

## THE WAR OF MOODIE'S ARM

Pa is not a big man, neither broad in the shoulders nor up and down tall. But he <sup>is</sup> built hickory ~~roughxxxxxx~~ tough. He is a mountain man from the west section of Malagoosha County with lungs strong as leather. His hands were so broad, they could snug a watermelon so the fingers met. I've seen him follow a plow through clay land and the handles hardly jolted but mostly ran on silk on the power in his forearm. He was soft spoken too.

It was the time of the war in Cuba. Not the big one you read about in the history books but the one they wrestled on the radio and television. It was in the Fall of 'Sixty-two.

We were working the Willow Ten that October. It was hard work for only Pa and me. We never but now and then get a snowfall in that part of Malagoosha County, its that mild. So mostly we plow through the Fall and rest out the frost, ready to seed again early in the year for the ground never stayed hard long. We would be hurling dirt in the eye of day long before that lazy Fall sun showed up. We'd break for coffee and lunch, quit only when the light faded. Pa used to squint up at the last of the sun and say with a ~~lopp~~ grin lopsided by the sweat running down into it,

"Skedaddle, you old bum."

Then he would bend again to the handles and by nightfall we'd have the new mule teams in a lather. We never plowed with horses.

"This country was built on mules, son," Pa would say when he felt like. "Horses get more talked about because they're



prettier. But it took the stubborn, ornery old mule to build it." Then he might add, "Maybe we got some of the mule in us too for it took a stubborn people to build it."

Spoken so softly that when the wind was blowing, you had to lean into him to hear it. For Pa hardly ever told of his folks. They were from the western section of the county.

Malagoosha County is some over a hundred miles long but narrow no X wider than a coon's walk when the hound dogs are sounding in the 'simmons. The County is almost all mountains. Malagoosha City is on the eastern line. We lived near the east line, a few miles from ~~thazxixx~~ Malagoosha City. Around here, the land is not as lean as in the west, rolls more. Not that there is much rolling, because of the knobs. The knobs thicken into real mountains, the more west you go. The farms about our way are wedged between the knobs but there is enough loam to carry our burley, oats, rye, corn for likker and hogs, sorghum and some stands of poplar, walnut, chestnut, hickory, oak and other timber. We also grow some peaches and strawberries. But for a cash crop, guess you could say a lot of folks, especially on Massacre Day, rely on corn whisky.

Before Willi Mae went away when I was no higher than anything's hind leg, Pa used to look up the powdery dust road to the mountains and say,

"Least uns, your folks are up there a ways, eighty-hundred miles or so. Your uncles Shad, Meshach and Abednego and a parcel of cousins. One of these days we'll go looking for them."

They were real mountain folk, back there in the insides of the County. Once or twice, some of Pa's closest friends, such as Uncle Matt and Sep Logan, used to josh him about the "feudin'



Hammonds."

But Pa never spoke to us about any feuds. When I pressed him, he would fort up after saying gently,

"Folks got no cause to go killing each other. Killing comes only where there's no sense."

The only time he talked much I believe was when he met the fellows in Jeb Coombes' grocery store over in Malagoosha City. Mostly on courthouse days, on Saturdays, and of course on Massacre Day.

Malagoosha City is southeast of us. Pa's closest friends, the ones he talked in to in Jeb Coombes', are farming folk from right around here. They go to town to meet and talk.

Our house is on a knoll. The road to Malagoosha City runs straight pass our house for half a mile before deep bending. Across our fence line is a thick wood, sweet smelling in the summer with cucumber trees burdened in white blooms, yellow poplars bearing green and orange cups dainty as ladies' shoes. It is a lovely wood. The foot of tall trees knee deep in fern, bloodroot, stonecrop and columbine.

It wasnt the kind of wood you would think a fellow would look at over his shoulder one day and feel fear tickle-footing the back of his neck.

But I reckoned it happened.



~~He was a~~

He was a sudden man too. Dug into his character were postholes for good and bad. A talk with Pa was likely to come to a sudden halt when he planted his foot in a hole. I recall an evening one summer when we were fooling around in Jeb Coombes' grocery store in town and the talk turned on the ruckus/<sup>some</sup>~~XXXXXX~~ colored kids were making all over the State to get served in restaurants and the like.

"There aint nothing them Nigras want that cant be given them with a rawhide whip," said Uncle Matt, one of the nicest old guys in Malagoosha County.

Everybody was chuckling a little when Pa said so softly that it took time to hit us, "You're wrong, Matt."

In another man, you'd <sup>figure</sup>~~KNOW~~ that maybe he was coming up with something smarter~~XXXXXX~~ than Uncle Matt's. But in Pa you knew this one was straight down the gullet.

"What'd you say, Abner?" said Uncle Matt, his face going stiff.

"I said you're wrong," Pa said. "What I meant was you shouldnt whip people for wanting to be human beings."

Now I'm not saying that Pa was wrong, but a lot of folk like Uncle Matt say things they wouldnt kiss the Book for; and what a man says on a barrel in the grocery store isnt what he thinks walking home. Pa had fouled that one but nobody rode him. The Hammonds had been in the county since it was Indian land and everybody knew that Abner Hammond was no nigger-lover. He was only a man with ideas.

We were working the Willow Tree Ten that October, Pa and



and me. Since I can remember, it has only been Pa and me — except for when Willi Mae had been with us and that had made no difference. Willi Mae, six or seven years older than me, had done little but moon around the house and gone off to the Saturday night dances in town. She had been I guess what you'd call pretty. We'd called her Red until she asked us to stop. Pa had looked a little hurt but since then we called her by her given name. Only it hadn't made her hair less red; maybe ~~PAZ~~ Pa's hurt had made her more restless for a year or two afterwards, she had left us for the city. So we were two men in the house since my mother had died when I was born. I suppose I had loved Willi Mae for I bawled when she left and was for calling her names. But Pa, in one of the few times he had been mad at me, told me to shut up. Willi Mae, it turned out, had looked after me good as any mother.

It was dark this October evening by the time we got to the house. We washed and made supper, then sat around listening to the radio. I had finished high school and Pa was thinking of the agricultural college. Only a few kids from this section of the county had <sup>gone</sup> ~~been~~ to college and this was one of Pa's ideas they considered peculiar down at Jeb Coombes'.

The music from the radio wasn't anything much so I picked up the newspaper. After awhile, Pa said, "Things are looking bad down there."

You know how it is, reading. It took a little time reaching me.

"Huh? Looking bad?"

"Down in the Caribbean. Cuba," Pa said.

"What's doing?"

"One of these newspaper fellows was just on the radio. He said ~~ourxxhips~~ we've moved a bunch of battleships down there."



"I guess that ought to hold Castro for awhile," I said, going back to the post mortem on the baseball season.

"Them Latins go all crazy quickly. It/<sup>could</sup>~~quit~~ touch off something," Pa said.

When I heard the chair creak, I knew he was leaning forward to turn the dial to the police news. Pa was regular as a clock. Each night since/<sup>the</sup>~~the~~ two years Willi Mae's~~XXXX~~ letters stopped coming, he turns/<sup>to</sup>~~to~~ the police news.

Listening.

The murders. The runovers. The asphyxiations in winter.

Not with buzzard hope but with the mildly worried hunch to his shoulders rabbits get when a ~~snap~~ twig snaps in the brush. The old maple rocker creaked again as he turned off the radio and sat back. I could hear the tree toads fluting outside and the rattle of a pine bough on an upstairs window pane.

"Anything in the paper?" he said.

I made to separate the sections to give him the newsy half. The Mala goosha Trumpet comes in two sections, the front half for news and the smaller back piece for the sports and the ads. Pa never takes it but I always make to give him.

"No, you read, son. Guess I'll just think awhile," he drawled.

I knew that meant he wanted to talk so I let the paper fall to the floor and stretched my legs out. In the highbacked rocker with the carved armrests, he looked small but Pa had presence. You were aware of the powerful head and hands and the iron-grey eyes that had coped with plowdirt and heat and sunlight all the forty years he had farmed.

"We ought to hear from the Dean soon," I said.



"You dont need to rush him so hard, son," Pa said.

"I'd like to get in a couple of years before they call me."

"They wont be calling you. There's gonna be no war."

"How can you say that? Its about time we shaved Fidel's beard. He's getting too uppity."

the whole United States army  
 "Wont take/~~xxxxxx~~ to do that," Pa  
 said dryly. "Them battleships got good razors. Long, noisy ones."

Now that Willi Mae hadnt turned up on the police news, he was lively and full of sass again. He was sending me mail and I liked to see him licking stamps, his eyes shining and rimmed with fun crinkles.

"How far are we from Cuba?" I asked, knowing he would have picked that up from the radio fellow.

"Oh," he said, pursing his lips and looking up at the ceiling as if he could read the answer in the stains and cracks. "Guess - about ninety or so miles from down in that place they call Key West."

"Wouldnt take much more than a burp gun to reach down there," I said.

"Heck, we could send airplanes down there that could sit up on top like a bald eagle for four-five hours laying eggs, son. Better'n any what-you-call-it gun."

"Yeah, guess so. You think we'll do it?"

