Assuming it was these two, Sagebrush and Billie Coast, and even if he buffaloed them,

he still did not see how alone he could herd them through the snow-filled Pass with maybe a blizzard lashing through there by morning. "Remember he said you lost fifty-sixty head in the quicksand. Seems to me I heard something about chasing the redskins to their village and rescuing a couple of white kids they had been holding. Reckon the Indians were more decent than some white men I know. They didn't kill the kids."

Bard Moodie looked up sharply. "Never heard of any white man doing such a thing," he said. Sudden shrugged. "Maybe the trail isn't what it used to be. You heard about the fever?" he asked Bard.

Moodie looked puzzled. "Cant blame the Kansans for wanting to keep the fever out of their territory — but what has cattle fever got to do with it?"

"That's right," Billie Coast said at his ear. "I am Kansas myself and I say, what have you against us?"

Joe Sudden allowed himself to look confused. He shook his head. "No, cant blame them for protecting their herds. Maybe that's why they chased us off. Told my own folks that too. Something went wrong and now they are waiting out there on the Chisholm for me to right it."

Moodie's thick eyebrows drew together in a frown. "Who is waiting?" he asked.

"My wife, kid. Cant figure it out." He was holding their attention now. He had suddenly become an enigma. Who had ever heard of a man leaving his family holding down a trail herd while he went outlaw? "Wife and kid and me, and a couple of boys. We had come up the old Shawnee Trail. Good season; sedge and mesquite thicker than money in a bank. Cattle fat, thirty-five dollars a head up in Dodge. Had the best remuda in the territory too. Mustangs and quarter horses under a fine little wrangler. Kid named Little Joe. Real good trail."

A real good trail. Antelope, deer and buffalo for the pot. No sickness; weather like silk, even the trail dust tasted different. A Sunday afternoon on the bank of the Canadian, an easy wind like pretty ribbons blowing through the live oaks; sitting beside Anne and watching the way her hair lifted to the wind and the tenderness at her mouth; thinking how this herd would set them up, with nothing owed and a lifetime of building again before them.

"You ever been in a stampede, Willie?" Sudden asked. "Hard ever told you? When those longhorns storm out, and you are riding alongside trying to squeeze them into a mill, boy you're riding through the furnaces of hell. They look like a million devils too, with the horns swaying and clashing and the big eyes rolling back — maybe that's why the heat coming off their hides can put blisters on your face."

Moodie asked: "Where was this stampede?" He knew that this talking Texan had been hurt somewhere, you caught it in his voice and the way his words came out, ~~as if something in his~~ ^{as if something in his} throat was cutting them off short. He knew that Sudden was asking for help. Well, then, he had cleared Willie for him.

"We were camped near Polecat Creek," Sudden said. "Clear night, small cloud drift. Longhorns got restive around midnight. Always restive about then. Always get up, stretch, browse a while, down again, if nothing bothers them. This night they soon settled again, no trouble in a million miles. I must have dozed off, woke to what sounded like a thunderclap at first. In that instant, the cattle were off." Sudden cracked his knuckles, rubbed his hands over his face, clasped his hands and squeezed his elbows against his ribs as if the room was chilly. "They broke out hot, swarmed through the camp. Had a top notch crew and we were out after them fast, some of us riding ~~the~~ bareback-and-halter. Even so, took us seven or eight

hours to crowd 'em."

Wee Willie said: "But how come it took you that long with the crew of tophands you say you had?"

Bard Moodie said slowly, his eyes on Sudden: "It happens so, Willie. Spooked badly enough, cattle will run tail out for a day."

"But he said they were bedding down easily," Willie protested. "Must have been one hell of a spook."

"Yeah," Joe Sudden said, his eyes wearily half closed, "sixgun spook."

Sagebrush Harry looked at Sudden. Sagebrush was a slow man in the head, but he had lived through too many bad elections not to be aware when voting time neared. He had been in deep thought about liquor and women. He had been thinking it was about time that Billie decided to leave the hideout. The noise would have died down by this, and they had sold the horses for plenty. But/ ~~deep in mid thought,~~ deep in mid thought, Joe Sudden's story had brushed against him. He wrinkled his forehead and looked across at Billie and saw a warning in the brilliant black eyes. Except that it could not make sense. This Sudden had said his folk were waiting for him back there on the Chisholm. However, he had always left the ~~planning~~ planning up to Billie. He leaned back and allowed his thumb to fall naturally to his gun belt.

"It was a shot from a sixgun that had set them running," Sudden said. Bard Moodie moved angrily on the chair. Hell, men lost cattle every day on the Chisholm. It was the risk you took. He could not break Link's good name even for a poor patched-pant fellow-Texan, who had stumbled out of a lost war and had hunted up a trail herd in the brush. And if he allowed this fellow to come into Link and point a gun at his clients because he had lost a few head of cattle, the good name of Link would be lost. "Mister," he said ^{quietly,} ~~harshly~~ at

Sudden, "you said you had heard of Link!"

~~Hold your vote awhile, Bard Moodie, Joe Sudden thought wildly.~~ He had sensed the easing of the tension in Billie Coast beside him. The man would be in some ~~uncertainty~~; for although all the lines in the story would seem to lead to the job he had pulled with Sagebrush, it had differed in an important detail. ^{The detail was that} Sudden was a ~~family~~ ^{a family} man with ~~his~~ ^{his} people waiting for him out on the Chisholm.

"But who stampeded the herd?" the boy asked. "Indians?"

Joe Sudden grinned wryly at him. ^{"Maybe"} "You've got a civilised land up in Canada, boy. You don't know about the breed down here. These were white men. They were after the horses — and got them all."

"Hard luck," Moodie said shortly. "But you saved the cattle."

"Real hard," Sudden said. "Hard on my wrangler too. He had to watch them tearing down the rope corral. Could do nothing about it."

"Then for a bunch of horses —!" Bard said angrily. "Sudden, you must be out of your mind!"

Sudden was tired so deeply, he could feel it crawling inside. He wondered whether he would be able to handle it when the men acted. He thought despairingly: Help me, Bard. He could not count on Wee Willie, a stranger to the West and just a boy anyway. He said in a low voice: "Maybe I was what you'd call crazed with grief, Bard, riding into Link this way. But you see, I had to leave ^{my} ~~the~~ folk out there. My wrangler, Little Joe Sudden and — and — his mother. Buried them there on the Chisholm. Cattle had gone over her, and my boy was burnt down by the rustlers when they sneaked into camp for the remuda. My son, my — my wife —"

"Christ!" Wee Willie said, ^{going} ~~leaving~~ forward to the edge of his chair; and sat still when he heard the string of oaths ^{coming menacingly from} ~~the~~ Billie Coast. "Yeah," Bard Moodie said, his voice crackling like a new

Joe Sudden was ~~able~~ ^{able} to handle the two of them. He couldn't expect much from Willie who was just a boy anyway.

lit fire, "Yeah, Sudden." And there was movement from Sagebrush Harry.

But Bard Moodie was also moving, exploding, his big hands levering the table to crash into Sagebrush Harry's stomach. So also was Wee Willie, as with a shout and a wild kick he sent Billie Coast's gun arm swinging off target. Joe Sudden rammed to his feet and hurtled sideways. The gun in Billie Coast's hand boomed forth again and Sudden heard the whisper of the bullet past his head. Coast's draw had been magic, a flexing of the wrist, a marvel of speed and only the youngster's quick thinking had saved him. As Billie Coast turned for his third shot, Sudden left the floor in a flatout jump that skidded him below the trajectory of the bullet and then his work-toughened shoulder struck the gunman. Sudden bore him backward to the floor, the gun flying, and kicked the heel of his hand, hard, twice on Billie Coast's nose. The man howled like an animal and the tired Sudden, the anger in him turned into frightening power, doubled his fist and poleaxed the killer on the bloody organ.

When Billie Coast recovered consciousness, he was already stoutly tied and Sagebrush Harry was in no better shape. "You will share a tree with your partner," Joe Sudden said, terribly quiet. "I am taking you two into Dodge. I promised my wrangler to see you hanged." Coast thought of the long haul through the blinding snow of the Pass. A long way to go, and there would be two against one. He felt a murderous smile opening inside him.

"Wait a minute. Guess me and Wee Willie will have to ride in with the man, Billie," Bard said regretfully, shaking his head. "Guess I'll have to explain to the fellows, Luke, Wyatt, Bat and the rest about Sudden taking you out. Otherwise Link will get a bad name." ~~Coast just lay and swore helplessly. Sudden grinned at Willie and said: "Nice kicking."~~

From Bible:
Day of na
and 3 clms

Chapter ~~Four~~ One

By Reason of ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~time~~ ^{time}

The Time of The Nail X

WALK A WEARY ROAD

Little Rock Mountain

TAKE OUT THE ADJECTIVES

A good man walked down the road and came to a place where the ~~top~~
~~bar of the~~ ~~xxxxx~~ splitwood fence sagged in rainsoaked rot ^{and} to the bar
below it. He moved ~~sideways~~ off the road to the fence and rested an
elbow on it. He pushed back the battered ~~old~~ felt hat off his face
and looked at the people in the field. He was very quiet, looking only.

The man who bossed the section looked over and saw him standing ^{looking}
^{only as} noble a field hand he had seen in many a day.
quietly. The ~~naked~~ biceps of the good man bulged out of the singlet
and his face was placid as a lake under the ~~rugged~~ crimp of the felt
hat. The boss moved towards the fence, ^{a strapping cracker whose} his thighs underneath the
tight khaki dungarees ^{ed} bigging up each time the stride hit.

"You are a good man," the boss said, eyeing the giant.

"Uh huh," the stranger said.

"What's your name?"

~~Peterborough~~ "John."

"Jonathan."

~~Peterborough~~ "John"

"Jonathan what?"

~~Peter~~ JOHN.

"Jonathan Peterborough."

"You want to work, John Peter?"

^{good man said "Peter John," again, mildly looking the section boss in the eye}
The ~~stranger~~ looked at him for awhile and then lifted his chin a
full inch, ^{straight up into the question}

"Seven

~~Four~~ a day, found," the boss said, ^{understanding}

^{John Peter} shifted the hard used leather satchel to his left hand
and tossed it ~~xx~~ across the fence. It landed at the feet of the boss
and ~~the~~ John Peter followed it, going over ~~the~~ like ~~cat~~ ^{smoothly} a cat. He picked
up the satchel. ^{and looked again. And said that what.}

^{He knew} It was long land, ^{a piece of land} long eight-ten foot ^{long if you poked} straight down; he could
^{that} tell ~~and~~ a man could plant a gopher in it and raise a buffalo. ^{himself} The
^{and it} rotary waddling behind the ~~towing~~ tractor boiled up soil blacker
than the bottom of hell. ^{He looked over at} With a handful of this, say five hundred

acres, you would give it for the Sheik of Araby? Be mental.

"You cut canals?" the boss asked him.

^{JOHN} John Peter nodded.

The yellow ~~object~~ ^{tractor} that sat silent in the field because awaiting a hand to guide it.

He sat in the bucket seat of the ~~trailer-harrow~~ ^{and} ~~they were~~ ^{FURROW MACHINE}

insect of a harrow using to cut the irrigation canals. He had the plough pointed true as the gospel on the left track of the DC-Four that ~~pulled~~

hauled him, ~~and~~ ^{he} felt the surge in the ~~two~~ sockets of his arms ^{and he rode} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~clanking~~ ^{angle irons like a steed. The seat slapped against his crotch; the hot metal} ~~four~~ ^{SEVEN} a day and keep and to hell with Sunday. That was seven ^{smells and oil smells sweet in his nostrils and on the roof of his mouth}

days by ~~four~~ ^{SEVEN. FORTY NINE} ~~books~~ a week. Two a week on butts and coast on beer for another ~~couple~~ ^{forty-five} pair. That was four. Leave ~~twenty-four~~ ^{forty-five}.

Leave a year of Rose forty-fives but you were still INELEGIBLE FOR IN THIS NECK OF THE WOODS ~~You couldn't buy any acreage of this good black stuff~~ ^{any} ~~was down~~

~~here but~~ ^{MAN.} save your money ~~man~~ and move north. Somewhere up there

a man like me can ^{claim a parcel.} ~~buy~~ five hundred, Or less maybe, ~~DEER~~ ^{ING} Depended on how you proved.

The tractor driver up ahead waved for a right turn at the end of the ~~furrow~~ ^{CANAL} and John Peter ^{laughed} canted easily around, ~~his~~ ^{the} blade up,

swinging free and he came down again feeling the bite running up

past his wrists ~~his~~ ^{free, and} ~~arms~~ ^{feeling fine as the} and listening to the singing of the engine, ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~jets which sang the fuel oil up to the flash pan.~~

The noon truck clattered up the lane and turned into the field, braking so hard the mess tins banged when they shouldered into the back of the cab. John Peter ^{rough} remembered the army as he climbed down, rubbing the back of his hand on the singlet and wiping his face free of dirt.

"Food ~~alright~~ ^{okay}?"

"Like the lunch?"

He looked up from his plate at the section boss standing straddle legged. The law didn't say you had to talk. He nodded.

"You like to eat alone, boy? You wanna eat with the rest."

^{JOHN} John Peter looked across at the dozen field people and shrugged.

"You are a quiet one," the boss said softly.

He watched the boots. You could tell by the boots. These were of scuffed brown leather, tightly laced, good toes and heels, good for tromping. You could tell by how the boots stood and by the ants crawling up your back. He looked slowly up ~~the~~ along the boss to his eyes. Nothing there, maybe another day.

"Food's okay," he said.

The section boss looked away. "I guess you are a good boy," he said above John Peter's ^{JOHN'S} head. "What did you say your name was again?" ^{"John," he said softly.} "John," he said. ^{Maybe another day, a bad, bleak day. He ditched the plate in the truck and swung ABOARD the MACHINE.}

Some land was smart and ^{made love} cooperated right away at the ^{early} first approach of the plough, ^{Some land} opened up easily without breaking a tine, and you never had to wrestle ^{it} or be brutal with dynamite or ^{break it} steam shovels to uproot ~~the~~ stubborn rocks. It was considered lucky to find such land. ^{Maybe} He would be lucky whenever ^{for sure} he stopped ^{forward to} ^{granted a roof for JOHN. Peter.} ^{some}. Maybe he would find such a land and he would treat it like a gentle woman and never make it cry or struggle under him. Only weaklings were rough in the seeds. A man who was strong in back and mind needed no force.