"Hard to tell what that young fellow in Washington will do. He's fast as a catamount when he gets mad. Look what he did to those folk over in Oxford."

I'd read about the nigger student at Ole Miss, but as I said, Pa was licking stamps.

"Dont ~~xxxxx~~ rightly remember."

"What do you read in the newspapers anyway besides the



ball games X? Didnt you hear about the Nigra fellow who wanted to get into the college?"

"He's got a nerve," I said.

"Sure he's got a nerve and he made it."

"You mean — they took him in?"

"Sure, after President Kennedy had sent in the National Guard and marshals and a whole bunch o' shooters."

"Now he's got a nerve."

"That's right. They both got nerve. Does this country a lot of good," Pa said.

"What good can one nigger do —"

"The fellow is a Nigra," Pa snapped. "Dont you go calling him nigger."

"What difference does that make?"

"Its just bad."

Maybe he was right. I didnt know. I turned the talk to crops and after shoving it here and there, he yawned and said maybe we should be turning in. Next day being Saturday, we were going to town.



CHAPTER TWO

When God Almighty made these United States, He did it slow and proud so it came out grander than any land. But He took so much time over it and there were other folks waiting too; so by the time he came down here, He was slapping Malagoosha County together like He was in a hurry. He tied the hills with hogbacks and gouged out the valleys with a blow of His fist. Thunder and lightning must have jolted His elbow when he drew the Malagoosha River so His finger jumped, zigzagging it through the hogbacks until it crossed the county line. Snug in one of the bends was the town of Malagoosha.

Back long ago, when the government made a fellow's homebrew illegal, the old Godfearing folk of Malagoosha went right on making mash because they reckoned it would be a sin to <sup>allow</sup> ~~waste~~ all His good corn and water go to waste. The revenue people mostly stayed out, figuring that what we made was for home consumption and not worth getting shot for. Suppose we didnt look too good anyway. For Malagoosha County is dirt farm country; beat-up automobiles and ~~shxkig~~ bib front blue denim country; sorghum and molasses and hanging-tree country; where when a fellow shaved was because he wanted to spruce, like say the first couple of days in his courting.

Pa and me were in the old car rattling down the washboard road before the day was fetlock high to a pony. We made it crawling around the switchbacks and over the humps which the chassis straddled like a seesaw, ~~nah~~ carburrettor whistling and waterpump wheezing, the loose pistons lief to tear the guts out at every stroke.

I dropped off Pa at Jeb Coombes' grocery story and took



the car down to Pete's. He runs a gas pump down near the county courthouse, a big guy about a shrug shorter than me. We used to hunt and fish together when we were kids with not many chores. Now he was hustling it with this gas pump, since the year he quit school with ~~xxxx~~ his time nowhere up.

"Hi, kid," he grinned at me as he hooked up the nozzle of the hose. "You want the new or the old?"

That was a joke between us. If I said the new, that would mean we had come in for gas. But when I shook my head Pete knew I was loading up on the heavy old/~~xxxx~~ lubricant that ~~xxxx~~ had been ~~xxxx~~ which came in for an oil change. Almost unplugged from the trucks/~~xxxx~~ thick as ~~xxxx~~ grease, Pete and me swore it prevented the engine from knocking.

When Pete was through in front, he came back to where I was pouring in the stuff with a quart can I was using for a ladle.

"How's your Pa? Up at Jeb's I reckon?"

"Yeah. Ruling the world from a cracker barrel," I said.

"Cracker barrel's good as a throne. Depends on who's sitting up there," said Pete. He is a very thoughtful fellow but you wouldn't know it the first time, the way he grins frantic hurling the words at you.

"Don't give me that, Pete. More good guys go after a throne than go after a cracker barrel."

"Yeah? Yeah? So you guess there're more thrones than cracker barrels in this whole wide world? At this time in this age, day and year, more fellows are climbing up on thrones than on a good old dirty white cracker barrel? Think, son, think."

You couldn't rile up or anything at Pete. The way he says it with that grin. The oil brimmed up, <sup>black</sup> and stiff as cardboard.



"That ought to hold it to next Saturday," I said. "Got a five-eighths spanner?"

"And a jack and a couple of lugs and whatever the hell else you want. Only I cant give you anything out of merchandise," Pete said.

"When we get our new car I'm gonna give you this one. Nobody more deserves it."

Pete went around with me, tightening nuts and wheel lugs, even grinning when he had returned from serving a customer out front and caught me sneaking a few bursts from the grease gun.

"That's what I say, we gotta help one another in this county," he said.

"I'm good for business. Folks see me come in here ~~and~~ for a service will reckon that what's good enough for Abner Hammond's Abner is good enough for them."

"Rather have that redhead sister of yours helping me out. Heard anything?"

Pete was a bit like Pa about Willi Mae. A couple of years older than me, he had known her before she went away. Always asking after her.

"No. Reckon as one of these days we'll have to go outside and look her up. At least, Pa will, one of these days."

"Talking about going outside. Going downstate tomorrow, down to <sup>Gulf</sup> ~~MISS~~ City," Pete said.

I looked at him, my eyes big. A fellow doesnt go outside of Magaloosha County every day. To tell the truth, I'd never been to Gulf City which is the state capital; and I dont believe Pete had been more than once before.

"No kiddang? What's this for?"



"Got a letter this week from the fellows who supply me with gas. Seems as if they're holding some sort of meeting down there of all the guys who sell their gas. Says they had a good year and want me to be their guest. Airplane ticket and all. Only, I don't know as if I can make it. Means I'd have to stay down there three or four days. Can't have the business shut up so long."

"Yeah?" I said, watching him.

"Yeah," he said, watching me.

"Why in hell don't you ask me?" I said.

"Tend to. Was waiting," Pete grinned.

"Pa can do without me for a few days. I can get home every night."

"Sure. I'll pay you."

"Sure, then I can pay you for all the stuff I've stolen."

We had it all fixed by the time I left him and drove back to Jeb Coombes'. I parked under a shade tree in front of the store and went into the big cool room lit by skylights. Jeb put up no partitions but the way he had the goods placed you knew what side of the store you'd go for groceries and where the ladies would buy their wants and where ~~the~~ Jeb's friends would sit.

Pa and the rest were in the angle of the store formed by the east and the street side, a little shut off by the cartons Jeb had set there for that purpose. It was no secret that behind the picture of General Lee hanging so low a man could sit and touch it, was the hollow where Jeb kept the bottle. They were all shaking hands with General Lee when I got there. Most of them nodded to me as I ~~went~~ went to sit by Pa. Years ago, after Willi Mae left, they



had accepted that I'd have to come in with Pa since he had no woman with whom to leave me. I had grown up with them and had never abused the privilege by pushing into their talk. I had learnt more good manners in Jeb Coombes' grocery store than what fellows with a Ma and a Pa both, did.

Uncle Matt Connant, one of the nicest old fellows in the county, tossed off his whisky and wiped his ~~K~~ gray mustache with his knuckles.

"Abner," he ~~XXXX~~ said, "it will be your privilege soon to introduce Young Abner to the General."

Pa looked over at me in the quiet way he has. ~~KK~~ "A year or two yet, ~~MM~~ Matt."

"Along about his age, a year or two younger, we were looking ol' Lee in the eye back of the barn," said Sep Logan, our neighbor on the river end, a <sup>tall,</sup> ~~fat~~ beaknosed man with one eye flaring bigger than the other. He had seven sons and a couple of daughters, all scared <sup>tuckered</sup> ~~tail/~~ ~~around~~ of him. He was normal as a mountain lion~~XX~~. In the act of breathing he was violent and when he moved his hands, they swept. He had a livery at the edge of town and he had put up a sign saying:

We shoot at sight Communists, Revenoo  
Runners and uppity Niggers. Also Jews,  
Catholics and anybody else who aint  
with us.

You could see strangers driving into town pausing to look at the peculiar welcome and some grinned but others werent so happy. Some newspaper boys had picked it up and poked fun at Magaloosha in their papers. A few of the folk around had showed it to Sep and were for gently persuading him to take down the sign. But when Sep took it badly, they left him alone for a fellow must ~~XXXX~~ do what he wants with his property.



But he never painted over the sign after that as he used to do every year before Massacre Day and it was fading now so you had to look good and close to read the words.

Sep's family had been in the ~~smarkey~~ county long as anybody's except ours and a few others, a hardworking man with a plow or a jug. He was a good neighbor, never leaning on your fence and would come running if you hollered. Once before we got our automobile, Pa had been riding the blaze face chestnut he kept for saddling. A snake or something must have scared the animal just where the road edged a ravine at the place ~~they~~ that's called Hogg's Hollow. It threw Pa and he fell thirty feet down into the ravine, snapping a leg bone. Pa lay in there most part of a day and a full night before Sep came walking by on his way to town. When he heard Pa crying out, ~~XXXXXX~~ Sep soon had it figured out and he climbed down into that ravine, climbed back out with Pa over his shoulders and toted him the nine-ten miles into Magaloosha to the doctor. He was that kind of a man.

"He's got his eye on college. A man should do what he wants," Pa said to Sep.

"Reckon," said Uncle Matt. "But it seems a waste going to school for three-four years learning what you could learn on the farm anyway. Now if he had been going to learn something like being a doctor, or a lawyer, or preachin' even; though I guess a man can learn to preach riding circuit better than any college."

Uncle Matt Connant was big shouldered with short, powerful legs. He bulked when he sat, the long silver hair reaching almost to his shoulder. His eyes were deepset and bluer than ordinary. He was the oldest in the group that met in Jeb's grocery store. He was given to talking and he liked his opinions unquestioned. He was an authority on crops, women, weather, automobiles, horses,



liquor, the United States, the Confederacy, and everything else. Except for Pa, he had the best money crops and his burley was even better than ours. He and Sep were the only two who had ever lived outside. They had run off and joined up with the soldiers during the first world war and had lived on the level land for upwards of a year before it was over. Uncle Matt seldom ever talked about it but Sep ~~xxxx~~ will remember anytime you want him to, how he and Uncle Matt nearly crossed the ocean to France. Only because they neither could read or write a lick the man wouldnt allow them to go on the boat. But Sep had the army bug in his britches and often a time you could hear him laying into his sons because they had no learning to get them into the army. Sep would yell that if they had any gumption they would ~~xxxx~~ creep under the wire into the United States Army.

Uncle Matt Connant never gave way to anybody except to Jeb Wishaw, younger than him by mostly near ten years. Uncle Matt had no family left since his maiden sister Miss Angie died a few years back and folks thought that maybe why Matt was so beholden to Jeb was because he needed ~~xxxxxx~~ kin. A man may be hard surfaced as flint but his flesh-and-blood part needs something softer to lean on. Jeb Wishaw had a log house a couple of dozen miles over in the north corner of the county. He grew five or six acres of sugarcane for his sorghum and he kept hogs and chickens. He was married to a lady from Louisa County named Mis' Charlotte Wishaw, a good woman even if she was a foreigner and they had a couple of daughters. Talk around was that I was courting the youngest, named a black haired, long legged painter cub named Olivinia. But she was as shy as a warbler and a fellow had as much chance getting close as hooking a jack salmon with burlap twine.



"What's this going on about Cuba?" Sep Logan said.

Jilson Swift

"Cuba? Who in hell is Cuba?" ~~Jilson Swift~~ asked.

Sep looked at Jilson like he had two heads. "You do considerable spell of living down in Coon Hollow," Sep said. "You ought to come visiting more often."

Jilson it was true only came to town once or maybe twice each month. He has a good crop of pumpkins and apples, bluegill and drumfish abound in the break at the ~~bottom~~ bottom of Coon Hollow and Jilson used to say it was unlikely he would come hopping out the morning Gabriel blew his horn. He had everything but trouble in Coon Hollow.

"Cuba? Some place down country," Uncle Matt said.

"Cuba is where the United States army fought more'n once," Sep said. "Fellow down there named Castor, he's bucking for trouble with the United States army."

"Castro," Pa said.

"Sound like castor oil to me," Jilson said, grinning.

Jilson was thin and tattered as a river birch in his denims and he didn't give a hoot who knew his ignorance. He could grin more than any man I knew, easy and lazy like he never yet had a stomach ache. Last time he came out, nobody much had been talking about Cuba except the fellows on the radio. Jilson didn't own a radio.

"You reckon it will come to a fight?" Sep asked.

Uncle Matt shook his head and held up his hand to halt Jilson. "Cuba aint so big. There wouldn't be any cause to fight them. This Castro, he wears a beard and carries a gun on his hip just as folks down here do on Massacre Day. He's just play acting."

"It says on the radio he's getting bigger guns from the Reds," Sep said.



"Missiles," Pa said and I looked at him proud, for in his quiet way he knew more than them all.

"Missiles? Rocks?" Jilson said, looking astonished.

"That's the new name for the big guns in the United States army," Sep said. "You shoot high and over and drop a ball in the next county. I Wish we had some of them when I was in."

"Then they wouldnt want you," Jilson said.

Sep looked slow at him and worked his hands, saying, "Why?"

"Soldiers is for fighting hand to hand, like ~~xxx~~ catamounts," Jilson said. "Now they got the big guns I reckon they wont need soldiers anymore."

"The United States army will always need a Logan," Sep said slow and heavy, the ~~trouble brewing~~ ~~trouble brewing~~ "I got seven boys fit for the army anytime."

Jeb Wishaw who had been silent for some time looked at Jilson and said, "Jilson, you ought to visit more often, as Sep just said. You know that?"

It was the kind of remark Jeb would use even on Uncle Matt, as if a fellow had been talking too much and he wanted to tuck in your mouth. Uncle Matt guffawed and sneezed and reached for General Lee and everybody held out their mugs and you could feel the air clearing like a storm just blew out.

"I hear Micajah Hoe fixing on going out to the flatland," Uncle Matt said.

"He's been meaning to go outside since before Abner was born," Pa said. "Martha worsing?"

"Fellow ~~xxx~~ passing my place told me yesterday. Seems he's asking money for his cattle."

"Martha Hoe's got more unforgetting in her head than a



parcel of skunks."

They went on poking it this way and that in the way Magaloosha County folk do of a Saturday in Jeb Coombes', all coming back to the fact that Martha Hoe had come into the county from the flatlands somewhere up in the North and had never forgiven Micajah these twenty-five years, but talked constantly about going back outside. It seems now that Micajah had weakened and was for giving up his cattle and hogs in the name of peace. While they talked I thought about Pete Sawyer and his going down to the city for a few days. I had never run a gas station before but what the hell. I could count dollars and cents and I could read the pump and the prices Pete marked on the merchandise with a stump of black chalk and I could keep the place clean.

The truth is I looked forward to the few days being in town with electric lights and flush toilets and going over to the restaurant for food and seeing the girls going by their behinds bouncing. I hadn't broken it to Pa yet, reckon I would wait until we were on our way home and he was mellow as a red-haw berry. He had never been alone without me since our womenfolk went. He wouldn't be jumping for joy when I told him but since I would be going out anyway if I got taken in college then it wouldn't harm Pa to see less of me in little pieces.

At brown dusk everybody said goodbye and headed out. The car ran good and Pa nodded his head in sleepy approval at the way I had oiled her and tightened her and generally stroked her so she purred like an old contented cat. We slowed ~~xxxxxx~~ to ease around Lookout Rock where the road curves sharply. Everytime there is an election, somebody talks about blasting the limestone rock and straightening out the road before it took our lives. The road was



rock marked an old Indian camping site, a square, massive chunk of chalk almost as tough as granite. ~~and~~ The road bowed straight towards it and then swung away to the right bearing for Hopemount. But what bothered folks was the way of a nightfall how ~~the~~ Lookout Rock took on. It was there big and white ~~and~~ during the day waiting for you to nod at when you were coming into town and say, "There's Lookout Rock, now." That's all. Just, "There's Lookout Rock, now," and it was accepted inside your head without saying it, that Magaloosha Town was just around the bend and you began wiping off road dust from your neck and forehead, and maybe whistle ~~a~~ a little. Last winter we had a snowfall and the Rock was a sight to behold. It ~~wasn't~~ got so cold your balls froze and old Lookout had his coat of snow for days, shining in the sun. But come nightfall, and old Lookout turns murderous.

Standing squarely astraddle of where the road should be if folks hadn't put a bend in it, Old Lookout turns killer because you ~~cannot~~ ~~can't~~ distinguish it from the road if you aren't cold sober or if you didn't know it was there. Strangers going through town at nights would be told by Pete Sawyer down at the service station, or by anybody else they stopped by, to watch out for Old Lookout. It wouldn't be hard to barrel straight into it because you mistook it for the continuation of the road.

Pa held the door handle and leaned into me as I brought over the steering wheel, letting up on the gas a little. I held down her nose dead on and juiced her enough to pick up what I had eased off for the bend. "Next election we must do something about Old Lookout," he said as always and then he went to sleep.

I drove on thinking about school and Pete Sawyers and Willi Mae and even about the long legged Wishaw foal named Olivinia everybody thought I was courting. Pa had been good about school,



unlike most of the older folks around who didnt think enough about high school to allow a fellow off the farm ~~past~~ past the wet pants stage. Pa had books and he took the ~~XXXX~~ Trumpet every Friday it came out. He had seen to it that I hadnt dropped out of high school as most everybody around this part of the country did and had even talked about college over in Jeb Coombes'. We didnt have much acreage on the homestead. We grew some burley and a little Dark-fired but the tobacco market wasnt whooping with health. We had some corn for our livestock, some hogs, and there was a deal of fishing in the waters around. We did tolerably, since Pa and I both worked damned hard. There were folks around with more help than we who didnt do half as good. If Willi Mae had stayed with us, we would have done even better since a man works closer to the ground when he knows that somebody's warming the house until he gets done. Its hard to define, but out there in the sweet smell of dirt and shrubbery and the new damp earth coming up like birth behind the plow, a fellow thinks of womenfolk in the kitchen and lamplight behind the curtains when you top the rise, and you feel lonesome. Perhaps I get it from Pa, for I can see <sup>the</sup> ~~his~~ loneliness climbing further up on his shoulders season after season and now and again it comes out in his eyes.