^{John} John Peter was making his furrow straight as a spit on a windless day and the thoughts filled his mind and spilled over into his hands. His hands on the plough were full of pride. He guided the knife so easily it was crazy. He saw the section boss loom for an instant in a kinescopic glide across his vision (as he braced backward in a turn at the furrow's end) and when the boss slid out of his sight and the fat edge of land filled his horizon again, he prayed savagely to God to bless him and make him a good little child amen until he could move out and pick up a ^{parcel} ~~piece~~ of land with a roof for ~~John~~ Peter John.

Chapter Two

He was showered and clean ~~by six~~ and they had this long trestle in the wooden hut set up for about ^{fifty} ~~seventy~~ men. He had ~~put on a thick shirt~~ got a thick plaid shirt from his bag and run a comb through his short hair and ~~left the sleeping hut for the dining hut~~ ^{gone from the bunkhouse to eating shed} walking with the other men. He was bigger and more alone than any of them but he was not lonely. The tractor driver who ^{had} towed the harrow ~~was~~ ranged alongside him and matched strides.

"Hi boy, did the bossman call you John Peter?"

^{Peter John,} "It's Jonathan Peterborough," he said, looking sidewise at the man. ^{"John's Re surname."} The driver nodded. "Yeah, I know, they always do that."

"What's his ~~name~~?"

^{Peter?} "Who? The bossman? Roby. John G. Roby. Mine's Nat Slenco. Shake, Jonathan?" ^{"What's the place?" "Here, Jarvis Bend. I said shake."}

^{Slenco's} They slid hands together and Jonathan looked down at the top of ^{Nat} his head. ~~Guess A shorty but his shoulders were~~ ^{He looked middle aged but tough as oak.} with three-foot ~~shoulders.~~ ^{Not Slenco said}

"You a down-home boy? No? I guess not. You're big though. You box-fight? Football? Something? Huh?" ^{Nat}

He had eyes that ~~meant everything~~ ^{held on to yours saying} he meant evrything he asked and he grinned a dont-be-mad one at you when he was finished.

^{Peter} "Okay, ~~Silent~~, we sit together, eh?"

So they went in together through the door of the ^{shed} ~~dining hut~~ and they put their feet together across the backless forms at the table and settled their backsides and placed crooked elbows on the trestle. Nat said: ^{Peter John.} "Hey, you guys, meet Silent ~~here.~~"

^{just looked} Those who were near swivelled their eyes and ~~some said Hi~~ ^{nodded} but others said nothing and four or five girls came out of the kitchen at the end

of the room. The girls carried trays full of plates heaped already and they marched in like soldiers, wheeling at the end of the table to go right and left of it and the men laughed and some wolf whistled as their skirts flared and sucked in at the hips. There was one his eyes ^{jerked by a revolution that swarmed him slickly before he knew.} went to as if a thread had drawn them to her. She was long legged and ~~had busts unfettered busts that swung moved underneath the thin blouse when she walked.~~ She was brown as the smoking pipe in his pocket and her eyes ^{smiled} turned up at the outer corners ^{dashed} twinkled with ~~fun~~ laughter at the noises the men made. She came ink to the table at his shoulder and he felt the ~~xxxxx~~ fabric of her blouse brush his back as she bent to the table. He could smell her even with the food steaming at his face. For an instant he felt her breath at the back of his ear and when she straightened he turned his head to watch her walk away. She walked freely, the ~~swirls of xxxxxx~~ skirt whipping at her knees. ^{The man} "Hey, Silent," ^{obscure} he heard Nat Slenco chuckling, "something, ~~bad~~ eh boy? Never saw it like that before?" ^{huh?}

He faced around to Nat Slenco, his face placid. He could taste her in the back of his throat and he had the beat of her walk at his wrists and in the pulse ^{at} of his neck. ~~It bothered him but it happened so quickly.~~

"A warm cat that, boy. You got the purring in your belly??"
watching Nat Slenco:

He said, "Maybe she's brown all over."

"Ought to," Nat said, slinging plates from the tray ^{she had left on the table} to the men near him. "She lies in the sun all ^{she can.} day back of the cookhouse."

"Who knows for sure?"

Nat ~~set a plate before him and took up his eating tools before he~~ ^{replied,} he said with his eyes on the food: "Nobody. She's spoken for."

Jonathan had the jolt at the guts but he said it. "'Cept the guy who speaks for her. He knows."

Nat Slenco turned his face, seamed and written up ^{on the} by weather ^{on} in the open cab of the tractor. He looked away, shy with anger. "I said

"You wouldn't say I took a hard way finding out the coffee wasn't coming hot enough?"

Maybe she had the quick eye like Slenco. He leaned back on his legs, shrugging the shirt back on, running the zip up and ~~grinning~~ watching her solemnly. Some of those ~~high~~ cheek bones set so tall up the face and the mouth wide and moulded spoke of expensive outlooks on life and goddam ~~but~~ Slenco had said she laved in the sun, a real modern one.

"I've got some oil in my locker," the girl said, "if you wait I'll fetch it."

"Suntan oil? You heading to become Miss Alabama?"

swung her

She stopped turning away for where the lockers were and ~~had~~ ~~xxxx~~

~~full~~ ~~xxxx~~ ~~of~~ ~~her~~ ~~xxxx~~

eyes back to him. She took a short step towards him and his glance

taking his pleasure

worked fast down and up ~~carrying a pleasing memory of the arch of her~~

new days

instep and the trim stance under the ~~starch~~ of the uniform ~~frack~~.

He had the clean

a/pull at his lips to grin ~~buzz~~ but he figured it/out of his mind for

this girl was none of the kind to beckon with a grin.

. "What have you got on under those clothes, mister? Wolfskin or just plain orneriness?"

He shook his head.

/"A lot of anger and maybe some hope."

She had the dark, steady eyes and no laughter hid down there now as there had been when the men in the dining hut ~~had~~ ~~sounded off in their~~

had

~~goodnatured tomcatting way~~; ~~but~~ a baffled light and a pronounced ~~piece~~ *steel* quality ~~of~~

of steel he wouldn't be fool enough to ignore. This was a situation

old as the weary road, one ~~you didn't~~ *which was not* plunge into, but walked alongside of,

easing in gently until ~~you found your step~~ *the pace was found*. ~~It was~~ Mostly you found ~~it~~ *the*

the scare, fear, panic, the shrink

among the men --- when you knew what to look for, --- and when you did,

if you had the guts and the heart you fought off the urge to blame and

with them

to abuse, and walked the weary road. Someday, like finding five hundred

They thrust their legs together over the tailboard and sat on the hard metal seats of the pickup. The morning nip was in the air and Peter ^{John} turned up the collar of his shirt and ~~rough~~ took out his pipe. ~~and~~ He worked in the tobacco and shoved the stem into his mouth, ^{sucking the sweet unlit aroma before he} As he fumbled with the matches, He turned to look at Nat Slenco. He knew the bright eye and the wide grin but that wasn't what he was after. ^{So the situation did film those eyes and did put a fake sheen on the} If the running ever stopped and the line ever formed, ^{could use} he ~~would need~~ what was hiding behind that grin. ^{standing,}

"You know something, buddy-boy?" he said to Nat Slenco, "you and I are going to be buddies. ~~Eszk~~ For sure."

Nat Slenco sat hunched over on the seat and he looked forward ~~ovzxx~~ beyond the cab of the truck and grunted doubtfully. A man could go on being fat and unwounded if he did not grow careless.

*It was like a bucketful of pale, inert
nitroglycerin. But drop the bucket.
juice waiting for some fool to drop the
bucket.*

Chapter Four

For Nat Slenco^{short} pushed out his/strong legs before him, resting the them on/his heels ~~and~~ of his brogues wide as cigar boxes and/bent turned his ~~head down~~ face down and sideways and watched the black country flow by. The wrench in the pocket of his old leather jacket hung heavy against his leg. A comfort, the wrench, ~~was~~. It had a handle a foot long and the big jaws could/grip and turn Xany nut ~~this side of~~ in the ^{State} country. The hand went to the wrench ~~wrench~~ more than once during the four mile run to the section they were spring ~~ploughing~~ plowing. The wrench was Nat Slenco's anchor to reality, his passport to good, practical living. *A holy wrench that put him up among the artisans.*

It was easy to look ~~down~~ inside, reaching back to say ~~where~~ the old ~~zurfztop~~ wattle side house ~~zikkzozkzshack~~ down the Cumberland road a piece where the bobolinks used to cry hell-and-a-hoot in the willows by the brook. ~~Only~~ The bobolinks were the best to remember because leastways then a man wouldn't remem-ber hunger and cold and the ^{maiming} ~~zikkz~~ nor the whip burning. But it turned so Rat whichever way you looked inside, it came back to the bad times. Best for a man not to look at all. And it was best Rat a man go away from these who ^{would} ~~would~~ push you into looking. By God and all, you take the weary old road, boy, and keep your eyes straight in front. Why, everybody have troubles, don't they now? But you even a man like Boss Roly has his plect of old man trouble. Hell leh, look at him and Daisy Mae here. If Rat aint trouble then put me down for a cottonmouth. He would want to lay that sweet little nigger gal more than dry beans need fire under the pot. But she was a piece harder to come by than a million dollars in yellow gold. So no need to worry yourself SWEAT STINK about this and that. No need in the world to blow up trouble like the college boy, throwing your big arm out to stop the world from spinning. Man, take five. Wait and the broken old wheel will roll past the bad spot and run smooth again. Be a hero? Be smart and sneaking and smarmy and suck up to them so you eat regular and laugh in the evening. Daisy Mae was smart, he would bet, soaking up that old sun so she was warm and brown but nobody, nobody got past that yellow door to her room in the ~~back~~ quarters back there.

Nat Slenco crackled his knuckles and hollered silently at the pain foaming in his bowels. No use getting the misery over a woman. So she walked through ~~the~~ the old dreams and when morning yanked light under the eyelids a man woke up sweating. So what was the trouble you wanted to walk up to the tree for? Why fit the noose around your own good stretchable neck? Man, make them haul you to that tree. Be smart and sneaking all the day and laugh in the evening. He looked down at ~~John~~ ^{John} ~~then~~, " ~~where~~ ^{where} P/bor was leaning forward, elbows on knees. "Say, ~~Jack~~ ^{Jack} he said slowly, ~~earing~~ ^{earing} his voice above the clatter ^{his} of the truck, "you are good on that old harrow machine."

^{John} Peterborough straightened ~~up~~ ^{up} and rubbed his palms down his face. He turned and regarded Nat Slenco.

"Well, now, ~~boy~~ ^{boy}, you could say we are not unacquainted."

Nat Slenco nodded. "I reckon."

~~Violence in Nat Slenco~~ ~~sat unused on its branches~~ ~~had for a long time~~ ~~had~~ ~~backyard~~ ~~country~~

~~inside of him, for the~~ ~~outside~~ ~~had early shown how easy it was to~~

Rolling with the truck, Nat Slenco ^{remembered} ~~lose~~ ~~he~~ ~~reckoned~~ his age and figured he must be nigh on fifty. Some-

times he thought it may be forty-five or around, but when he tried hard enough he could recall the turned-up campaign hats and the ^{shiny leather} ~~glossy~~ leg-gings and he had learnt that this must have been around '17 when America entered the war. ~~The~~ ~~courthouse~~ in the square had burnt to the ground around ~~20~~ 'Twenty and he had been a grown boy then doing chores for old Mis' Tania who lived in the big ^{white} house across the brook. ~~He~~ ~~knew~~ ~~for~~ ~~sure~~ ~~that~~ the time of the Troubles for he remembered how ^{the bones in} his knees had turned to water the night they came riding in the high backed Fords. His ma had tried to hold back his father from going to the porch when the men called, but even though the fear glistened in ^{his} ~~the~~ eyes in the lamplight, his father had ~~taken~~ ~~up~~ ~~the~~ gone out.

"Maybe you forcing hard on twenty-^{one,} ~~three~~, twenty-^{two} ~~four~~, boy. Seems you coming along good to handle that piece of Jezebel back of the tractor."

"Okay, I told you before so stop playing smart. I went," P/b said.

"What did you study at college? Doctor?"

"You think they teach you how to ^{work a harrow machine} ~~to/PLWZAZP1800Z87XK0000~~ so you know how to ~~use the knife~~ cut up a patient?"

"Maybe you do it in the summer? Lots of ^{college} guys work in the summer."

"Sure, lots of doctors still wear Red Caps in operation rooms.

They got into the habit working the ~~Pull~~ trains to pay for their tuition."

Nat Slenco felt the hard ~~neckless~~ lick inside the boy. ^{John} Peter-
on the edge of the seat,
~~borough~~ sat/~~forwards on the truck~~, his head and shoulders thrust for-
ward and riding against the ~~neck~~ truck's lurch so he jerked/~~ungrainly~~ about
instead of moving easily into the rough rhythm. The boy was a giant,
great tearing hands and knuckles ~~toz kaxer~~ veined with strength. Under
the old baseball cap he ~~had~~ wore this morning was the thick, short
cut hair and Nat stirred around on the seat when he found the urge
building in him to rip away cap and hair and see inside.

"I got an idea to see inside your head," he said harshly, grin-
ning it away when Peter^{John}~~borough~~ looked quickly at him.

"Dad, you would see a farmer," ^{Peter John} ~~Peterborough~~ said, "a real
college farmer with a diploma and able to ^{look at the earth and tell} ~~tekk you what God xxxxxx~~ you
whether God
wants you to plant ~~xxxxxxx~~ or whether you should get the hell out
of here."

Nat Slenco said angrily: ^{up there}

^ "They teach you anything/^{about} looking at people and telling
whether you ought to bring trouble to them or get the hell outta there?"

Nat Slenco felt suddenly tired and wished the boy would grin, just
once. He looked at you coldly, as if/~~xxxxx~~ ^{skxxham} he saw
strangers, the way
a mule looked at you from the white wall of his eye. Go away, boy,
let it lay. Our feet know this road and even if we stop we will start
again but/^{Lordy,} ~~Lordy~~ we dont want to stumble.

"Take it slow, Nat," Peter^{John}~~borough~~ said far away. "Slow, ^{Boy} ~~uh~~?"

"Take it slow along here," Boss Roby said, extending his arms sleeves rolled to the mild April sun. "We got troubles down below."