I am tied to the earth, and particularly Magaloosha County earth. Other fellows feel tied to clerking, or preaching, or healing, or some like Pete to engines. I need dirt smell like breathing, so I reckon that as long as I live, I will be around a farm. The difference it seems is that I want to farm so big I can have tractors and a good automobile and a good house. Pa, I know, senses this; and while he does all he can to keep me fired up about the State agricultural college, he also pokes me in the rib to remind me that the country was built on mules.



clear and gentle and alive, the special qualities it had.

"Son, you serious on Olivinia Wishaw?" he said.

We had never talked about the girl before. As far as I knew, Pa had never heard the gossip but now he busted me with it.

"I dont know what you mean, Pa. How does a fellow knows he's serious? When he doesnt hit the road, snow or shine, every night to go mooning at her window?"

Pa chuckled decently. He had a way of doing it, you also wanted to, no matter how mad you had been ready to be.

"Maybe a fellow knows when he gets sharp with his Pa because of a simple question."

"I hardly ever see her," I said. He had me regulated now, speaking as gently as he, which had been what he was I after. He had that gift.

"You havent got to see her more than once or twice. What is more important with a fellow and a girl is whether the girl has seen him. A fellow knows right off; a girl, it takes some time."

"How come you know so much about it? "

"I wasnt always hitched to a plow. Did a little courting myself."

"I aint courting," I said flatly.

We drove a short distance in silence and then he said, "The Wishaws are good family. Old blood."

"You can see it in 'Jeb.'"

"Yes," I said. / ~~INDIANXNIGGERZANXWHITEXBLACKX~~

"Sounds as if Miss Olivia turned you down. You asked her yet?"

"Sure. She said only if you didnt want her, then I could



have her."

has put a good head on her.

"Told you she had good blood. It/

Reckon she figures ~~you~~ that since she wants a Hammond and you so slow you'd walk faster backwards, she'll take the old man."

Carolina parrakeet's

"Pa, that creature's so shy a/ fierce as a bald eagle."

Pa sighed. "Son, a bold woman's no good for marrying," he said.

I thought of Willi Mae and I knew he was thinking of her too. He had that set to his head, like he was thinking of running. I thought of Pete Sawyers and what a fellow had told me long ago, how Pete had been sweet on Willi Mae before she ran away.

"I'm going to be in town for a few days. Pete Sawyers asked me to mind the station for him," I said.

Pa took his time answering. "Gets lonely out at Willow Tree, sometimes," he said.

"Heck, it isn't that," I said. "Pete's got some kind of dealers' convention he wants to go to."

"Wont do you any harm," Pa said. "ne neither. Might as well get used to the idea of being alone since you'll soon be going."

I didnt say, Shucks, Pa, dont talk like that, or anything. He and I knew it was true and we never ran from the truth, except things like not talking about Willi Mae much, and that wasnt running; just looking at it and saying, no.

"When are you going?"

"Monday," I said.

"We'd be coming to town anyway for Massacre Day, so I guess we can go in together and I'll bring back the car."



CHAPTER TWOX THREE

Massacre Day got its name ~~because~~ from an incident that happened during the march of George Rogers Clark through the State in 1778. While he was busy with the British and the Indians, a party of hostiles evaded his columns and headed south. Stumbling upon the little settlement at Malagoosha, they wiped it out clean as a whistle. Of course some other folks went after them and did it back to them, but that is how we got Massacre Day, a Fall day of goldenrod and purple ironweed and Indian pinks.

Fa and me headed for town early but early as we were, things were livening up already. A lot of folks had brought in their long guns and some were dressed in buckskin fringe but mostly we all wore denims. Those who had the hair had let it grow long for months and some fellows wore beards. I dropped Fa off at Jeb Coombes' and went on to Pete's. He was sitting in the office, dressed in his city clothes and looking real sharp.

I said, "Pete, you looking real sharp, you know that? A real city fellow."

Pete smiled and said, "Aw, go on home," but I knew he was pleased. He had a buttonhole and everything. ~~ANAX~~

"Bus aint here yet, any minute now," he said and showed me the books and wrote up an order form in case I ran out and the tanker showed up.

"You have a good time, Pete," I said as the bus slid in.

He had been looking sort of funny at me and I wondered whether he thought I couldnt take care of the gas station. But as we shook hands, he looked away and said, "You know what? I'm going to look for



Willi Mae."

Then he gave my shoulder a little shove and climbed aboard. I guess I must have been standing with my jaw dropped for behind the glass he dumb showed me to close my mouth, grinning at me. Then the bus rolled out. I didnt think of it much for awhile, doing chores around the ~~place.~~ ~~XXXXXX~~ Pete kept the station very ~~ganz~~ clean but I was so excited at handling it on my own for a few days that I found places to ~~zkeaxxxk~~ tidy up which didnt exist. I rubbed and dusted and moved until I was stiff-armed. A couple of flatlanders dressed in well pressed cowboy clothes and brandnew big hats drove up in a big, black Buick. There would be many ~~of~~ folks like these as the day went on for Massacre Day was well known throughout the State and beyond. Lots of outsiders ~~to~~ came in to drink whiskey and shoot off pistols, to re-enact Massacre Day. Two men and their ~~XXXXXX~~ <sup>ladies,</sup> maybe their wives, were in the ~~Buek~~ Buick. They were laughing fit to be thrown and saying some-thing in molasses accents and I knew they were <sup>cooking</sup> ~~XXXXXX~~ <sup>XXXXXX</sup> a joke about Malagoosha.

"Say, Dan'l Boone, who put up that sign on the edge o' town? The City Council?" the fellow in the back asked.

One of the ladies snickered. I guessed they meant Sep Logan's signboard. From the front apron of the gas station you can see the board at the end of Saltlick Street. Malagoosha City is built around Saltlick Street. Its the main street cutting right across town ~~and~~ to Lookout Rock. A couple of stores, the Baptist chapel, the court-house, Pete Sawyers gas station and I guess that does for Saltlick Street.

I grinned a little. That darned old ~~zigh~~ sign. I reckoned that by nightfall this Massacre Day I'd have answered that question if not once a couple score of times.

"Maybe it just growed out o' the ground, mister," I said.



"Aw, come on, they say 'most anything you stick into the soil around these parts will grow but a sign's too much to expect," he said, his face untidy with the laughter he was holding in. "You folks gonna come gunning for me?"

"Which one are you?" I said, thinking I might as well push it around too, the ladies were so happy.

"You could call me a nigger revenue runner wearing red underwear. The ladies are Catholics and my friend's name is Levy, Abe Levy," the fellow said.

"Then turn around and beat it outa town, mister," I told him. "You're dead three-four times already."

They all laughed and I hooked my thumbs in my pants waist looking pleased and rocking on my heels and toes like a darn clown. Pete always said that one of the best things about his job was standing before the station and looking up and down Saltlick Street knowing you were a proprietor. For awhile as the folks laughed I knew the good feeling. They took on a load of gas and the fellow topped up with oil even though the Buick didnt need it, but I believed he was so pleased. I wiped his windshield and windows and he included a half dollar tip in the bill.

"Whereabouts they celebrate the Massacre, pardner?" he asked.

I pointed him over by the courthouse lawn where tradition said the first killings were ~~done~~ done. About ten a.m., ~~the~~ Coleman Roberts the druggist who was also mayor of Malagoosha would walk from his office to the lawn and run up the State flag on the pole. Then from behind the log fence built across one end of the lawn would pop up folks from among the oldest families, wearing beards and the ladies in gingham, the men with old muzzle loaders, shooting off



gunpowder and yelling like the whole Sioux nation was on them. Kids from the county school would play the part of Indians and although the flatlanders didnt know it, Jeb Coombes and Lincoln Meade who kept the other tavern, and the merchants in the Chamber of Commerce would all have ~~pankazziozathxxxx~~ forked out to keep the kids happy, re-enacting the Massacre as often as new folk drove in. But the ones who should have paid were the whisky toters. If Jeb Coombes and Lincoln Meade did well across the counter, the real millionaires were those who stayed back in the hills and waited for the strangers to come prospecting. Every stranger seemed bent on going home with a real mountain jug under his arm.

I was being kept busy. Before Mayor Roberts crossed the lawn in his buckskin and moccasin and the three cornered hat on his head, I had changed a <sup>radiator</sup> ~~water~~ hose, put in a set of spark plugs and set the points on three or four automobiles; meanwhile gas and oil had gone briskly. I knew now how Pete Sawyer must have believed <sup>have left</sup> ~~in~~ in me to ~~leave~~ a rush business ~~on~~ my hands. But the blood heated my face when the stray thought ~~hazked~~ hit that maybe Pete was figuring that already we were family. Pete hadnt said much. Nothing to get upset about. Most folks going outside who knew you had kin on the flatlands would offer to visit and say howdy. It was just that nobody had ever talked about Willi Mae, she <sup>being</sup> ~~king~~ so long gone and everybody knowing she hadnt been writing to us. And the way Pete had looked, and the grin, sort of squeezing the corners of his mouth so he was knowing, it made me leery as a woodchuck. The more I thought of it the more I was for closing the place and going over to Jeb Coombes for a talk with Pa. I was for asking him outright whether there had been anything between Pete and Willi Mae. Reckon a fellow my age and all had a right to know. But business was picking up faster now



and it wouldnt be right to lose trade Pete was believing I would collect because I had been a cottontail rabbit in a world no larger than a cabbage patch.

Massacre Day was right mild, with ~~xxxx~~ a sheepfold of clouds scattered on the blue Fall sky and a norther blowing enough to stiffen the state flag on the courthouse. The town was filling up, ~~but~~ but not too lively yet. The crowd was mostly gathered at the courthouse lawn and when the burst of cheering came, I looked over to where Mayor Coleman Roberts was standing on his office steps, waving his three-cornered hat. A few ~~of~~ Malagoosha folk fired their <sup>guns</sup> ~~musks~~ in the air and somebody began working the bell ~~xxxx~~ over at the Baptist chapel. This first re-enactment was ~~never~~ hardly ever the whole kit and boiling. A parcel of kids dressed up like Indians with feathers and everything would come whooping into town from the direction of Lookout Rock while from behind the ~~stockade~~ <sup>stockade</sup>, the menfolk in beards and buckskins popped off their blanks, yelling fit to scare a tax collector. But as the day wore on and the whisky flowed, the hullabaloo grew fiercer. By gloaming, the kids had been shoved out of the scene and townsfolk and outsiders took over. Tired as hell with all this play acting they had been put through by the older folk, the young uns gladly withdrew to the schoolyard where they had a feasting and a romp of shoot-the-buffalo or over-the-river-to-Charley.

By gloaming nobody was feeling any pain. The stockade had been rushed half a dozen times and the last two times hand fighting had broken out. A few drunks were propped on the sidewalk and a couple of flatlanders were in jail for trying to set fire to the courthouse when they took the part of Indians. Even over in Jeb Coombes', ~~xxxx~~ they were rolling a song and I reckoned it was about time to close the station and walk over to see that Pa was alright. He has



got a good head, & but General Lee could have got right down mad at all this handshaking today by Uncle Matt and the others who had got above their raisin. ~~Saxixmax~~ None of the level land folk would be loading up on anything but liquor for the rest of ~~kk~~ what was left of Massacre Day so I was closing the station when I saw this automobile coming into town. It had on upcountry plates and I supposed him to be a Tommy-late-again. The car stopped by ~~zhaxxiag~~ Sep Logan's sign. It was getting ~~the driver tuenaxxon~~ dark by then and ~~ixsaxsaxsaxxiixixkxaxx~~ switched on a spotlight and played it on the sign. Just about then, they were making the last attack on the stockade and putting it down for keeps. If the Indians had got hold of so many guns the time they came busting down, they would have cleaned out the white man all the way to Florida. But then it happened.

The driver had finished reading the sign and was <sup>going</sup> ~~axxiing~~ quietly through town, passing the courthouse, when the guns began going off. He must have been scared at the yelling and the shooting; ~~mayk~~ I thought at the time that he was a stranger passing through Malagoosha and knew nothing about Massacre Day. However it was, that automobile leaped away as if it had been kicked by the devil. It roared down Saltlick Street, scattering folk right and left, rocketing over the ruts, the cutout booming with power. Past Jeb Coombes' and past the chapel, racing through the dark with no headlights and good God Almighty, I knew.

I knew that the poor bastard barrelling down the goddam road would never see that goddam Lookout Rock for what it was.

And he slammed into it.

He hit like a cannon and the flame sheeted up. Everybody turned and stood still.

But I think because I had known it was coming, I was running



before anyone else. I was bawling like a baby, insensate to all but the gutsy need to agonise aloud. It was burning when I got there and it seemed<sup>to me</sup> as if each particular crackle was a separate crunching of metal and leather and cloth and flesh and bone. Outside of the epicentre of burning, there was a circle of silence in which I stood cold and alone until long afterwards there came the running feet.

Any outsider coming into Malagoosha County may see a dirty, unshaven, tobacco chawing, patched overall breed of men sitting ~~in~~ under the shade trees or swapping sorghum for hogs. Newspaper folkpoke fun at us for a shiftless, whisky-swilling lot choked to our collarless neck with superstitions and prejudices and ignorance. A deal of truth, maybe, but they have never seen us with our troubles. ~~Like~~ Like the day Sep Logan packed in Pa and collapsed outside the doctor's office, the blood running out of his nose.

Most of those who got to the wreck first, were folk from outside, ~~who had been in the city~~ <sup>on</sup> city folk/~~to~~ whom arson and homicide act like carcass on a buzzard. Our own people came slowly and deliberately, ~~slowly, deliberately~~ knowing the task ahead and going to meet ~~it~~ it, taking the decision inside, the way they had tamed the country. They stood for as ~~a~~ long as a spit into the flames, and then Uncle Matt Connant wiped his mustache and said, "Let's get 'em out."

<sup>was</sup> It/~~was~~ only a body in there but they wanted it for burial. It was unlawful for calamities to win. "Let's get 'em out," said Uncle Matt and since there was nothing else to use, they went for it with bare hands. When the story is told outside, they will say it was the corn liquor that did it but we who knew ourselves wrenched at the hot metal and beat the flames with brush and took out what was left. Somebody brought a lamp.



"A man," Uncle Matt Connant said, looking down.

I was standing by Pa, my hands hooked under my armpits quieting the sears and blisters.  
~~trying to quiet the pain~~

"One arm's gone, burnt off," said an outsider satisfactorily.

Pa stiffened beside me. He had been slapping out places in his clothing where he smouldered.

"Why dont you go on out," he said ~~quietly~~ softly to the stranger. "Massacre Day's over."

The man,  
~~the stranger~~ his face uplit and strange in the light of the lantern, showed his teeth and said, "Take it easy, oldtimer."

Pa could have knotted him in half easy, hands raw from the flames as they were. Jeb Wishaw said at the stranger's back, "Mister, you ought to go on out like Abner just said. We aint partial to you." I would swear that swifter in detecting  
~~the city folk are~~ violence since they live in a jungle. The stranger peered up at Pa and at Jeb Wishaw and he gave a funny little sort of grunt and ~~backed~~ turned and pushed his way out of the crowd, muttering to himself. We didnt do anything to the flames once we had the body out, waiting for it to eat its way through the inflammables. I felt a touch on my shoulder and turned to face Olivinia Wishaw. Her dark hair was shining in the firelight, brushed smooth and falling to her shoulders.

"I've got some ointment for your hands, Abner," she said.

I had my hands hugged under my arms but I didnt recall, struck dumb with the prettiness of her mouth and hair and she coming that way to me as if we were bespoken.

"Give them to me," she said.

"I'm alright. 'Taint anything," I said.

"Give them to me, Abner Hammond. The night's turned chilly



and the air will blister you bad."

There wasnt any need arguing with her and all the folks around. It is a fact ~~you notice it in your eyes and ears~~ that the women in Malagoosha County will go through fire and snow and drouth and not once let go of a whimper but will yowl like a puma in a trap let a thorn pierce man or child. She took the left hand and annointed my wrist and fingers, rubbing gently, quieting the heat in them. Then she did it to the right too, her head bowed and her breath warm on my fingers. When she straightened I turned back the scarf so I could see her face.

"I am thankful to you, Olivinia Wishaw," I said.

"Your pa has no woman," she said.

"Then come back to me when you're through," I said. "We'll walk back together."

She stood thinking on it for a moment and nodded grave as a preacher. "That I'll do," she said.

And it was funny that a girl you couldn't <sup>hardly</sup> see ~~see~~ more than a ruffed grouse in wintertime was telling me easily that we would walk back to town together. I saw her go to Pa and ~~his~~ his head jerked around like a bird, looking for me before he caught himself and stood still for her to put on the ointment.

Some ~~Some~~ of the outsiders had brought their bottles with them when they ~~ran~~ ran to the wreck and there was being as much yelling and whooping as when they were in town, not hardly ~~remembering~~ recalling now why we were out here at Lookout Rock. One of them a few feet away from where I was standing, let out a screech.

"I stepped on something soft --- a snake!" he hollered, his eyes fit to pop from his head.

Now I dont take to snakes at all but anybody could have told that city fellow no copperhead nor cottonmouth would be within a mile



of that mob. Snakes dont like our company any better than we like theirs, moreso ~~and~~ tromping and shouting and carrying on enough to scare the wild creatures for miles around. But no sooner than he had cried snake, all his friends cut loose with yells and leaped out of there like they were bitten. What stopped the panic was Uncle Matt Connant's shout:

"You go leapin' around and maybe you step on his mate!"

Uncle Matt Connant has one of the best voices in the country. For hog calling or at a breakdown, Uncle Matt can whip ~~anybody~~ us all. So when he bellowed the warning, not a one failed to hear it — and every city fellow and his girl froze as if someone had poured ice water ~~on~~ ~~around them~~ them.

"Quiet — an' listen. Maybe its a mountain rattler," Uncle Matt said.