He thumbed towards the ground and ~~grinned~~ grimaced at Nat Slenco. Nat winced clownishly and nodded as he revved the throttle in farmer's and the DC4 trembled in neutral. Roby went off, walking/the/ ~~plowman's~~ *bent knee slide* long ~~half~~ *lope* over the plowed section. There was a population of rocks a foot down capable of snapping the tempered steel blades of the harrow a notched easier than a man could break ~~any forked~~ stick. God Almighty sure pulled fake down around some of these lands. You looked at the black gumbo, coarse-grained with the fat glistening like diamonds and you thought a plowing deeper than you had long land, eight-ten foot down ready to/~~spillxcrazzkonzholes~~ a mule's tool. But if you didn't know it, half the units would be laid up in the workshop most of the time. He stopped by the furrow machine.

"You got the contours right, Dixie ~~xxx~~ Charlie?"

Charlie an enormously strong Negro and

~~Chazzkx~~ Hester was/the best furrow man this side of the river

but you had to watch his head this early in the morning for Charlie

~~Hazzkx~~ Aunt Phoebe's corn mash closed in on/~~x skikk~~ ~~xxxxxskikk~~ (GET WORD FOR STILL, READ UP)

every godsend evening before the toads began whistling by the old mill

run. Nobody knew when Charlie Hester slept for he never was in the

bunkhouse and it was believed that he curled up right there by ~~he~~ the early in the yard each

old woman's still. But he was/~~therezinxkx~~ morning to move out with

the gang with only the red eyes and a certain vague idea that the

tractor was holding back on him, to show for it. He cursed and fought

the controls something awful. ~~and~~ One ~~time~~ morning he had/~~leftxkx~~ *flown out* of the ten feet away

machine in a soaring dive and landed/with a crash that should have

broken his neck. Before he regained ~~consciousness~~ *his senses*, they had to pry from his hands

/the steering wheel which he had wrenched from its base. Outside of his

morning frenzies, he was the gentlest man on the section.

~~moved away and~~ climbed on his back. He mounted Boss Roby nodded ~~back~~ Charlie Hester's surly grunt ~~the~~ the swell of the land to ~~the~~ knifer's. Maybe a man ~~could~~ leave Charlie Hester alone for that nigger ~~had~~ ^{knew} the contours of this section ~~written~~ deeper in his head than ~~xxxxxx~~ a Catholic ~~XX~~ Saturday night. The rummy was born someplace around here anyway. They were the best, who were born around here. No trouble at all. A lot of good — fellows. Boss Roby thought of niggers but he rejected it. He knew why he stopped the word sneaking up on him and he had ~~felt~~ ^{felt} ~~spooky~~ spooky. He stopped ~~by the knifing machine~~ ^{and} kicked ~~at~~ the shiny rotary. ~~xxxx~~ The motor busted loose ~~at~~ on its gasoline starter, ^{as he did so,} slapping the rackety echoes in his ear. Irritated, he flapped his hand in the air. Dixie Griffiths, the operator, grinned and fed in more gas.

"Okay ---! Okay --- you grinning ape!" yelled Boss Roby. ~~angrily.~~

He turned his back to the machine and looked down the tight incline over the plowed section. It looked real nice by God, the long shallow curves of the furrows snaking decently into the bottomlands so the soil would not wash away when the rains pounded out of the east come high summer. The water would take a smooth ~~course~~ ^{way along the} ~~xxxxxx~~ trenches gently nudging the high packed banks ~~xxxxxx~~ while it fed the roots, pouring in moisture to heighten the sugar content up the fat brown stalks. Boss Roby settled his ~~booth~~ ^{booth} into the soft ~~soil~~ loam and pulled back his shoulders in a stretch of the muscles. He ~~knew~~ ^{his} had a good team on the machines and with luck on the weather, ~~the~~ section would lick the holy hell out of the other sections in sugar per ton milled out. He was ~~out~~ ^{after} for that job.

Mistuh Mac, the ~~teach~~ ^{aging} ~~old~~ hellion who headed this corner of the county for ~~count~~ the Tidewater Sugar Corporation was due for retirement at the end of the crop and a lot of ~~hard~~ ^{throat} cutting would be done ~~before~~ among ~~the~~ Tidewater's six top section bosses before Mistuh Mac's khaki corduroys were ~~filled with the new cultivation chief~~ ^{fitted on a new boy,}. Roby was nose down for the

twist arms and weak

a

knife her at six inches, you black son of a gun,"

good one, Dixie

Neg 008

BARFISH

Schlitz.

Boch

that came to hand until the old German was forced to let go while he covered his head with his arms.
~~held his arms over his~~

Shaking his head at the memory, Boss Roby moved down the incline towards Nat Slenco's machine. He could smell the insides of the ripe land, A piece of the county swelling with the need to place food in a man's hand. land parted before the tractor The/tractorxclawingxforward and broke on either side lazily easy so a man could believe it was/water going over a freeway. He had been brought up on a patch where the first kiss of the hoe/erupted dust enough to you. It killed off the seeds faster than if blindxxxeruptionxofxdustx enough xtochokezyou?X you had mashed them when he was sixteen and with a mallet. One Jefferson Davis Day/with the June sun bouncingxxx salty baked the/baked yard fierce to nobody knew how, he had put/hisxtwopairsofxxx intoazazzazxxx bagxxx into a canvas bag he used for hunting, the two pairs of jeans and extra the wardrobe sharecropping father had shirt which was all/his/tenxkzfarming could salvaged for him from share died the family's half/of the short-staple upland that had/died in the slack soil down to a hundred and forty bales to the acre. HisxIrish

Young Roby, rawboned and spareribbed as/~~an~~ Irish knack horse, had
which/~~his ancestors~~ shared the peat dwellings of his ancestors, in the
Old Country, widened and lengthened and filled out/~~on a~~
in the loblolly and shortleaf/~~forests~~. By the time they had
Harbour A swinging axe loads a man's shoulders with the kind of muscles
dragged
best suited to the murderous kick of the BAR and Roby he/~~took~~ the old
up a dozen bloody beaches
ball-and-chain/~~right through~~ before he swapped it for (GET A
PROMINENT TEXT BOOK IN A U.S. AGRIC COLLEGE) in the State Tech at war's
end. After/~~the~~ course paid for on his G.I. ticket, he/~~came~~ back to
Jarvis Bend and landed the job with Tidewater. He had done right
a right. He had no cause to be spooky but Jesus Christ all his
brain had gone down into his cock. He howled wide open all the way up
from his guts: "Watch it --- you son of a bitching coon!"

The harrow had made a neat turn and the blade had smacked back soft as silk into the foam^{on} a faultless cut. Peterborough heard the whisper in his head asking why ~~who~~ Section boss Roby abusing him. His face was bland.

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That Silence cracked his knuckles and hovered silently at the
pain foaming in his bowels. No use getting the misery over a woman.
So she walked through his dreams and when ^{morning, yanked} ~~the~~ ~~light~~ ~~into~~ the light into
the ^{long barrack} ~~room~~ he woke sweating. So was that the trouble you would want to
march up to the tree for? To fit the noose around your fine stretchable neck for?

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PROFANITY (TITLE)

NOTE: This is the first of three sequences which should be in another distinctive Roman — rather than Italics.

I will open my door
saying up to the
hub
of the world
Virginia

THE BELLES

^{fled} Pure as a late lark's singing, ~~Mrs Jim Bob~~ Slocum
~~ran~~ across her ante bellum bedroom trilling a delicate capriccio
of smut. She tipped the jalousie blinds out at the white pillared
gallery, ^{and} looked out at the Southland. ^{looked out}
^{on} ~~But~~ there were the sick oaks, ^{That} once ~~they~~ ^{and} had stood in
unceasing sunshine. Now they were shining in the rain, ^{the unclean} that never ^{rain} ~~ceased~~
^{OK} in magnolia land. ^{chasing} A blinding, ^{choking} ~~choking~~ rain, lashing ^{blatantly} under the
eaves and ~~running~~ catspaws down the shallow slope ~~to the~~ to the
hollow near the war memorial. [The broken fields streamed and tossed
away from the ~~Jim Bob~~ Slocum mansion, bearing a burden of oaks
that were uncommonly unclean, full of fat parasites entwining the
sucked-out trunks, the sick oaks of weeping magnolia land, the
empty, ^{entrapped}, sapless trunk, jaded but upright.
Upright, ^{upright} ~~They~~ stood like the house, creaking in the
wind but never disposed to fall. They would rot straight down to
the roots and ^{to disintegrate inside} ~~turn ash~~ in their own circumference.
The land ^{on the windows} ~~held~~ a vast, suppressed strength like a lazy
joy that wouldn't ^{not} roll over until it was prodded by the plow, ^{to the} ~~out~~
^{and out} of sullen love for the tines, clinging stinking rich to the prod-
ding tines. The tines plowing carelessly in a juvenile love,
searching for worth in the dark bodied land, laughing with a
glisten of steel blue teeth as ^{they} it withdrew and drove in again in
unceasing copulation.

^{murmured Virginia Slocum,}
"Copulate me," said ~~Mrs Jim Bob~~ Slocum rushing back
across the room to the portrait of Jim Bob. She ran nude ^{right} around
the room, ^{her breasts tipped forward} ~~her~~ ^{and} returned to the portrait.

She slid her hips in a slow dancelike the Delta folk down in the black bayou mud, her bottom cool and fragile, high instep pecking at the gutty rhythm, her knees close together.

"Copulate me," she said in the honey drawl, taking her pubic hair close to the twinkling eyes and smiling mouth of old Jim Bob Slocum.

She stood stockstill suddenly.

"Just listen to that rain," she said into the room.

"Just hark to it." Head on one side.

She listened to the swish of it, in the gutter, the gusty rattle of it, in the leads, and shyly swung her honey coloured eyes, watching the run of it down the glass. It ran hard coated down the glass, winking lewdly at her when it caught the light right and she blushed at the lewdness.

She rested her eyes thoughtfully on old husband Jim Bob.

"Its soothing," she said to him.

"All that water, its sheathing. Plumb sheathed, as Aunt Jemima would say."

She fled over the floor again, the concave belly with its wedge of yellow hair still as an athlete's. She ran high kneed for Jim Bob's old bullsnake whip. She threw the lash so it thonged out and with a snap of her wrist, hobbled her hips in the leather. She held out the handle and undulated before it. Her eyes looked bruised. The handle weaved gently.

A telephone rang in the room.

"Mrs Jim Bob Slocum," she said into it in the authentic drawl. "D.O.E. Secretariat. You caught somebody passin'?"

"Its me, Miz Virginny. The ladies from the D.O.E., they all heah," came Aunt Jemima's lazy drawl.

Virginia grinned at Aunt Jemima's authenticity. The Aunt

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"Copulate your wife, you sensuous lump of lard," whispered Virginia Slocum, a gamin grin out of place on her lovely patrician face, "Do it to me, you cold piece of cod."

She slid her hips in a slow dance like the Delta folk down in the black ~~bazzanz,xxx~~ bayou mud, her bottom cool and fragile, high instep pecking at the gutty rhythm, her knees together.

"Copulate me," she said in the honey drawl, taking her pubic hair close to the twinkling eyes and smiling mouth of Jim Bob. *Slocum*.

She stood stockstill suddenly.

"Just listen to that rain," she said hollowly into the room.

"Just hark at it." *Head on one side.*

~~Her head on one side,~~ She listened to the swish of it, in the gutter, the gusty rattle of it, in the leads. Shyly she swung her honey coloured eyes and watched the run of it, down the bay windows. It ran hard coated down the glass, winking lewdly at her when it caught the right light. Virginia blushed at the lewd wink. She rested her eyes thoughtfully on ^{*Husband*} Jim Bob.

"Its soothing," she said to him. "All that water. Its sheathing. Protected. Plumb sheathed, as Aunt Jemima ^{*would say.*} ~~would say.~~"

She ran to the other side of the room, ^{*The*} ~~her~~ concave belly with its wedge of yellow hair still as an athlete's. She ran high kneed for Jim Bob's bullsnae whip. She threw the lash until it thonged out. With a flick of her wrist, Virginia snapped the thong around her hips. She held out the handle and undulated before it. Her eyes looked bruised. The handle weaved slowly. She tightened the thong around her hips, bruised eyes on the

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weaving head. The telephone rang in the room.

"Mrs Jim Bob Slocum," she said into it in the authentic drawl. "D.O.E. secretariat. You caught somebody passin'?"

"Its me, Miz Virginny. The ladies from the ^{D.O.E.} ~~Daughters~~ of the ~~Evolution~~. They all heah," came Aunt Jemima's lazy drawl ^{from} ~~the~~ ^{observation}.

Virginia grinned at Aunt Jemima's authenticity. That Aunt Jemima honey, ^{on the home phone} she was good too. ^{Aunt Jemima did not} ~~She didnt~~ like folks who were caught passing either.

"Which ones? The shroud-makers?"

"No ^{ma'am.} ~~ma'am.~~ Theys for tomorrow. These are the shoe-makin' ones. The cobblers."

^{her} ~~"I'll~~ be right down, honey," Virginia told the ~~maid~~.

She slipped into shorts and halter, patted Jim Bob's cheek, and went out of the bedroom.

^{BREAK}
^{CAPS} The cobblers were in an alcove of the drawing room near the foot of the stairs. The cobblers were sleek and well groomed in sunny weather clothes. Going around in sunny weather clothes because their menfolk had promised to roof the world. ^{from all that rain}

^{astirle} "Roof you all," cried Virginia gaily as she slid ~~down~~ the massive oak rail and landed on the deep pile carpet.

She looked laughingly up at them from the floor. A roof over the darkly glowing head of 'Bamah, from another white house down the river road. And over handsome, big bodied Texana, the ~~oddy attractive~~ lesbian, who lurched when she walked. And a roof over the Judge's white-blonde daughter Georgia, who rode to hounds ^{IN A G-string} on a coal black stallion, ^{that only to} ~~wearing nothing but a G-string.~~ And over vague, cuddly Missy Sip who had majored in ^{Sociology} ~~math~~ and ran the biggest computer in the blood test factory. And over the Carolina twins, the long legged, soft mouthed hellions belonging

to the old General across the turnpike.

"Virginia, pet, you always look so fresh. You gettin' lots apart from Jim Bob?" drawled Texana

"All I need," Virginia said. "And you, honey?"

Texana rolled her wicked dark eyes at Georgia.

"Reckon. Dont I, lamb?"

"The hell you do," giggled Virginia who knew that Texana ~~had~~ ~~no chance against~~ ~~help no elews in competing with the~~ ~~prec~~ taut-hipped, coal black ~~stallion~~ stallion that Georgia rode to hounds.

"You on to me, sugar?" asked Texana, her teeth strong as oil stocks.

"Closer'n a burr to a buffalo," Virginia said. She put an arm around cuddly Missy Sip.

Missy Sip was shabby for the company. She came uncomfortably close to trash, but her breeding showed. She had goat's heels.

"How's the lil' ol' computer these days?" Still weeding out the one percenters?" Virginia asked Missy Sip. ~~Pretty but shabby.~~

Missy Sip thought of a few who had got in under the wire. The dirty grey tears rolled down inside her.

"They brought in U.S. marshals to raise the wire," she sobbed. "The D.O.E. —"

"A crapping shame," boomed Texana. "The ~~queen~~ ^{Daughters of the Evolution} oughta do something about it."

Missy Sip sobbed as if her heart would break.

"The executives ~~up~~ ^{ON in the swamp} the Potomac —"

"Crap the Potomac!" Texana yelled. "Better move you over to my place. We got lots of room."

"Aint got no shoes to walk over in," Missy Sip wept.

"Folks ~~on~~ ^{Mon} the Potomac say a blood-test factory aint productive. They done cut our ~~reg~~ ^{allocation} ~~allocation~~ ^{appropriation}."

"But all God's chilluns got to have shoes!" 'Bamah cried.

And they all hung their heads at the Instant Guilt. They said it softly over and over, "All God's chilluns oughta have shoes."

"Amen," said Aunt Jemima listening at the scullery door, a bucket in her lap for the tears.

"We all love Aunt Jemima and her folks," the ladies ^{yelled} ~~said~~ sadly, looking at the closed scullery door.

"Amen," Aunt Jemima said solemnly, looking through the hole in the bottom of the bucket.

"Ma, oh Ma!" cried Jubal ~~her son~~, seated on the scullery floor, his big hands hanging down between his knees cupping all his hope.

Jemima turned about inside her hundred years of waiting. "Son, You just gotta learn to wait too!" she ^{cried} ~~xxxxxxx~~ desperately.

"Aunt Jemima, honey?" Virginia called.

Aunt Jemima took up the sack and clumped out of the scullery. She shuffled forward and imperiously dumped the sack of shoes to the floor. Coldly, she nodded them down. They sat quickly, cross-legged, cobbler fashion on the floor.

"Shoot," Aunt Jemima said with scorn.

On a sigh of ~~ecstasy~~ ^{picked}, they commenced picking at the pile. There were broken, splayed-toed shoes caked in river mud from the bottom. Carpet slippers gaping where the rats had got to them. Gum ~~xxxxxx~~ boots that had lain in the bayou until there was little but the uppers. In the ladies' lacquered hands, they overflowed the delicate palms, filth-caked and ^{loathsome} ~~grievous~~, the rape-happy boots that needed repairs as any psychiatric son of a bitch knew. The lovely lacquered hands hauled and tugged.

Missy Sip sucked at her torn fingers; her eyes ^{were} afraid.

"Dont be afraid, Missy Sip," said Texana in her tough, gentle way. She was too successful with the foolish girls to be rough.

"Yes, yes," whispered Missy Sip, the old grey tears coursing down her cheeks. "I love Aunt Jemima and all her folks."

and All their Southern ^{heads} ~~heads~~ flung up at that and they recited in a chorus,

"I love Aunt Jemima. We love Aunt Jemima. All God's chosen ~~for~~ sure love Aunt Jemima."

"Amen," said Aunt Jemima behind the scullery door, looking through the hole in the bottom of the bucket she had brought for the tears.

"The studs are still sound in this one," Virginia Slocum said, sniffing through her tears as she peered at the whip scarred child size boot. "Honey husband Jim Bob would love this for stomping," ~~the kids at the beach.~~

"Not so much talk," rebuked Georgia. "There's work to be done for ~~the~~ the homeland."

So the girls grew quiet, *and* Boots thudded and there were clicks from needles and awls. All the flags had already been stitched by ^{an earlier} ~~an~~ greedy generation, but the needles of the great land still had work to do. A confusion of banners to rally the profaned land. ~~To shield it from the profanities of~~ ^{Hamitic} ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~the~~ ^{from the} ~~the~~ ^{to hold off the invasion of Semitic noses,} ~~to turn back the menace~~ ^{Roman} ~~of Italian~~ seducers ~~marking~~ under their Protestant stoops.

The girls had been cobbling easy, The long tanned legs beautifully moulded to the floor, ^{mouths} The tapering wellbred fingers plucked ^{ing} at the footgear. Their pretty ~~kiss~~ ^{whip scars, or} pouted when they found bullet holes, ^{but} or rope burns on the leather, ~~but as the evidence of~~

LACKS
FEND
ATTACHES
IN PAGE
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violence increased, ^{it caused,} the tempo ^{to} heightened, ^{and the fingers flew, and} furrows appeared on the brows, and the breathing of the cobblers shallowed. ~~Sweat~~ channelled down through their makeup. ~~Their hands flew faster.~~ Boot after boot dropped back to the floor, mended and ready for use again.

"Faster, faster!" cried Aunt Jemima from the scullery door.

She held back Jubal with one hand as he strained to go in. She beat the time with her kerchiefed head, the coal black ^{Mammy} ~~lady~~ ^{who was the} purveyor of reprieve to a guilt burdened mob ^{lady} ~~woman~~. The time-buying ~~Aunty~~ of a lovesick folk.

Sew, stitch, mend ^{ran} the fingers, bruised and pierced in the Cause. Ecstasies of agony sweeping over them to pay for the absence of honey husbands out on a nightride to purify a race. Hurry, hurry, faster raced the fingers, bodies jumping and jerking in a frenzy. Fear bubbled at the ⁱⁿ ~~slavering~~ mouths as back and forth they swayed, hustling out the night but scared to catch up with the day.

"Ma! ~~There~~ There aint no joybells gonna ring!" cried Jubal to ~~the harsh~~ ~~old~~ old Jemima.

But a body never doubted that the joybells would ring, said Aunt Jemima peering through the judas. No ^{sure} ~~sin~~. A body never doubted that morning would come and them joybells would be a-ringing.

Aunt Jemima looked keenly into Jubal's eyes, way back to where he lurked. And you were smarter'n a squirrel in the ^{wink} ~~face~~ if you caught the pinwheel of anger shining through the ^{reflection} ~~rest~~ of old shoes ~~reflected~~ in Jubal's eyes.

You would be smart to find among all those weary shoes ^{signs} the ~~shine~~ of trouble, making tracks straight for your own cabin door. But in a thousand sculleries behind a thousand doors, a lot of downhome black folk were living brave and good even if they hadnt taken to fishing. For folk could be as brave in a scullery-room as those kids who had gone a-fishing. For wherever you settled to be,

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you could set off the good-news bell. You knew the wearisome road was a-turning and so you hustled out more of those old shoes.

"You wait for the good-news bell, you hear?" Aunt Jemima cried to her son.

"Ma, I aint got the time! I gotta go fishing!" Jubal cried in terror as he saw how his days were fraying.

But Aunt Jemima turned strongly away. [She looked back through the judas.

Jubilee! sang ~~at~~ her ~~Belta street~~ soul, for the ladies were cavorting on the floor now, a writhing, sweating, suffering grove of ladies twisting over each other as they lusted for the unmended boots. They clawed and scratched, pausing a little to kiss and stroke and then go crawling after ~~xxx~~ more shoes.

Aunt Jemima threw open the double leaf door and strode into the room with the authority she had studied in a dozen ~~not~~ nurseries.

"Alright, chillun, guess there's plenty more. Guess you come again we find you a sack or two," ~~she said~~. *[They turned their glazed eyes up at her, waiting as they had all their lives, for her to comfort them. Aunt Jemima nodded gently. She sighed with relief.]*
"No, Aunty," Missy Sip said sadly. "The fix is in, ~~from~~ *up north*. You watch. ~~the~~ *They're gonna finish us.* Cousin Jim Bob's taking boots off the gross national product."

"Dat"
"That bad?" asked Aunt Jemima

"Sure is," said Texana. "Means folks wont buy as much rope or gasoline either."

"Huh," grunted Aunt Jemima. But her soul exulted in one long Jubilee!

She slapped at thighs and bottoms to seperate them.

"Taint planting season yet," she muttered. *"Up, you git."*

Cuddly Missy Sip looked fearfully at her out of the corners of her eyes. "Your kin got shoes in this lot, honey?" ~~she asked~~.

Only got one kin and he's ^{ah keep} back there in the scullery, ~~he~~,"
said Aunt Jemima, wiping a smudge from honey chile Missy Sip's
mouth. "Them's shoes ^{are} from menfolk who ^{went busting out of the scullery} ~~could run fast enough before~~
~~the rope caught them.~~"

'Bamah shyly touched Aunt Jemima's work roughened hand.

"You ~~don't~~ dont need to be afraia, Aunt Jemima," 'Bamah ssid.

"You just stay in the scullery, Aunt Jemima," ~~one of the~~ ^{a he}
Carolina ~~the~~ twins said. ^{"Nobody gonna come busting"} ~~We'll see that nobody comes~~ in there after
you."

"Stay in the scullery, Jemima honey," they all sang in a
chorus.

"You'll always wear shoes, Aunt Jemima, pet," Texana said.

"You'll always wear shoes," they chorused happily at her.

With her eyes flashing triumph, Aunt Jemima glanced at
Jubal as she brushed past him, going in for the mint juleps.

TAKE IN AT PREVIOUS

2

* For the forecoat and the ^{collar} ~~lgh~~ clothed a man in a Kingdom
aint ~~not~~ ^{Jim Bob or his} ~~no~~ ^{Deputy} ~~with~~ ^{need} stamp. You took rope down to a ^{BIBLE} ~~father~~ ^{system,} ~~best~~
BELT ^{BOY,} ~~the~~ ^{You} ~~it~~ ^{PRAYED} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~white~~ ^{white} ~~amts~~ ^{amts} and ~~united~~ ^{united} the best
goddam cotton on the white goddam loom on which ^{Boy} ~~we~~ knit this Scotland.

The choir moved ~~behind~~ ^{behind} the curtains of the oval room, ~~shining~~
SHIRING and shushing the ~~white~~ ^{white} ~~shirasee~~ ^{shirasee} that should come out a worship
song, a moaning growling graffiti upon the walls of ^{INDIFFERENCE} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~white~~ ^{white} folk
raised to ^{HUSH} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~most~~ ^{most} ~~song~~ ^{song}.

"Ma," Tubal ^{bleaded} ~~from~~ ^{his} ~~the~~ ^{corner in the scullery,} "you got too much alum in the collar."
For no matter ^{how you tried to go easy,} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~life~~ ^{life} ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~shore~~ ^{shore}
came before ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~next~~ ^{next} ~~lord's~~ ^{lord's} ~~day,~~ ^{day,} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~six-days-a-week~~ ^{six-days-a-week} ~~bale-and-barge,~~ ^{bale-and-barge,} ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~down~~ ^{down} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~street~~ ^{street} ~~front~~ ^{front}
dear ^{must} ~~pay~~ ^{pay} for the privilege of wearing a Sunday collar. ~~But~~ ^{But} ~~aint~~ ^{aint} ~~Tomina~~ ^{Tomina} ~~but~~ ^{but} ~~her~~ ^{her}
~~People~~ ^{People} ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~those~~ ^{those} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~alum~~ ^{alum} ~~bandet~~ ^{bandet} ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~halloped~~ ^{halloped} a song of her own, for she was the mother
who ~~passed~~ ^{passed} ~~all~~ ^{all} ~~men,~~ ^{men,} ~~seven~~ ^{seven} ~~generations~~ ^{generations} of field hands

THE BELLES

Cap Swarming down the joy-ropes which Virginia had hung from the vaulted ceiling, the shroud-makers descended the walls in a giggling assault, evening gowns billowing up on the down draft to display the swimming pool legs that were brown from all that eternal moonshine, goats' heels kicking lasciviously in the hope of some unclean fun. They fell into Virginia Slocum's Colonial room with a fetching disregard for exposure. With laughing mouths and flying hair, they tumbled over each other, sprawled on the rubbed oak floor amidst the magnolia blooms with which Aunt Jemima had strewn it.

They caught sight of Aunt Jemima frowning down at them from the powder room gallery and they laughed wildly up at her.

"Cavort!" yelled Aunt Jemima ^{IN A WAY TO} ~~as if she would~~ shatter the chandeliers. "Cavort! Cavort! Cavort!"

They had grown up in a thousand nurseries obeying their coal black mammies. Quickly Georgia wrapped her legs around those of big strong Texana, pinning her to the floor, and they closed slowly and sensuously, long brown legs threshing. Missy Sip gave a soft moonlight moan of understanding and drew a trace with her finger around Virginia's navel. The Carolina Twins said coarse words of passion and threw themselves on Missy Sip's fragile hands. The fingers closed softly, the exquisite pincers squeezing whimpers from them. Missy Sip buried her face in the coal black tresses of 'Bamah and then Virginia Slocum, her eyes smouldering, crawled over to them and with long shuddering ~~high~~ grunts, ^{appropriated} ~~chopped~~ ~~chopped~~ Missy Sip.

They all moved slowly, sleepily together until Virginia ~~Kenneth~~ assumed the beautiful crucifixion position and whispered,

"Dont be afraid, Missy Sip. We'll help you keep the wire down."

And ~~as~~ as the sob of desire escaped Missy Sip and she fastened her lips greedily to Virginia, the girls lay back in an orgiastic welter of silk and flesh, losing in/~~the~~ ^{their} roaring passions all those shrieks and screams from the ~~the~~ magnolia bush where ~~Paradise South~~ ^{downhome} folk were in the grip of ~~the~~ Mob love. ~~the sweeping staircase~~
^{Aunt Jemima} ~~Jemima~~ clumped down ~~the sweeping staircase~~ from the powder room, a vast bundle of muslin in her arms. She threw the muslin over them. It swelled like a cloud before it settled, shivering silvery on ~~the~~ sliding limbs and ungovernable breathing. ~~Jemima~~ ^{Jemima} had her hands clasped below her fallen breasts. The ~~the~~ ^{yellow} kerchiefed head nodded to a rhythm going in her big body. She crooned the song away inside, crowding it to a corner, working at it to shape the notes ~~the~~ strong and resilient for the buffetings of a magnolia world.