And so besides being frozen, all of them were struck dumb, pillars of salt growing out of Malagoosha earth. We were hard put to hold back our laughter but you wouldnt know it from the stonyfaced front we ~~showed~~ showed. One of the flatland women moaned suddenly and dropped where she stood and none of their men moved to help her. We could see the eyes of our own womenfolk <sup>throw</sup> ~~a~~ a swift glance at us and then they returned hardfaced again. We had them fooled, the flatlanders, shaken with dread and not daring to move until Uncle Matt Connant released them.

Uncle Matt got a flashlight off one of them and played it on the open ground which they had deserted, looking for the piece of pulp ~~saw~~ wood or whatever the ~~X~~ fellow had stepped on. The light went among ~~the~~ the leaves and scattered stones and bits of automobile which had been flung out by the explosion. Then it settled on something. Uncle Matt had meant his voice to be contemptuous but how it came out was a croak.



"There's your snake," he said, pointing the light to the man's arm lying on the ground.

It lay discarded as a fallen branch~~X~~, the fingers clutching the ground. It ~~X~~ was sleeved in some dark material and we could see a watch still strapped to the wrist. The hand itself was dark, as if the fire had scorched it. It was flexed at the elbow and wrist like in agony, as if it had tried to crawl away from the fire. A little blood flecked the sleeve where the cloth had been torn from the shoulder. Some of the city women shriek~~ed~~ with fear, but most of them with laughter.

Then they descended on the arm as if they would devour it. They were for tearing it apart for making them ashamed. One tall fellow grabbed it quickest and whirled it above his head, blood spattering from it on to their upturned faces. They yowled and danced as he spun it and what with the liquor and it being Massacre Day, ~~XXXXXX~~ it was no effort for them to believe they were Indians, hopping on one leg and bending double and shaking their fists as if they held tomahawks.

Uncle Matt had been following the arm with the flashlight as they twirled it around, catching glimpses of it and when his voice tromped down on us, even us, his own folk, were surprised at the hard anger ~~it~~ in it.

"Mister," he said savagely. "Mister, let go of that dam' ~~nigger~~ hand!"

Everybody heard him, for he had put a <sup>twang</sup> ~~knag~~ in his voice like a boastful bull fiddler at a breakdown~~I~~ trying to <sup>get past</sup> ~~amazinknag~~ the other ~~players~~ <sup>lighter fellows.</sup>

"Let go of that dam' nigger arm!" Uncle Matt Connant said.



CHAPTER FOUR

It was true. When you took a good look it slapped its truth straight home in your face. The back of the hand was molasses brown and a gold ring shone on the little finger. And while the light played on it, the flatlander who was holding the arm turned it so you saw the curiously light-dark palm with the darker lines crossing it. It had not been burnt, for the hair was still whorled down on the ~~skin~~ skin and ~~the fingers~~ <sup>white halfmoons</sup> the ~~the~~ <sup>white</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>on the</sup> fingernails were unsmudged.

"You're holding a nigger arm, mister," Uncle Matt said again.

"Maybe he loves niggers, he dont want to let go," Sep Logan said loudly.

Nobody could blame the city fellow, for I guess we were mostly all transfixed by the suddenness of the discovery. But finally it got through and with a curse the city fellow hurled it from him. It turned over and over in the light, spattering us with more blood until it fell into the field beyond. Men and women were cursing as they ~~I~~ wiped the blood from face and hands.

"Bend down, Abner," said Olivinia Wishaw and with her apron she dabbed at the drop ~~that~~ had fallen on my forehead.

"Is there any on ~~X~~ me?"

"No," I said.

"Let's get outa here!" yelled one of the <sup>flatlanders</sup> ~~flatlanders~~. "This place is spooked."

It was all they needed and there was the commencement of the scramble back for their cars.

"Massacre Day's over," Olivinia said.



Somebody turned up the lantern as the flames from the wreck died and we went nearer to it. There was just us folk by now, the closed mountain faces we all knew, white above the ~~tanxx~~ torn, patched, weathered clothing, faces wrung hard by the code that rode us from ~~the~~ crib to ~~anxlusiox~~ finish. We circled the wreck looking down at the smoking bundle we had applied the code for. We hadn't known many of them. Those who passed through did it quickly, the daylights scared out of them by Sep's signboard. I recalled how this fellow in the automobile had pulled up by the signboard and then barrelled out at the first crack of the scatter-guns.

"Somebody fetch a couple of axes and a can of coal oil," Sep Logan said.

He hadn't turned his head; he just stood looking down and said it, but we all knew what he meant to do. Pa surprised me though.

"What you reckon on doing, Sep?" he asked.

"Burn 'em some more," Sep said.

"No," Pa said.

I looked up at that. I guess we all did, Sep last of all. Perhaps he hadn't really heard the meaning, Pa had laid it out so flatly.

"What's that you say, Abner?"

"It's all done and gone," Pa said. "Let's bury the fellow."

Uncle Matt Connant looked quizzically at Pa. "On whose land, Abner?"

"Why, I reckon in the public lot," Pa said.

There was a sound you scarcely heard. It was the sigh of their clothing as everyone moved.

"You out of your mind, Abner?" Jeb Wishaw said softly.



And then Sep did what he ~~subgink~~ oughtnt to have done. He ignored Pa. He turned his head away from Pa and said wearily,

"Get the women out of here and go bring the axes."

All this while, Olivinia had been at my side close as a sheathe, not saying anything, her fingers ~~snuzzling~~ laying along mine. When the ladies began going, she just crumpled my hand in hers and held it there loosely balled. I disengaged it gently and said, "I'll meet you at the-service station."

"Guess not," she said.

"Then I'll be out tomorrow evening to say a word to your pa," I said, thinking she was turning shy again.

"I didnt mean that, Abner," she said. "I'm not going into town. I'm staying here with you."

"You heard what Sep said. He doesnt want the ladies to see what he's going to do."

"He's told us already. Better for us to see it than to think it," she said.

But I knew it was something else. She had heard Pa starting out to buck the other men and had seen Sep's clumsiness that would turn Pa ~~fix~~ stubborn. She knew I would side with Pa, no matter if I thought he was wrong, ~~Ma~~ and she was staying out to be with me.

The top of her head was shining an inch or two below my chin but as I touched her shoulder and felt the hardening under the soft flesh, in dismay I knew that short of lifting her bodily from the scene of the wreck, I couldnt budge her. ~~snuzzling~~ A necklace of red haw berries was coiled in her hair. There was a fragrance on her.

"I want to go to State," I said.

"Yes. I heard Pa telling Ma about it."



"He against it too?"

"Pa aint against anything. He sees a right in everythin anybody ~~does~~ does."

"He's not a serious man, it looks."

"He's the most serious fellow in the county," Olivinia said. "He ~~says~~ says if a fellow feels right, he wont make trouble and the world will be better off. Folk who make trouble are those who feel wrong, Pa says."

"Maybe I should wait until I get back from college."

"Abner Hammond, you aint even sure yet if they'll have you. No cause to get conceited with me."

"You afraid I wont come back?"

"I've got more suitors than I can fend off," she said.

We heard <sup>some</sup> ~~axes~~ kids running ~~back~~ out from town, the ones who had gone for the axes and the coal oil and I looked at Pa. He hadnt moved since Sep spoke. The kids came into the light and the men began taking the axes. ~~EngkuxMakx~~ Jeb Wishaw took an extra ax and handed it towards Pa. But Pa shook his head.

"Sep," Pa said.

Everybody stopped and turned to him.

"I'm here, Abner," Sep said.

"There aint brushwood enough in the count~~ry~~ to burn all this stuff to ash. What's left, I'm going to bury."

"On whose land?"

"If they wont have him in the public lot, then I'll bury him on my land."

Stunned with disbelief and, I guess, anger, I heard myself saying, "Pa, you crazy? You cant do that!"

Pa twisted his head at me and for one of the first times



since I grew up, he was angry with me in public.

"You stay out of this," he snapped.

Sep wiped his face with his hand and held it over his mouth. After awhile, he said behind his hand, "Let's cut wood."

So the men ~~X~~ went went to the side of the road and began cutting brush for the fire. They piled it high on the wreck and when it was high enough, ~~they~~ the time came to place the corpse on the pile. The funny thing was that nobody wanted ~~to touch it. XXXX~~ Some-  
~~body said they should cut some poles and lever the body onto the~~

brushwood. But Pa cut in and stopped them.

And then in silence we watched him remove his stained old windbreaker and wrap ~~X~~ it around where the stump of head was. He stooped to get his hands under the body and half sobbing, I stumbled forward and went to the feet. Pa looked up and saw me, and he moved towards the head and got his hands under the shoulders. We lifted the soggy, burnt out mass and placed it on top of the firewood. Pa took up the can of coal oil and ~~sprinkled~~ threw it over every-thing and struck a match. He touched it in several places and the wood flared up, crackling and eating swiftly. He signalled for more wood and the axes rang out again on the crisp night air as the Malagoosha men ~~cut~~ ~~XXXXXX~~ brought more fuel.