~~Jemima~~ ^{Jemima} caught the rhythm and built it up inside the tune until the diaphragm filled with ~~its~~ resonance. Then she threw the song into the ~~the~~ room, sending it out full grown

and even if the shroud making magnolia women took it and wrapped their lightweight voices around its agony for their evening gowned concert halls, the pain would remain. And appearing in the wrong places, shame them. For the pain was a downhome pain that was created inside the ~~little~~ lost folk of ~~Paradise South~~.

Her upflung face / hard and unsparing, the toil roughened hands palms showing, Aunt Jemima searched out the gut notes, belting

it out until the bodies beneath the muslin caught the agony, bracing
 and arcing up and up/^{and} with/^{an} exultant/^{cry} it broke ^{up the} ~~in them~~
^{evil in them}
 and the evil flowed out.

"Swing low, sweet chariot,"/^{moaned} Missy Sip in her light
 voice of anguish.

Angrily, Aunt Jemima/^{snatched} away the muslin. Their faces
 clean and free smiled innocently up at her. They lay about like
 overgrown babies, legs, ~~and~~ arms, breasts softly powdered with
 sweat.

Her head weaving on her veined neck,/^{Jemima} bowed beneath
 a great crash of anger. She struggled up and prodded her impurely
 hopeful soul into loving them all. For what could the poor pets do
 with all them witless menfolk gone ariding through the live long
 night? And just look at all them pretty Southern belles, all gussied
 up for a shrouding.

"You get to workin'," barked Aunt Jemima in her nursery
 voice/^{the} hammered and honed in/~~the~~ nursery rooms of ~~the~~
 half a nation.
~~the~~ She threw out ^{spools and} needles and ~~spools of threads~~ from
 the pockets of her Mammy apron. "You get to sewin' on them shrouds.
 You gotta clothe them naked bodies your menfolk strung up all
 over the country." she said.

Them poor little ~~the~~ lambs all come in by themselves
 a-hankering for a shrouding and a body couldnt do nothing but help
 them. Couldnt do nothing but what I trained for, said Aunt Jemima.

Aunt Jemima watched with ^{calculating} expert eyes as the ladies ripped
 the muslin cloth, getting the lengths right, measuring it along the
 corpses they remembered in their heads, ^{dancing} ~~hanging~~ from cypress and oak.
 All the corpses of all the downhome boys who had eye-laid a magnolia
 woman.

"You keep making them shrouds. My race folk aint gonna

get no credit if they reach them golden stairs wearing poor clothes and without shoes," she said.

Ma, we aint needin' no shrouds nor no shoes! ^{agonized} cried Jubal helplessly behind the scullery door.

^{her} Aunt Jemima could remember ~~the~~ far back the brawling, yelling desire for shoes that had driven her blue eyed baby Jim Bob into public office. Could recall him at his first lynching, the baby fat ^{as Camp's ma full} big ^{ma's} breasts had provided in ~~her~~ wet-nursing days a still pink around his cheeks. For ~~she~~ ^{Camp's ma} had been Jim Bob's coal black mammy ~~back when he was born~~ ^{as she had been for Virginia, Bob's late wife and his} All white folks had to have a ^{and the} coal black mammy. ^{FOR} she thought proudly. ~~Camp's ma had been his walking and~~

Remember that young Jim Bob going into town to seek public office? And him with no shoes on then? Aunt Jemima shook her head fondly as she remembered.

^{he} Remembered him ascending the platform, hair plastered down with ^{she Camp's ma had rubbed into it,} harness oil, wearing his denims with the nail through the suspender but already with the organ sweep of oratory in him, ^{the} The shit-and-stay convention room genius already in him that would pinwheel him straight into ~~potentate~~ ^{power}.

"Sure," ^{remember} Aunt Jemima whispered to ~~herself~~ as she watched the shroud makers. "~~I remember~~. Just listen to that Jim Bob that first day before he learned to talk good. Can still see him talking."

She struck a pose like Jim Bob, big head forward, short thick arms stabbing forward as she talked like Jim Bob that first day he offered himself for public office. She said like the young Jim Bob,

"Ah done hear tell that them folks up ~~North~~ ^{in New York country} say we should open up all kinds of jobs to them niggers. Even allow them to handle our funerals. Undertakers, that's the big word Jim Bob was searching for. Folks up ~~North~~ ^{in New York country} say them niggers should even be allowed to bury a white man."

Jim Bob had paused and grinned at the spit-and-chaw hall ~~of men~~ while he readied his punch line.

"Well, then, Jim Bob says this: If when ah dies, there aint a good cracker undertaker to look after mah body, then the nearest nigger-undertaker got mah permission to do this: He can strip me, lay me out, roll me over on mah face — and do what ah always made him do in mah lifetime."

Aunt Jemima shook her head as she remembered.

In no time the Mob had given him his club and magnolia

and young Jim Bob was off and running.

"Lordy, Lordy, the thinking I do and ~~me~~ honey babies needing to make their shrouds," Aunt Jemima rebuked herself.

So she clapped her hands together and the needles flew, stitching ~~the~~ foamy muslin that had the colour of moonlight, snipping the one-piece ~~graveyard~~ graveyard clothes in all sizes from eye-raping kids to the big shouldered road gang bucks who had crossed up an ofay ^{whose} ~~graveyard~~ Scissored and sewn and laid out for a weary cullud already safe and sound in his pinebox mansion where ~~the~~ the river/^{stayed} away from his door.

ladies' hands hastened
The ~~ladies~~ and the stitched and finished winding sheets flew through the air like boneless ghosts, homing on a spill of wind some sad morning. Aunt Jemima, her powerful forearms held off at her side, hovered around the frenzied ~~ladies~~ ^{ladies} ~~sewers~~ ready to move in and seal off the first of those to crack ~~in~~ in the madhouse scene of pocketless garments being hustled for the army of lying-in downhome boys, awaiting the born-again freedom train.

"Whoo Whoo — heah ~~the~~ dat whistle blowin'! Whoo Whoo — heah dat freedom train a-rollin'!" hummed Aunt Jemima in chords as strong as ^{the} baling wire the white boys used for the chastity belts they fixed on the cullud ^{ones} ~~ones~~ before they ^{pulled} ~~placed~~ them ^{on} ~~on~~ board that born-again ^{train}.

Missy Sip's voice tore raggedly through the room.

"Its a lie — we never fixed so many!" ~~she cried~~ ^{she cried} hoarsely.

Her face twisted with rage, she bared her teeth in a feral grin as she ~~bit~~ bit at her breasts. With a quickness that fat old Jemima couldnt match, Taxana slithered over the ladies and held the whimpering Missy Sip. Texana touched

her here and there so the lacy ~~shocks~~ shocks went deliciously through her. The others had stopped ~~when~~ when Missy Sip broke. ^{and} Their shoulders heaved/~~and~~ their breaths rushed through their open mouths as they waited for her to calm. They were glassy eyed with fatigue. The bowels of compassion opened in Aunt Jemima. She had known them ~~when their fannies were half exposed~~, before their honey husbands struck it rich.

"You rest awhile now, lamb," she said to them. "We got enough to go on with and you gotta be strong for planting time."

They had grown up obeying a coal black mammy so they licked their lips and grinned obedience. Their long brown legs fell out exhausted in the deep pile. They hitched their gowns about their waists and let the ceiling fans cool them.

"Aunt Jemima, you got any shrouds in this lot?" ^{panted} ~~she~~
'Bamah, her dark hair wet and lank down her ~~cheeks~~ cheeks.

And Texana laid Missy Sip gently on her back. And Missy Sip felt the long powerful legs twist down on her. The sliding power of groin bearing down for the prolonged rush until the tender meeting when the true bodies kissed.

^{Aunt Jemima}
"Dont talk! Dont talk!" screamed ~~she~~ feeling for the flaming sword.

^{heaven}
At twilight, they all fell out of ~~heaven~~ on a cry of ecstasy and decay.

THE BELLES

The Plantin' Time Ball

copy Dancing with her sugar spouse Jim Bob Slocum in the thunder of a plainsong from the great pipe organ, Virginia ~~was~~ pressed, unwounded, to his broken sword. He held her closely with a hand cupped on her buttocks. Her muscles swarmed and rippled like a cat in coitus.

In the high ceillinged hall of Jim Bob's mansion, in the many splendored glitter of the chandeliers, all the fellas who could be spared from night riding had gathered for the plantin' time ball. The randy ladies of Mobs^{town}ville slid in the love embrace of sons and brothers.

Virginia looked hungrily across the black clad shoulder of Jim Bob, searching the landing for the Carolina twins who had gone upstairs with an uncle, ~~and~~ ^{and} thinking of the ~~seduction~~ seduction, Virginia shivered with sensuous ~~delight~~ ^{delight}.

"You cold, honey?" asked Jim Bob as he executed to the plainsong.

"Let me have it, darling," Virginia said, rippling her ~~bottom~~ ^{buttocks} bottom.

She thought of Jim Bob's whip handle and bit his ear.

But Jim Bob, ~~in Mob City~~ ^{in Mob City} had no ~~ball~~ heat in him to ~~impel~~ ^{impel} his sword. He was saving himself for the high yaller gal ^{waiting in the ballroom}. He pumped his legs to the organ, content in his lady's inviolability: the hoodwink for mansionsful of white folks in the hate bowl, denying hope in the sun soaked land.

'Bamah, who was dancing with her honey husband's pa, felt with ~~interest~~ a flash of interest that she had aroused honey husband's pa. He ^{tried} ~~was tugging~~ ^{at} the knot of his necktie.

stalking
'Bamah had been/~~stalking~~ her brother but incest could be served with honey husband's pa.

"You got an itch, honey husband's pa?" asked 'Bamah, her delicate nostrils twitching at all the ripe rich odours given off by honey husband's pa.

"Guess I should have washed before gettin' spruced up," he said, scraping his fingernails at the ripe red underwear beneath the white tie.

'Bamah snuggled closer. Honey husband's pa smelled like her brother ^{when he} ~~who~~ was readying to go out night riding. Maybe he would do. Got to have a partner for a plantin' time ball.

For it was a ripsnortin' shivaree in a no-time beat, an out-of-tune, out-of-time go-around that only a Southern gent with a masochistic bent would rake such promising fun from.

Wrapped in the no-beat of a plainsinging organ that broke up Jubal behind the scullery door.

"Ma, why dont they call me, ma? Why aint they using this downhome boy to make a hot lips Dixieland duet?" cried Jubal to Aunt Jemima.

But Aunt Jemima threw him a look.

"White folks like to dance to their organ. Their ^{re} aint no call ~~■~~ for black folks to make it their affair whatever," she said.

"But, ma, they aint heard from me! They aint heard what this cullud citizen got to offer!"

And Aunt Jemima threw her apron over her head at the word, crying, Lordy, Lordy.

Since it didnt matter that you were behind the scullery door, but mobfolk would lynch you sure as shootin' for figurin' you were a cullud citizen.

"Son, you leave them alone, you hear me? ~~You black~~, you

stand back — ~~and live longer, you hear?~~ White folks aint ready for no duet."

While the plainsong thundered unwrinkled at the white folks ball. And Jubal who loved this land with the agonized passion of the unwanted, cried for a lick at the tune. His horn lay dead at his feet. Its bell tone, still. A quiet trumpet.

ccp Jubal said roughly, "There aint no joy in it, ma. There aint no goodtime dancin' to a buryin' tune."

"Could be a goodtime deal for the folks what doing the buryin', son." *They got* lots of time," Aunt Jemima said softly.

There was time and to spare for dancers, eons for cobbler^s and shroudmakers, and those who spruced up for plantin' time. A white boy who stayed inside the walls/^{which} his time had thrown up around him, could disprove the prophets, or/^{hurdle} ~~hurdle~~ the fate with which history waylaid him.

So error and truth both stood at bay, uncertain of the outcome.

Texana threw back her big gorgeous head and laughed.

wp Texana had crept inside the skulls of the dancing girls and was looking out through their eyes. She leaned her elbows on the cheekbones, ^{high out and} ~~that~~ were wind whipped, ^{music} with the lashings of plainsong ~~surging from the organ~~. ^{gazing} She ~~gazed~~ from the empty sockets. ~~Gazed~~ at the solitary skulls and the rib cage complexes.

She wept for them but the salt ate away her tears. She could recall the time she had climbed out of the eye sockets and gone up among the clouds and an archangel had put his hand up her skirt. Poor archangel, feeling for an aperture to right ~~her~~ and left and meeting up with a wall. Texana grinned out of Georgia's eyes and with her ~~nipples~~ fingers squeezed the nipples of the blonde girl's breasts.

"You must be a poor, lone bitch," said the archangel gently.

"Shucks, no. I got the biggest of everything including the ~~biggest~~ widest open space between the hairs," ^{Texana} ~~she~~ said with clear such a powerful laugh that ~~the~~ oil derricks shook/across the state.

She squeezed Missy Sip's and the hot little thing whimpered.

"Why you so scared, Missy Sip?" the ~~the~~ girls asked, crowding the shabby pretty.

"'Cause they'll shut down the blood test plant 'less'n folks mix more," wept Missy Sip.

So Virginia Slocum clapped her hands and signalled Aunt Jemima at the scullery door.

^{called,} ~~said,~~ "Jemima, honey, you get Jubal, you hear me?" Virginia authentic as sugared ham.

And Jemima clumped across, her ~~headkerchief~~ angrily bobbing, to whisper at her ear, "Miz 'Ginny, lamb, you-all ~~none~~ crazy? What will the menfolk say? They'll fix my Jubal so he dont dance no more."

But all the ladies smiled at the authenticity of Aunt Jemima and shook their heads at her fears.

"Aunt Jemima, pet, aint no need to worry. Your folks

will look after you," the Carolina twins said.

"He'll march up ~~the~~ the golden stairs wearing shoes and shroud like any of God's chilluns," Georgia said.

But Aunt Jemima didnt want her boy to be a marching-in saint. She ~~secretly~~ shared his hope that the day would come when he would be a fishing ~~punk~~ ^{kid}. So she fixed the stiff look of a nursery Aunt on her face and shook her head sternly at them.

"Now you least 'uns, you-all go to bed and dont bother Aunt Jemima no more," she said.

But Missy Sip wailed some more and the ladies turned mad at ~~XXXXXX~~ Jubal. ^{they closed} If the blood test factory ~~was closed~~ down, Missy Sip would lose ~~what little~~ ^{all her} pride she ~~had~~ ^{was left} ~~clung to~~ and ~~become just~~ ^{become just} a shabby poor relation among ~~her~~ ^{the} vigorous, incestuous clan. They glared at Aunt Jemima but she only looked stubborn ~~like~~ ^{as} she used to look in the nursery.

"Guess we'll have to tell Jim Bob how that Jubal boy done goes into this store to buy a box of crackers on Abie Linkun's Day," snarled 'Bamah from the side of her mouth. ^{But} Aunt Jemima ^{SHRANK AND WITHHELD,} "Crackers? My Jubal aint got a evil bone in his body. He wouldnt buy no crackers on Abie Linkun's Day," Aunt Jemima whispered.

"But guess that's what we'll have to tell Cap'n Jim if Jubal dont come out to mix," Virginia said sadly. ^{But Jubal} ^{he dont want no} "He come out right, ^{and} it aint integration. ^{Not if} ^{integration,} ^{meant} ^{that} ^{Aunt Jemima} ^{"He aint a boy} ^{to go a-fishin'."} come out to en-tertain," said Georgia.

So Aunt Jemima groaned and turned back to the scullery door. She glared at the boy's eager face.

"They calling you," she said to him.

"Knew they would," he said eagerly, ^{fussing at his belt.} "Knew they would remember that I was magnolia born. I got part of the country in

all good dancers go.

Jubal dug with his dancing heels until the hole was long enough for a blues wracked, weary soul. He sank into his place of safety, ashamed because he had hoped. They threw in a magnolia bush after him.

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worked, he rose carefully and clear his throat before he squealed like a guinea pig. Joe Regan had bulging eyes and a huge onyx lodge ring and you always gave him plenty of room for the energy coming out at his elbows.

Regan had loudly taken over the talk at table and had for sometime been boasting about his prowess as a rug salesman. His manners had deteriorated to the point where he was challenging his host, Gus, with not having bought a tigerskin rug for his wife since the years they had been married. Ma, looking up quickly, had seen her husband's face tighten and had instantly filled the breach with: "What do I want with an ol' tigerskin? Gus is tiger enough for me."

And Regan, the fool, had roared with laughter, feeling he had alone been responsible for infecting these poor sad sacks with jollity. It would have been a mourner's board had he not graced them with his presence. He ate fast and wordlessly, thinking out his next display of wit. Mr Purdis took up the low-voiced conversation he had been carrying on with Mrs Murphy.

"Let me put it this way. It can be very dangerous. It is somewhat as a two-way radio-set, receiving and sending. If anything should happen to prevent the animals coming to him, he would have to go to them, and no power on earth could stop him, not even you, I'm afraid." Regan listened curiously.

Mr Purdis had warned of this before. They were both concerned, but *Ma* *figured* there was nothing they could do about it. They'd just have to be careful.

"What was it this time? Another bullfinch?" Mr Purdis asked.

Mrs Murphy reddened. She shot a glance at Julius, but Julius was famous for taking the same *lowering* bow of the head he made for Grace, right through *the* whole meal, never lifting his head until he ^{had} sighed and rested his fork.

Mrs Murphy began slowly: "We-ell, that is - he —"

"Nonsense!" Regan bellowed impatiently. "Nobody can do that. Old I'llum' Purdis told me of the bullfinch the other day and I said the bird

must have been off course, sort of forced landing."

Mrs Murphy said flatly to him: "My boy can. He's ready now."

"Undoubtedly," Mr Purdis bowed, "but whatever addenda you bring will assist me in evaluating the point of readiness at which he has arrived."

Regan chuckled around a breastbone. Mrs Murphy said hesitantly: "Well, they aint exactly what you could call bullfinches."

"Then perhaps a chaffinch?" Mr Purdis said courteously, helpfully. "I think I told you when I first identified the first, er, visitation, that his mind may be attuned to the species finch, but that you could anticipate that as his proficiency developed, his selectivity through the genera would increase. The chaffinch is rather less brightly less coloured than the —"

"By golly!" Regan bellowed all of a sudden. "Why not try moving the kid over to the genera turkey? Imagine him whistling in free turkeys! In no time Mrs Murphy would have that tigerskin rug which Gus wont buy for her—!"

Mrs Murphy breathed hard and lights glimmered in her eyes. She stabbed a finger at Regan. "Now, you listen, you loud-mouthed lummoX," she said coldly, "that bird you have been guzzling ever since you came in here happens to be the one my boy brought in without moving out of the house! Laugh that off you - you —!"

Regan stared at her for a moment and then he broke down. He yelled and doubled with laughter. The dishes rattled and the water glasses sloshed over and it was really Regan's moment. But Gus, after glaring malevolently at the howling man, leaped to his feet with a violence that threatened to overturn the table. Regan's laughter ended abruptly as he saw Gus Murphy's face.

"Julius!" Gus cried thinly, "I want a - a - squirrel!"

Julius looked puzzledly up at him. Ma Murphy tutted impatiently.

"A squirrel, son. Your father wants a squirrel."

A light of understanding entered Julius' eyes. His body stiffened in the chair and his eyes sprang shut. Mr Purdis murmured something and reached for his pocket watch. Regan's shoulders twitched continuously. Mr Purdis held up a finger and said: "Hist! Hark!"

They heard the scratching at the door. Gus hesitated and Mr Purdis nodded at him. Hand shaking, he reached for the knob and twisted it. A large squirrel bounded into the room. Its fine tail was the length of its body and it curled up bushy and tapering and ended between its ears. It leaped to the table and picked a way between the dishes and sat up in front of Julius. Julius opened his eyes and commenced stroking the squirrel behind the ears.

"Murder," Joe Regan whispered, his face white, "Its murder."

Mr Purdis closed his watch with a snap. His voice, dry and precise, broke into the silence: "Two minutes. The rodent must have been in propinquity."

Ma Murphy looked at the set blanched face of Regan. "Well? Satisfied Mr Know-It-All?"

Regan swallowed, his eyes bulging. He said hoarsely to Gus: "Gus, you are a rich man! Nobody can be as rich as you!" Gus sneered into his face.

"He must first secure his trapper's license," Mr Purdis said firmly. "There are laws governing the matter."

Regan ignored him. He was still talking to the stony-faced Gus.

Mr Purdis said: "Mrs Murphy, I'll acquaint you of my findings after one more test. Perhaps you'd have the boy bring in, say, a muskrat?"

His watch was in his hand until the scratching came. Nonchalantly leering at the slobbering, broken face of Regan, Gus ~~immediately~~ tilted his chair and kicked the door open. The muskrat scampered in and ran down the table to Julius.

And that was when Regan went to pieces. He leaped to his feet. "Gus — that's piker stuff!" he cried shrilly. "We can be rich — I'll manage you — sable, ermine, silver-fox, mink — you and Ma cant figure it big yet — not that its your fault you've been grubbing so long — the breaks were just against you, friend Gus —!"

The table shook under Ma Murphy's clenched hands. "Wrap it up, you!" she bellowed at him, ^{lightning} ~~lightning~~ rustling in her nostrils and thunder in her voice. "So we caint figure it big, Mr Joe Regan? We been grubbing ~~along~~ too long, eh? Okay, big shot, I'll show you. What's the name of them ^{biggest} tigerskins ^{my} you been rubbing into our ears? Come, give out!"

"Sa - sabertooth," ^{Regan} ~~Ma~~ said, grinning fixedly at her in the hope he could make her friendly again. "Big as houses, Ma, but they're extinct."

"Extinct? Meaning they caint be found?" Ma Murphy was wearing a little smile as she turned away. She kept on turning until she faced Julius.

"Julius?" she said, a caress in her voice, "your Ma wants a dozen of these sabertooths — the biggest you can find."

And then it was too late for their shouts to reach him, for Julius had immediately obeyed his mother and had gone into the familiar rigidity.

Joe Regan shrank into his chair, his eyes roamed the room in terror. Gus breathed loudly through his mouth. But Mr Purdis rose briskly, took out his watch and consulted it. "Do not be alarmed," he said, his spectacles and his intelligent forehead shone dully on them. "I shall request Washington by telephone to alert our Arctic patrols. Doubtless they will be intercepted as they come down out of Siberia."

July 3, 1962

The Editor,
"Saturday Night."

Attn. Kildare Dobbs Esq

Dear Kildare,

I send you the Jamaica story --- this one
on the Jamaican Theatre. Hope S.N. will
like it.

Let me know whether you would want
anything on the Independence Celebrations
--- and are you interested in sport? The
9th Central American and Caribbean Games
open here mid-August.

Regards.

Victor Stafford Reid

VR:mj

THE THEATRE IN JAMAICA

The producer was a Negro. The lead, an Englishman. The theatre was the Scots Presbyterian Kirk in which the Altar boys from the Catholic chapel marched to the cadence of an Anglican verse speaking choir as the black, white, Jewish, Chinese and Indian cast played to T.E.Eliot's springing lines about "Murder In The Cathedral." In an age of religious and racial bias, of such a grand mixture has the Jamaican theatre been brewed. What has come from the bung is of body, vigour --- and peculiar palate.

Oddly enough, theatre in the largest of Commonwealth Caribbean islands, has a tradition older than any in Canada or the United States. In the days of the Thirteen Colonies south of the border, players from the Jamaican stage were much sought after in Philadelphia and New York. The reason was that the rich sugar planters of the West Indies could afford to import the finest English talent for their entertainment. In the great halls of the plantation houses, cooled by blocks of ice imported in schooners from Canada and packed in sawdust in trays around the wainscot, entire casts of plays current in London, performed for the sugar barons. As a way of picking up a little extra cash, they would call in on the American colonies on their way home. The first theatre was built around 1680.

The genre of the Jamaican theatre of course had its roots in English habits, customs, manners --- libretto and lyrics. It had none of the land's warm vulgarity, none of its rhythms, its history, its romance. This was English theatre on tour through the outposts where their compatriots, temporarily in from the rumshops of Port Royal, the green and golden fields of sugarcane swelling over the

savannahs, the barracoons and the ubile slave wenches kept there for their solacy, sweated inside their ruffs and corsets as they applauded *The Beaux' Stratagem* or *The ~~Proving~~ Wife*. *(GET EARLY PLAY FROM ENCYL BRITAN)*. What local theatre there was, centered about the famous Anancy Stories which the black folk had brought from Africa. In the rebellions that frequently ripped the island through the 17th and 18th centuries, the hard pressed English soldiers often rested out their bivouacs in some forest glade listening to captive Maroons telling their story in song.

(Maroons were escaped slaves who took to the mountains and made war on the English for over 200 years. So successful were they, an armistice gave them self governing status but one colony of them were treacherously disarmed and exiled to Nova Scotia from where, after severely suffering from the winters, most were returned to Africa to help found the state of Sierra Leone.)

The Anancy folk tale was so to fix itself into island life that it was integrated into Western theatre to provide "body, vigour and the peculiar palate."

The "Anancy" is the West African name for a harmless household spider who survives the onslaught of stronger beasts by the deviousness of his thinking. He has no heavy weapons in his arsenal. He rides tigers, slays elephants, lures maidens, busts alligators ~~on the spot~~ and accrues fantastic wealth by his fiendish wit. No larger than a nickel, his creators, without a break in continuity, will recount exploits in which he eats whole troops of monkeys. His enthusiasm for the love act is unbounded. He is everyman's protest theatre, an in-wish for justice, power, love and the human right to be let alone. Anancy provided the philosophy, while the leggy "set-girls" were to form the chorus for what would be the first Jamaican theatre.

Known best for its famous "golden fringe" on the northshore where millionaires besport themselves in gin clear water and on cream cheese beaches, Jamaica was not always Pleasure Island. In the bad old days when most Jamaicans were chattels for the plantation owning few, the open air stage was a window through which anger and frustrations were flung. The "set girls," the prettiest on the plantations, with an astonishing ingenuity would make over their mistress' cast offs into costumes that quietly spoke up for their endowments. Divided, as for a mock battle, into Red and Blue "fleets," (a device that indicates how uppermost in affairs was the presence of the fleet in Kingston harbour under the young lieutenant named Horatio Nelson), the Red and Blue "set girls" danced their folk ballet in the shade of huge tamarind trees, acting out battles, comedies, and wry, unspoken comments on the doings inside the plantation house.

These homely theatricals literally grew up alongside the sophisticated pieces brought by the English touring companies. By 1760, large and well appointed theatres were in the three chief centres of Kingston, Spanish Town and Montego Bay.

The importance of the theatre in Jamaica was officially recognised up to the middle of the last century when there was a Master (and a Mistress) of the Revels among the civil appointments. And while Hamlet was being hung over with self questionings, the jubilatory "John Canoes," the less disciplined, more spontaneous male equivalent

.... /over

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An island, by its famous "golden fringe" on the northshore where millionaires besport themselves in ~~luxury hotels and exclusive cabanas~~ on the gin clear water and ^{own} cream cheese beaches, ~~now being better known~~ *always, Pleasure Island.* ~~for its amenities to pleasure,~~ Jamaica was not ~~invented,~~ ~~as say Miami,~~ ~~but grew up,~~ ~~as say la Munroe,~~ with it. In the bad old days when most Jamaicans were chattels for the plantation owning few, the ^{open} air stage was a window through which anger and frustrations were flung. The "set girls," the prettiest on the plantations, with an astonishing ingenuity would make over their mistress' cast offs into costumes that quietly spoke up for their endowments. Divided, as for a mock battle, into Red and Blue "fleets," (a device that indicates how uppermost in affairs was the presence of the fleet ~~based~~ in Kingston harbour, ~~at one time~~ under the young lieutenant named Horatio Nelson) ~~and which saved the island from both French and Spanish attempts,~~ the Red and Blue "set girls" danced their folk ballet in the shade of huge tamarind trees, acting out battles, comedies, and wry, unspoken comments on the doings inside the plantation house.

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of the set girls, were dancing in the streets and into history.

The John Canoe actors were mummers who, masked in animal heads and wearing ~~a~~ loose vari coloured trouser^s, leaped and cavorted to a bamboo flute, and a guitar made from waxed cords and ~~the fruit~~ ^a ~~of the~~ calabash ^{bowl} ~~tree~~ ~~for its sounding-box~~. It was these three unlikely ~~items that~~, gathered in from field and folk lore, were mated to the delicate English pantomime to produce the first truly Jamaica theatre.