Pa got a pole with which he poked at the fire, ~~XXXXXX~~ so it would burn evenly. He kept signalling for more wood and the men cut until they were exhausted. Our eyes were all red rimmed and hair smoky by the time Pa held up his hand to stop the wood cutting. But nobody went away. We sat down on the cold ground waiting for the flames to die and the only thing I was clearly conscious of was Pa, still on his feet at the head of the bier, and Olivinia massaging my shoulder. It was near daybreak when we



staggered into ~~town~~ town. Jeb Coombes' was open. That morning I shook hands with General Lee and by forenoon I was blind drunk.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Mayor Coleman Roberts said the city ordinance did not allow the cemetery to accept a Negro. Pa dropped in at the gas station to tell me. He had washed up but the soot and ash were still ~~on~~ sort of on the edges of him. It was late the ~~1~~ afternoon after Massacre Day and I had slept off most of the effects of the introduction to General Lee. A shower in the restroom and a cup of coffee from a restaurant across the street had put back my stomach in some order.

"What'll you do now, Pa?"

We were both sitting at Pete Sawyer's desk in the tiny office. His eyes took a couple of licks at me and then settled steadily on my face.

"You did say something last night, didnt you?" he asked.

"No, Pa, ~~no~~thing," I lied.

"Its alright, son. You're no leastun. You're grown now and have a right to say your mind. What I figure is we ought to talk this over."

"Pa, there's nothing to talk over. You'll do what's right."

"I know what seems right to me, son. But I aint ought to hit you over the head with my right. Then again, even if a man is



right, the way he goes about staking his claim to it may make him end up wrong as wrong can be."

"Sure. Sure."

"You see, when I said I'd bury that poor Nigra on my place, I was talking without thinking of you. I was selfish, mad I believe at that stiffnecked mule, Sep Logan."

"We've got plenty of places. The bottom of Willow Tree Ten, near that sink ——" I stopped, for it ~~had~~ occurred to me then.

Malagoosha County is riddled with sinkholes more than a porcupine has prickles. We could drop the whole wreck, corpse and all into one of these sinkholes and the county would be clean again.

"I know what you're thinking," Pa said gently. "I dont blame you but that's wrong. That's sneaky wrong."

So I burst out at him. "But, Pa, you know this county and you know folks around. We aint bad people but we've got our customs and habits and upbringing. We like it here, what we do, how we live. You yourself said one time that those newspaper fellows who poke fun at us dont know fine we feel with our sorghum and court-day and our hardtimes. Like pillars of salt/<sup>standing</sup>~~growing~~ in a swamp, you said. Outsiders were soft and soggy, you said. Now why do you want to bust it up?"

Pa hadnt rested at all last night and had been in Jeb Coombes' most ~~XX~~ of the day, drinking and talking with the rest. But except for the dirt on him, he was full of energy as a squirrel. He slapped Pete's desk with ~~his~~ his hand.

"Dont tell me what I said when I talked wrong! Maybe I talked like that in the drouth, or maybe when I had a gut sickness, or thinking about Wil ——" he caught himself and struck his fist into his palm.



"You staying in town tonight?" he asked.

"Yes, I promised Pete I'd be around for the night trade."

"Alright. I'll take the car."

He went and I watched his ~~Ma~~ hickory tough figure going down the street to where the car was parked under the trees before the courthouse. He got in and the first flip of the key turned the engine over. I grinned and felt better for it. Whatever good was still in that battered old automobile, I had either put it in there or was holding it to rights.

Olivinia came over to tell me her ~~Pa~~ pa was leaving town. I hadn't seen her all day. I was leaning on the grease trolley, looking at the free stride and feeling hot as I thought of her thighs ~~whacking~~ brushing each other and the sweet bobbing of her breasts. She must have seen the desire in my eyes for she blushed swiftly and looked a little confused.

"Oh, Abner, I - I -"

"We got to get married — ~~we got to get married right~~ ~~katixzgetzmarriedzrightxnaw.~~ quick, Olivinia!"

And then she got real angry. Guess I sort of rushed her and with my nostrils flaring and my eyes bulging as the desire to be in her <sup>rock</sup> ~~walloped me/~~ ~~rock~~ hard, I must have looked like a stallion snorting and raking under restraint, ~~before the mount.~~ a hoof as he eyed the mare he would be mounting.

"So you looked last night, all of you, like - like - evil, like ~~ghouls~~ ~~exxxian~~ vultures," she said.

Now I wasn't feeling the least bit like a vulture and Olivinia was no dead meat but alive, alive, a live bundle for a ~~fellow~~ fellow's arms and her mouth so kissable I could feel the insides of my own a-tingling.



"Nobody was evil, not a one of them. We just burnt a dead nigger, is all," I told her grinning.

"You - you sat around like vultures, smelling the flesh burning and grinning at each other. You - were all filthy. All of you, except your pa. If the womenfolk hadn't left when they did they'd have been sick at the sight of you."

Pa had refused to take the ax from Jeb Wishaw last night and I had taken it instead. When Pa shook his head, I held out my hand to Jeb Wishaw and he slapped the ax handle into it, not looking at me at all and we went into the brush. I had been ashamed of what Pa had done and had laid into the brush in blind anger, cutting more than my portion and feeling no fatigue whatever. We had been no pretty picture, sitting around on the ground afterwards and waiting for the fire to burn out. Uncle Matt, big on the ground, his shoulders hulked with weariness and the beard smoke stained, chest heaving. Jilson Swift, thin as a lathe, his hands lank between his knees brushing the ground, head thrust forward and breathing out of his mouth. Micajah Hoe in his Sunday suit because he was fixing on going outside come next day but he had to cut wood when Sep said so because generations of the code had buried it deep inside of us, apart yet together closer than a pod of peas.

"You got no call to say that, Olivia. We did what we had to do."

Some of the scorn left her face and her eyes were earnest as she spoke.

"Abner, your pa showed everybody last night that a man only has to do what's right. I know you were ashamed of him last night, but I was more ashamed of my pa, Jeb Wishaw, than you could be of yours."

When I remembered what Pa had said about right and wrong,



I could have grinned but I was careful not to make it show ~~through~~ in her present mood.

"You know how we feel about niggers around here, Olivinia. None of us ~~xxxxxxingxx~~ bother them if they stay ~~xxxxxx~~ outside. Sep Logan's signboard says it all."

"This was a dead human being, Abner."

I shrugged. "So it couldnt have made any difference what we did to him."

"Not to him, to us," Olivinia said.

"I dont feel any ~~xxxxxx~~ different."

"Your pa would notice."

"What's there to notice?"

"The way you changed last night. The way you ran for cover."

Now its one thing slamming into a fellow for looking and saying the thing he feels and its another saying he ~~pkayxx~~ hid out when his folks/<sup>needed</sup>~~xxxxxx~~ help. What I had done was to make up for Pa. It hadnt hurt Pa for he had showed them where he stood. And by cutting wood and sticking with the folks, the Hammonds were still ash tall in the county. I stood off from the grease trolley, ~~and~~ feeling tightened up.

"You go on home now," I said.

"You're vexed. Ma said never to talk to a man whe he's vexed. Leave him to lose it like the flux."

She had a tongue like a timber rattler. I wasnt the one to argue with her on the public highway with everybody capable of looking on but I told myself then and there that I wouldnt marry her if she was the last girl left in Malagoosha County. A fellow can just take so much. I looked at her coldly for a couple of seconds while she wore a half grin. Then without a word she rose on her toes



and in view of the entire street, kissed me on the mouth.

Raging, I headed back inside quickly. Some fellows across the street whom I hadn't seen before, were yowling and making cracks so I didn't wait to see her go. I was also furious with myself for having been nutty enough to believe her shy. Once she thought she had me treed, she had shown her true colors. I locked the street door of the filling station, turned out all the lights except one above the pumps and went back to the cot in the room which Pete used for sleeping. After a while of tossing, I was suddenly laughing out aloud at the way Olivinia had made me into a chucklehead.

## CHAPTER SIX

What took me to Lookout Rock next morning? It had to do with Olivinia. And what she had said about Pa and me.

Five generations of Hammonds had growed up and died in west Malagoosha until along came Pa. He was the first really lonesome one among them, a bull who elected for his own field. Pa one time said a man ought to be able to haul on his boots without having to elbow a cousin. So when he came of age, one court day he borrowed a car and drove over to here with his land deeds in his pocket. After swapping around a spell, he ended up owning forty acres of sandstone and loam. He had an eye for crops and land so we did pretty well with white burley and raised some hogs and a couple head of cattle. We were planning to put in a tractor but Pa figured it could wait until I had gone through the State agricultural college. Pa was a good man, and it hurt more than I cared to show when Olivinia said I had backed off.

So early next morning I drove Pete Sawyer's pick-up out to Lookout Rock with no purpose in my head but thinking of Pa.