As in much of these British Caribbean islands, the customs of England survived above valour. Their High Court judges still appear begarbed in full bottomed wigs - - in spite of ninety-four degrees of shadow heat in these midsummer days. So the Christmas pantomime of prince charmings, good and bad fairies, an ogre in the castle and the beautiful maiden, existed and even flourished in the Jamaica Yule programme. But since Anancy is partial to beautiful maidens, nobody wise to his ways was taken aback when one Christmas morning they awoke to find that he had slipped into the panto. Ensconced as soon he was, the sly fellow even worked it so that suitably sophisticated set-girls and some sleeked out John Canoe boys found a way into the panto to provide him with enlargement for the upstage role he prefers. The earthy, hilarious, long-running annual "panto", the money spinner of the Jamaica theatre, has been the result. Its influence has fostered into practise the growing company of Jamaican entertainers whose performances are of such good calibre as to open up room for them on the Arthur Godfrey and Ed Sullivan shows.

But what is even more remarkable is the warmly human result of the Jamaica theatre. In this magnificiently lovely island, whose

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people huckstering their yams and ~~plantains~~ in the markets of the coast towns, can be at their homes a mile high in the sky within a motoring hour, the races and prejudices have mostly lost contours and are becoming ideally crumpled. And in the thriving Jamaican theatre, where "the Dark of the moon" with its smoky mountains flavour interchange performances with frothy "White Horse Inn", the process to the Canadian foreigner, is startling. ^{yet,} But a Negro King Richard humping ^{past} by a Chinese footguard whose mulatto comrades downstage has just finished a gossip with the white wench from East Indian Queen ^{Gertrude} court, is really theatre, man's universal make believe of, often, what should be.

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Sent to Esquire June, 1955.

VICTOR REID

PUBLIC OPINION

SLIPE ROAD
CROSS ROADS P.O.
JAMAICA, B.W.I.

THE SEGUNDO

EDITOR

PUBLIC OPINION
SLIPE ROAD, CROSS

The fishermen came in from sea early in the morning and lifted out the tanks ~~boxes~~ of live fish from the boats and placed them in the barrows. The women, their skirts hitched up about their hips, crowded around the barrows, their hands and voices quick as they appraised the catch. The boy laid on the warm sand, hidden from them behind the old, upturned boat under which he had slept, and his body was hot and cold with the desire to put his hands on the fish.

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The barrows were laden with jacks and herrings and bonittas, and deepwater shads and mackerels, and bluenosed snappers and other fish; and because of the great thief, El Hombre Malo, for whom one must have great regard, the fishermen stood close guard about the barrows and their women while the dark morning light cleared. The boy stifled a tiny moan and commenced creeping towards the fish.

Heavy sea sand scored his chest and elbows and knees as he crept. But the light was clearing and he could see the glistening, eager scales and the fins as boned silk and he cried softly as he crept. He had no segundo there to fling to him a fish; and it would be as before, the pain and the tongues as scorpions. But he must hold the fish, to feel the quiver going deep within him; and perhaps since they looked for the huge El Hombre Malo they would not see a little brown boy reaching between their legs to touch a fish.

The beach was lower where the boats were hauled out and from here, he could see into the top of the tanks. A fine bonitta swam around in the tank nearest him, breaking the water into clusters of shining jewels. The fisherman was smoking, leaning on the tank and looking out to sea and his woman was fiddling with the metal chains of her weights so it would always show an ounce more than it contained; and if he were quiet, he could reach in between them and touch the fine bonitta.

The boy wriggled down the shelving sand, his heart going fast boom boom against his ribs and soon he was up against their feet, his face buried into the sand and water dripping from the sprung side of the cask onto his head. He raised

his head, shooting quick glances right and left, and his head would be an eggshel to the ponderous brown feet if they were lifted now. And he was horribly afraid to be so near the cruel feet and was backing away when the bonitta splashed in the ^{tank} ~~water~~ and his old caution slipped out of hand.

Quite openly, he got to his feet. His lips were parted, his eyes shone with excitement. He pressed his face to the end of the tank and there, swimming right past his nose, was the beautiful fish. His hand plunged in and his fingers closed around it. It wriggled hard between his fingers and he shrieked with glee. His other hand shot out and imprisoned the bonitta and he drew it out and pressed it to his breast and his eyes and mouth described an O of pure ecstasy.

But the fisherman heaved upward at that ^{instant,} ~~moment~~ flicking away his cigarette in a shower of sparks and, bellowing with rage, recovered his bonitta while with his elbow he sent the boy reeling to the ground.

"The Bastard is stealing my fish!" he roared then as back he flung it into the tank. "The Bastard would steal my very fine bonitta!"

And the fishermen and their women turned at the roar, their faces in the hot dawn hard and cruel under the dried sweat and weariness. And from the ground, the boy saw them crowding in to eat him alive.

"It's The Bastard!" they growled. "He's growing up for the gallows! He's growing into El Hombre Malo!"

Then they went for him, the salt-caked rope-ends hissing and licking at his bare brown legs below the tattered trouser-ends. He scrambled to his feet with pain shooting white-hot up his legs. He walked away before them, not running at all but stubborn at his mouth and that made them angrier and they shifted the attack to all about his body with the rope-ends. And when he stumbled up the shelving beach and fell, the scorpions kept flicking at his head and body so he had to protect his head with his forearms and elbows. And some even thought they would kill him for it was a hard life and they ~~did~~ did not want anybody stealing their fish and they whipped him until a voice like an old

foghorn drove into the midst of them:

"Let the boy alone, cabrones!"

The sobbing boy felt the good hands on his head and under his armpits lifting him to his feet and he knew his friend, the old policeman, was his saviour.

The men walked from the beach behind their women who pushed the barrows up the village street, keeping close behind their women because of the great thief, El Hombre Malo. The small brown boy with the broken dream sobbed out his story to the age-squinted eyes, the thick-chested, salt-smelling body of his friend, the old policeman. The old rural comforted him eagerly.

"Your father was a big fisherman!" he fluted, eyes popping so all the whites showed. "A ^{net} ~~big~~ fifty fathoms wide with floaters made of cork from Canada. Call you The Bastard? He would have gone before the priest with your mother had not the hurricane blown him from his boat! They will tell you that your mother died of you — but I say she died of this obscene village!"

Out he whisked his yellow handkerchief and blew his nose into it. He worried his nose into the cloth and then he took a long, resentful breath. He looked down at the dark head, soberly considering what he had said. He put his hand on the crown of it. I am afflicted with deceit boy, for I cannot speak the truth.

"Boy, you are only eight. You need a segundo," letting go of it as a stone.

"You are my segundo!" quickly and hurt.

"I am an old segundo!" his anger at everything, rising.

"You are my important segundo!" the boy cried out.

The rural was a sadfaced old grampus breaking water with a shake of his grey head. ~~During the surface with his head down.~~ He would explain to that nice young Father about the portable calvarys. He would tell that young priest how there were people who took hammer and nails in their pockets and walked about looking for a cross. How some ran all the way, hound nose to ground, sniffing for a cross to use the nails on. And the old rural exploded.

"Go seek El Hombre Malo!" he shouted. "He should be your segundo! He steals enough fish for two — he'd be a strong segundo! Not this old one of

the rurales whom they will put out tomorrow! Tomorrow! You understand? Tomorrow — out!"

"You are my great segundo," the boy said resolutely. The words were rattling around in his head. Soon he would send ~~in~~ them down into his belly. He liked to think first in his head and afterwards in his belly.

The policeman waved his hands at him. "Go away — you argue like a priest."

There were sounds on the hot morning — the splash of waves, the shouts of the fishermen up the street, the creak of wooden gears in the wheelwrights. The gears were creaking around in his belly too. His ~~best~~ friend was going. The friend who protected him from most of the cruel knuckles, who sometimes brought him food when hunger turned his knees to water. He knew why his segundo was going. It was common talk in the village. Si, it was now understandable.

"You have secured the big proof on El Hombre?" Loud as a bell.

Off came the cap and the yellow handkerchief went over the seamed face.

"I have secured a fool for segundo," the old policeman growled.

The obdurate young face swung up to him. "Then you go because there is no proof! They send you from the rurales without honour!"

The cap swiped a blow past his face. "Ho, ho, where did you think that one out? In your belly?"

A laugh false as a conch's ~~egg~~ egg. He knew now what it was. Understanding fell on him as a house. His segundo was afraid. For had he not, on the beach, seen El Hombre Malo stealing the fish and told the rural so? But the rural had called him a snooping old woman.

"Wait here, boy," the policeman said kindly. "I will bring you food presently."

The boy walked heavily to the water's edge after the policeman had gone. He must find El Hombre Malo today; but he knew he was afraid.

He tied the shirt-tails into a knot above his navel and rolled his sleeves. He dipped in his hands to his elbows and threw water over his face. He

dried his face with his sleeves, scrubbing his eyes to free them of salt. With a thrust of his thin shoulders, he turned away from the sea, walking swiftly.

A crab scuttled through the sand, waving his claw like a torn banner and the boy had no interest to poke a piece of driftwood between the claw. Knew they should have allowed him to hold the fish. Knew he would not have hurt the fish but just hold him a little and then pop him back into the cask so he could breathe again, gills fanning and quivers going from head to tail. Knew his father had been a big fisherman, biggest in the whole Caribbean who would have caught all the fish in the sea had he not been blown from his boat. Si, hombre, just knew it.

He reached the edge of the jungle where the mangrove limbs grew thicker than his thighs and twisted right out over the water. He had never gone into the jungle before. Cautiously, he eyed it. Today they would put his important segundo out of the rurales. He would go without honour, unless there was proof about El Hombre Malo to be handed to the jefe. And if El Hombre could be found anywhere, he would be found in the mangrove. He put down his head and entered the jungle, his shoulders hunched for a quick wheel, in case.

It had a floor that wobbled and underneath there was a sucking and a moving and sometimes it opened as a wound. A slip into the ooze would be the end of him. He would simply disappear. The cabrones would be puzzled. They would assume he had become rich and had gone away and they would kick themselves for being fools all along not to have befriended him. But for his friend, the old policeman, who had no other segundo, he would let himself slip down into it.

Suddenly, the boy stopped. He was on the edge of a clearing and there, through the trees, was an old man and a boat. The old man had just come in from sea for the boat was only hauled up halfway out of the water and he was bent over it, furling his sail to the bamboo mast. And there was much fish in the boat. The boy's eyes opened wide at the number of fish in the boat. Glinting

fantails and lordly jacks, small eels coiling and unsnapping, fat snappers swimming carefully around in the cask. And, like a king at the centre, a great bonitta. It was the finest bonitta he had ever seen and the thought to hold it put a furry feeling inside his throat and turned his limbs to water. He was rapt and gaping. Let the world fold and sink if he could ^{but} ~~not~~ hold that fish. He choked up and his small body shook to look on the bonitta. And just then the world rolled on him.

"Mother of God ---!" the voice spoke out of an earthquake. "It is a beautiful fish!"

He flung around on wildly scrambling legs, tearing branches with his wheeling arms. And the fear was as a bag of feathers bursting at his middle.

Full length along the branch lay El Hombre Malo, a great, indolent lizard who moved only his shining eyeballs. Teeth gleamed at him out of the cool green shadows as El Hombre Malo addressed him:

"He is an old and very unkind fisherman, but he catches good fish. He brings it here where he hopes no one will see that he is wealthy today."

The feathers blew about in his belly. There was a way to stop them. He had practised it many times when they sicked the dogs on the beaches at him. He tightened his stomach and lowered his head and belligerently pushed out his lips at the man. Leaves rustled softly as El Hombre minutely shifted his position. He rested his chin in his hands and gazed unblinkingly at the boy.

"You are The Bastard," he said suddenly.

He felt the fear leaving him. He breathed carefully, deeply, and the feathers subsided. He licked his lips and tested their firmness on a weak grin. He nodded, almost happily, that he was The Bastard; filled his chest with air and nodded again. "I am he," he said.

El Hombre nodded gravely. His fingers ^{played} ~~rested~~ softly on the branch. "How would you like a fish, Bastard? The fishermen say you are a great thief."

And he scowled at it, hating the fishermen for it.

"I am not a stealer of fish!" shrill as a woman and to be ashamed of

on other days.

The lid drooped to cover one of the shining eyes. "Shout as you care, boy. Our old fisherman is stone deaf. Used to be the great diver — oysters and mussels in ten fathoms until he broke his eardrums."

The great lizard would not understand. His segundo, the old policeman, would, but not this hooked nose and this jeering mouth.

"And why do you take their fish, then, my little Innocent? Why? Why?"

To make you into a foolish cucaracha, here, hot and spilling, came now the foolish tears. For he knew nobody but his segundo would understand.

"I - I - only to - hold them —"

O, as the foolish cockroach, he should crawl on his belly seeking a hole to hide in. To hide from the yellow, mocking eyes.

"To hold them —?" echoed El Hombre Malo. He was a beachful of jeering faces closing on the boy. "Am I the supreme fool to believe that?"

His hand ran forward to pin him — too late. The boy had already left the branch in a leap that tore his body through the leaves. Sobbing ^{and} ~~quickly~~ moving nimble as a monkey, he hopped and slithered up the interlaced limbs until he was lost from sight. ~~At once~~ Catlike, El Hombre Malo turned his head ^{and} this way ~~and~~ that, seeking sounds from the boy. It had been bad that the boy had got away. It was fouling the plan he had about the fisherman. He had not bargained on there being a witness.

"Muchacho?" he called softly, winningly, his yellow eyes glowing. "Let us dig into this a bit more. Don't run away. I, the great thief, will not hurt you. For I could greatly shake these branches until you fell plop into the swamp and only the crabs would find you."

High among the thinner branches of the mangrove, the boy wrapped his arms and legs about his holds and ^{fearfully} ~~looked fearfully about him~~ looked around him. Soon he saw through the bluff and his lips curled with scorn. No degree of shaking could cause him to fall through these entangled branches ~~and~~ which were, in effect, a series of floors between the ooze and him. And these branches were too

slender for the man to climb into. He discovered by ^{peering} ~~feeling~~ a certain way, through a sort of funnel in the leaves, he could see El Hombre. The width of his shoulders overpowered the ^{stout} ~~stout~~ branch so it was a twig along his chest. The fingers were long and bulged at the knuckles in thick, hairy muscles, cupped as if ready to pound and squeeze and crush. A knife was sheathed at his waist. The boy's face hardened as he watched the knife. He had seen a knife used in such a hair-matted chest until it squirted. He had seen it done to a fisherman one drunken Epiphany.

"See, muchacho?" El Hombre Malo called softly, ^{unceasingly} ~~turning~~ and peering, "I leave you alone, while we talk. You see, to me, to hold a fish is ~~as~~ as nothing. He cannot speak to you — quiet as a wish is his tongue. No feet to ~~dance~~ dance to you — he cannot tell a guitar from meat turning on a spit. Why — there is nothing to gain from holding a fish!" He ended disgustedly: "A thief who is not a thief ~~is~~ — a stealer of nothing!"

"I am not a thief," ~~he said~~ coldly looking at the spot where the knife had been placed that Epiphany.

"Bueno," the man said, his head still as a pointer, "then a phenomenon."

His head came around slowly, the yellow eyes slewing sideways in the sockets seeking the place from where the boy's voice had come. He saw him.

The eyes of a cat on you. "Why are you here, boy?" softly, to fool you as the cat does.

There was a stouter limb running past his sanctuary which the boy had not seen. El Hombre calculated the quick rush. Easy. Then a quick flip of his throwing knife. Then the boy would be food for the crabs while he climbed down and did what he had to do to the ^{old} ~~fisherman~~. But the boy was swift. He must hold him to talking while he gathered himself for the spring. "Why are you here?"

The wary ideas which had all the while been sitting in his head, slipped slyly backward and eyed the Bad Cat. "To find the one, whom, said my friend, would be my good segundo."

The yellow eyes breathed on him. "Your segundo? What friend?"

"My friend the policeman," head clear as anything, now that it had come.

"The policeman? He sent you?" a whisper containing pins and needles.

The man swarmed to his hands and feet and glided up the stouter limb in a blur of movements that seemed one. The boy froze to his ^{sanctuary} ~~hiding place~~ with fear as his eyes confronted the yellow orbs of El Hombre now only a few feet away with nothing between him and the throwing knife balanced in the man's hand, but air.

"The policeman? Why did Senor Policeman send you?"

Terror wiped the boy's face free of guile; blank as marble out of which his stiff lips spoke: "He - he - he said I should - seek you — you should be - my - my - segundo."

Yellow eyes swarming all over his face, lifting the hair at his forehead, tilting his head this way and that way to look at him and making him very uncomfortable. But he licked his lips and the marble broke up in his face and his mind was functioning again. He hoped El Hombre would not kill him, but would take him as his segundo. And when El Hombre stole the fish, he would go straight to the jefe himself with the big proof, saying the rural had sent him, and his friend the old rural would go out full of honour. He had it all figured out.

El Hombre forced down the muscles gathering in him. Thoughts pinwheeled backward in his head. Years ago, the rural had been a particular patroller of the beach. The old rural had seen many things. He pressed his knuckles against his teeth so the joints snapped loudly. The yellow eyes glowed like coals, seeing the weals on the boy's body.

The fisherman on the beach knocked loudly on the gunwale as he tugged at a rowlock. El Hombre shifted a look at the fisherman. A beast wandered into his smile directed at the bent back of the lone fisherman. He looked back at the weals.

"I hear they whip you often on the beach when you would steal your fish and say you grow into El Hombre," he said to the boy.

"They are very cruel," the boy said ^{stiffly,} ~~stiffly~~ remembering the morning.

For all big people were cabrones. They sent the white hot pains shooting through your knees with their whips and used their knuckles on your head until the tears came. And only such a segundo as his friend the old policemen kept them from killing you. And as for El Hombre Malo, and the knotty old fisherman there now tugging at the rowlock, he had no pity to spare. For one, the Epiphany, for the other, a hanging.

"They are very cruel," he said to the man. "If you killed the unkind fisherman and took his fish, I would not speak, for you are my segundo."

In the green light filtering through the tiers of leaves, the man's eyes glowed warmly. Mother of God, he thought, understanding it all, we are of the same school. He began to swarm down the limb.

The fisherman straightened at his task and watched El Hombre approach, the brown feet lightly touching the sand, the high carried shoulder, palms half turned outwards, the fixed smile. He insulted in the sand.

The spit flew unheeded past ~~the man's foot~~ El Hombre's foot as his hand went up with the knife. The fisherman screamed, a deaf-eared cry that babbled to nothing. High up ~~inside~~ among the leaves, the boy sweated and thought of the squirting at the Epiphany.

El Hombre Malo squatted at the water's edge, cleaning his knife in sand and water. He turned his head and shouted:

"Come, boy, for your bonitta!"

He shrugged when there was no answer. A stomach for killing must be acquired. The muchacho at least had a worthy head; he would acquire in time. He thought of the old rural. Before he became too old for it, the rural had been a scrupulous man in his duties, patrolling the beach at all hours. Doubtless, he had seen, but had kept it locked in his heart when the boats failed to return after the hurricane. A man's loving was his own affair, anyhow. He stretched his arms until the bones at his great chest cracked. Then he swooped to his

Maybe it wasnt the Chief at all; maybe it was just one of those counter counter spies who spied on counter spies.

"Its you alright. I can hear her yawning," said the Chief. "Why the hell dont you feed them while you _____"

"Whoops, whoa," said 7770 pleasantly.

"Alright. Dump her and go watch the heliograph," snapped the Chief unpleasantly.

James Bind shrugged when the girl screamed. She ought not to have listened in to other peoples conversation, he thought ~~he~~ bleakly as he hit her. He dodged her flying teeth and wondered bleakly why she hadnt had them ~~py~~ pulled by her family dentist.

"Get into the sack," he snapped.

The last he saw

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ were her eyes dilated with fear as he finished sewing up the mouth of the sack. He dumped her out of the mouth of the cave as the Chief had ordered. Maybe if she was lucky, some passing fisherman would pick her up in time *for burial.*

~~Mr~~ Jimmy Bind put on blue burlap ~~sa~~ slacks and a washed out shirt made from a Russian wheat bag that had washed up on the Jamaica north shore from Cuba. He put pink cardboard from a shoe box inside his shoes to stop the holes and tied the uppers with a ^{piece} ~~piece~~ of string. After a thought, he took off the shoes again and put in green cardboard. ~~xxxxxxwith~~ Green went better with the fungi on his ankles. He was swearing angrily by the time he had fought off one of the big cave rats for the hunk of mouldy cheese he had hidden under the mattress to ripen. Bind never ate cheese unless it was ripened. He kept it under the mattress so he could feel when it began to move and would know it was ripe enough then.

Bind was swearing because he thought the Chief was ~~him~~ just being an old woman. Everybody knew that the Department was strapped for cash, but ~~thatxxxxxxxwasxxxx~~ a minute or two on the phone wouldnt

bring down the ~~ag~~ government as the Chief had warned. He was just ~~being~~ being a cheap old bastard. Signalling his agents by heliograph so as to save phone bills. One of these days, tourist season or no tourist season, there just wouldn't be any sunlight and then see/~~whether~~ whether any lousy heliograph would work!

Once more at the mouth of the Caves, James Bind turned his steely eyes ~~t~~ in ~~thhe~~ direction of Montego Bay. His eyes felt damn steely, he thought. Not much sleep with that sulky little number around. Ha, she hadn't thought he knew that she was a counter ~~spyx~~ counter spy! Ha! She must have been or she wouldn't have listened to what the Chief had been telling him.

Ha, thought 7770, as ~~hexxatched~~ his steely eyes roved the roofs and balconies of the hotels at Montego Bay spread out on the coastline below him.

James Bind caught the flash of the heliograph and recognised in a flash the style of Agent 770. He grinned a little, thinking of Agent 770. The double seven meant/~~an~~ ^{that} Agent was licensed to make out; and knowing that 770, he had no doubt he was making out alright among all those long-legged women tourists lolling ~~an~~ about on the beaches. Facetiously, James Bind acknowledged by bouncing a sunbeam off ~~one~~ of his gold front teeth.

"Okay, wise guy. Haul on your trousers and get to hell down to the road pronto. Something's up," ~~flashedx~~ signalled 770. If the double seven meant a fellow was licensed to make out, ⁷⁷⁰ ~~he~~ could never forget that a triple-seven meant that an Agent was licensed to license a dame a make-out even if she was reluctant. *It made him jealous of 7770.*

"What's up?" glinted Bind from his ~~gum~~ gold dentures.

"Couple of spies."

Castro people. Man and woman."

~~"Two of them. Looks like Americans,"~~ signalled 770 with his tray. He was disguised as a bus boy in one of the Montego Bay hotels. ~~and~~ He was a fine Agent who knew how to use natural cover, so he was signal-

ling ~~by~~ by his ^{silver} service tray. Bind knew all this but the Old Man, as they called the Chief, didnt know that Bind knew. James Bind chuckled coolly as he thought of the Old Man's face if he ever knew that Bind knew. ~~xxxxxxx~~ The Old Man kept his Department in watertight compartments. It was a fact of life (or death), ~~in~~ the Chief once told him, that if an Agent was captured and subjected to torture, it was better if he ^{had no idea} ~~he~~ ~~xxxxxxx~~ who were his fellow Agents on the job. Bind chuckled coolly again.

For what put James Bind in a bind of cool chuckles was the thought of the Old Man's face if he ever discovered that James was really a counter counter counter spy. That was what the triple-seven really meant. 7771 had only gone along with the gag about licensed to license a dame a make-out. The truth was that the Old Man had gone goddam senile and didnt know nothing from nothing. "Roger" Angrily James bared his teeth and glinted/ ~~xxxx~~ and out," at the busboy-Agent.

7771 clapped his hands a certain way and a couple of coconuts fell from a tree at the mouth of the Cave. He cracked them by hitting the broad ends on a cropping of blue veined granite. Bind thought grimly that you could always tell a fellow's breeding by the way he cracked his coconuts. Most of them went after the broad sides. Some even took any old limestone rock or loose stone to crack their nuts. But the real fouled up wrecks of men were those who cracked them on the narrow ends. Those were the kind who would love their mother-in-laws. The kind who brushed their teeth and said "Ma'am," to dames. Roughly, Bind kicked a sliver of granite loose and used it to scoop the meat from the coconut.

He thought a little of what 771 had said. 771 was a counter counter agent and you had to be careful of those. A double double cross was always harder to recognise. Most people were so stupid they couldnt honestly cross a guy without crossing up themselves. Sometimes what

you took to ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ be a double double cross was no more than a lousy honest john stumbling over his own feet. The real triple^{of} course was a lulu. You hit a guy and reeled like you were hit yourself only to whip around and kick his teeth in when he followed through for what he thought was the kill, metaphorically speaking of course.

If that lousy 771 was really with it, it meant that the two Americans whom he had signalled about wouldnt be coming along the coast road at all. That would be the double cross. But since he was a double-seven man, it meant that Bind should look out for the double double cross. Which would mean that the two Americans would be coming along the coast road after all. But if had been ~~Automaticallyxxxxxxthoughtyxx777xxxxreflexxxxxxxmyxxfurtherxx~~ promoted or anything like that, it would mean that he was pulling a triple which would put the two Americans right back where they were when the signal had come. And if that damn busboy Agent had licked the Old Man's boots long and hard enough and ~~xxxxxx~~ got the coveted 77771, that would be a double double double double cross which would make/~~him~~ the busboy a counter counter counter counter spy and foul up the whole awful deal.

Bind clapped his hands to his face and groaned. But that still left a lot of stuff inside so he removed his hands and bawled real loud. He felt better.

After he had dried his eyes and wiped his nose, he felt better still. He washed down the coconut meat with Branch Water No 9, chilling the bottle to room temperature by sitting on it. He slipped the strap of the goatskin bag over his head and adjusted the bag at his hip. He loaded the bag with a few clips of broken rocks. Bleakly he looked around the Penthouse before swinging down to the road. Agent 7771 was too old a hand to leave any evidence of his stay. He settled the ammo bag at his side and

tested his shooting hand. He fired ^a the rock hard and high and it ^{opened} ricocheted from the roof of the cave and ~~split~~ his head. ~~open~~ He dashed the blood from his eyes and grinned coldly. That bit of ~~wear~~ wear and tear the Chief had given him for a bonus hadn't wore him down as much as he had thought. ^{His shooting hand was good still.} She had tried ~~like splendidly~~ ^{valiantly} to wear him down in the sack but her end had ^{been poetic justice.} ~~Those who lived~~ He chuckled as he remembered her eyes when he had sewed the mouth

of the sack. ~~Ja~~ ~~A~~ 7770 wondered what always made them so scared. When you had to go you had to go. Schopenhauer (?) said it. You slept the big sleep. Isaiah said that. You loved the deal and so you took the dirty end. That would have been Schiller.

7770 stopped thinking because it hurt his head like hell where ^{he went around the floor} the rock had split his skull. He ~~had so much trouble~~ of the cave, quickly picking up rocks and dropping them in the goatskin ^{ammo} bag. ~~He~~ ^{Jauntily} saluting the phone with a saucy twitch of his posterior, 7770

in the sack would die in the sack. Some poet had said it.

Swung down the rope ladder, ^{grinned coldly} to the ~~west~~ ^{west} road and took up cover. ~~Castroites, who he would get them both. He would be so scientific, the old man would just have to give~~ The beach was very sandy and it didn't hurt his head much when he dug the hole. But the sand got into his nostrils and every time he sneezed, quarts of it went up like smoke signals.

^{These sand} It was ~~the~~ ^{signals} signals that the ~~keepers~~ ^{keepers} saw. ~~They~~ They had ropes and ~~large~~ ^{on enormous} butterfly net ~~for~~ ^{rich} ~~for~~ ^{nots who lived} They were well paid to be gently to the ~~modest~~ ^{modest} ~~nots~~ ^{nots} on the north ~~shore~~ coast

"Ah, here's the old nut," said the first keeper, "making out he is an ostrich."

"Let's get him before he strangles himself breathing in all that sand," said the second keeper, shaking out the net.

"Watch out for his shooting hand," chuckled the first keeper pleasantly as they closed in on him. "Old James Bind, he'd ^{be} a tough customer if he went so

him that coveted extra O to make him 7777. He thought he would be so fox the two spies wouldn't know he was there until he was on him. Then, he would dig a fox hole in the sand. Luckily