Nobody was up but a titmouse hurtling from tree to tree on a whirr of wings. I shied a stone at his tuft and he left me alone. The hard top ended right outside town and the rest of the road was crushed and rolled limestone. They kept it well steamrolled this near town but further out it would be pocked and gutted especially in the spring. There was some <sup>ground</sup> ~~maxxing~~ mist, thin and watery like rain lay ahead. I thought of Pa and ~~hoped~~ guiltily hoped Willi Mae would show up by a miracle before it was time for me to go. It hung heavily in my gut. I swore if that fellow crashed his car on Lookout Rock this instant and Pa and everyone were back in position as they were last night, I would have ~~backed~~ stood by Pa close up as skin to bone and hurled that ax right back at Jeb Wishaw.

The Rock <sup>loomed</sup> ~~looked~~ up ahead, ~~at~~ white and ghostly with the darker heap at the ~~pilexxxxxxx~~ base. Everything was charred and twisted but the smell of burning flesh was gone. There was something funny about the wreck that took me some time to nail and even then, for awhile it didnt make sense. Last night when we had pulled off, everything had been in a mess. But between then and now, ~~the~~ somebody had tidied up. The pieces of broken brush had been swept aside leaving a clear <sup>open</sup> space around the wreck but what mule kicked me were the rocks. Somebody had piled a border of rocks around the wreck as you would do to mark off a cabbage patch. The wall was a good foot high~~x~~, not too neat but thick at the base as if it was meant to go higher. I went closer and peered inside the automobile. The body was still there but even that had been tidied up, laid out long and neat enough for a coffin. It took me a while to think it out; but then I figured it was Pa. He must have stopped on the way home after ~~the~~ Mayor Coleman Roberts had told him about the city ordinance. Pa is a determined cuss and he must have resolved on his own burial. It would be a hell of a ~~max~~ note



building a tombstone slap on the edge of the road for a nigger whom we didnt want in our cemetery. It tickled all through from breakfast to grunt and I rocked with laughter. The wall wasnt high for in the dark and weary he couldnt have done much. But the beginning was there and Pa and me had always worked together. I turned to.

If we're short of anything in Malagoosha County, it isnt stones. They were there all around in sizes from potatoes to pumpkins and I worked at that dry-packing faster than if I was being paid. In a sense, I was being paid. For by the time my the muscles in my legs and arms had gone ragged, and my palms tender from last night had turned to bleeding again, I was feeling washed out clean inside. The guilt about Pa was gone. This time when he had made his play I had gone all the way. I had the wall up chest high before weariness battered down my arms and I turned and stumbled back to town. After I had rested I would come back again.

A few folk out early and looking rotten as I felt with all that liquor they had taken yesterday, turned their heads curiously to follow me as I shambled to Pete's gas station. There wouldnt be much business this early in the morning so I reckoned I hadnt let Pete down by not being on hand. I took a shower and went across the street for breakfast. I had hardly got back when Sep Logan's old Chevvy came clanking in and pulled up at the station. Sep rolled down a window and poked his head out. He was unshaven as usual but his eyes looked funny, dazed. I guessed he had seen my wall.

"Where's your Pa?" he asked.

"Ought to be on the farm now. He left last night."

"Well I dont think he's on the farm. Where's he?"

I dont know what he thought he was doing. He ought to have gone to the Mayor. He ought to know that Pa wouldnt get mad at me for a thing like that. What bothered me was how did he know about me and



the wall so soon. He kept on staring at my hands.

"What's the matter with your hands?"

"The wreck."

Sep Logan is one of the finest fellows in the county but he's suspicious as a fox. He has eyes bulging under a heavy fall of brow.

"Yep, it figures. You've been helping him." He stared hard at me.

"Helping him in what?"

"You know dang well!"

"You tell me."

"Building that dang wall!"

He was fit to be tied but he looked baffled all the same.

"Where is he?"

"Back on the farm."

He snorted and let in the clutch so the old Chevvy jumped like a whip had been cracked at its behind. He rammed past Jeb Coombes' and scroched out of town.

He was a smart man. He was ~~XXXXXX~~ running double harnessed to Pa even if he was on the offside. He knew the wall had Pa's hand on it. He was reasoning so closely because he knew Pa. I was proud for the respect he ~~was~~ showed of my pa Abner Hammond. He knew Abner Hammond wasn't the man to give up. But then again, it wasn't beyond Sep, that angry, violent man, to put his seven foolish sons to destroying the wall. He hated Nigras and Jews that bad.

I shut Pete's door and hutled down Saltlick Street. I didn't know rightly what I'd do if I ran into the Logan clan, but at least I was still siding Pa. Those seven idiots of his would ram that wall down my throat if he told them to. But the wall was alright when I got there. Going back to town, Mayor Roberts hailed me.

"You looking shaggy this morning, Abner. Worked too hard at the likker or the wreck?" he said. A tidy grin on him like it was



furrowed in by a machine. He was bony and tall, with long arms bent at the wrists where his hands sloped in as if reporting for work. He wasn't personally a popular man but he had got to be mayor one year when nobody had much hankering for it with hog sickness hitting the county from one end to another. He worked so hard at being mayor, keeping ~~seeking~~ the grass around the courthouse lawn ~~waxxkxkx~~ low and watered, marking the traffic lines in white paint himself so it wouldn't cost the county a cent, smiling at all the women and asking after their leastuns, nobody had the heart to go after him at the next election.

"Guess everybody's shaggy this morning, Mayor," I said.

"Heard from your pa about what he asked me?"

"Sure."

"The law, you know, Abner. Got to uphold the law. The statute says nothing about burying Nigras in the cemetery."

I thought a little. "Does it say anything against?"

He looked at me as if I had stepped on his corn pads.

"What you asking, son?"

"Same thing as Pa."

He stared at me and then he shook his head. "Dont know what has come over you and your pa. 'Tisn't as if if you're one of those Yankee fellows <sup>knot</sup> ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ with the/ ~~XXXXXX~~ in the head which makes them have niggers sitting in their living rooms. You and your pa are Hammonds. I know your folks over on the other side. What's this you're riding?"

I was ashamed for Pa and me but I wasn't quitting on him again.

"Then what're we going to do with the corpse?"

"Drop it in a sinkhole," Mayor Roberts said, his eyes angry.

We had been thinking the same thing. I felt lousy, likely to curl off in some corner and go to sleep. Only Pa had been decent.



Mayor Roberts grinned but his eyes were still cold.

"Then it will be just like a county burying, if we collect a couple of boys and pay them to dump it in," he said.

I went away without telling him that the job would be a mite harder than he reckoned. There was a heap of rocks his boys would have to dispose of first. Then it occurred to me that it wouldn't be too hard getting through the rocks. They had been dry-packed, without cement. A couple of sledges could rip through. I shrugged. Maybe that was a way out. I had packed in with Pa, done my portion. If Mayor Roberts took it away now, it wouldn't be skin off my elbow.

It was a fair day at Pete's. I sold gas, tightened a couple of shackle bolts on a pickup, found a gas choke, sold a set of spark plugs to an out of townner who came jolting into the station firing on about three. I earned fifty cents fitting them in because he didn't want to dirty his city ~~hands~~ fingers. Meanwhile I kept an eye good as I could on the road out to <sup>Lookout</sup> ~~Massachusetts~~ Rock but nobody used it all day. Folks out my way didn't have many people coming to see them. Most of the traffic would be one way, into town. And after Massacre Day everybody would be laying up until their heads quit aching. Nothing happened until evening. In the evening I got a call from Pete.

Jeb Coombes sent a kid to tell me I was wanted on the phone. I was sure as hell he must have been mistaken but then I thought about the fellows down at State Agricultural College and I hustled over. Maybe they wanted to tell me everything was fixed up for me to come in. But after I had waved thanks to Jeb and got the darned thing to my ear, it turned out it was Pete.

"This is me, Abner Hammond," I said into it.



"Abner?" he almost tore my ear off. "Abner? How the hell are you?"

"I'm fine. Who's this? Pete? Pete! Well, boy!"

"Sure its me. How have things been? How was Massacre Day?"

I could hear music behind him and I wondered where he could be. Maybe in some swank hotel. He was lucky.

"Massacre Day was fine. Say, where are you?"

"How was the station?"

"Fine. Where are you? In a swank hotel?"

"How's your pa?"

"He's fine. How was the airplane?"

"How did Mayor Roberts go?"

"Fine. Listen. Listen, Pete, you staying in a swank hotel?"

"Anybody got into a fight with the outsiders?"

"No. No --- except we got a nigger."

"What'd he do? Uppity?"

"No. He busted into Lookout Rock. A real wreck."

"Car too big for him, I guess."

Then for the first time while Pete was laughing, I realised how scared the Nigra in the car must have been. I remembered how he had stopped by Sep Logan's signboard and read. He had driven away slowly, taking it easy, making sure he wasn't stopped for speeding. Then the guns had gone off and he had busted right off. Taken off like a raccoon with the dogs at him. He couldn't have known this was all part of Massacre Day. It could be he had even thought the guns were shooting at him.

"I guess," I said to Pete. It wasn't as before. I was knowing something more. I kept talking. "Where are you?"

Pete laughed some more. "Hell, you really want to know, don't you? I'm in a town they call Key West."



That was the place the fellows on the radio were all talking about. The army and the navy and the airforce were all down there waiting to see what the Cubans were up to.

"Key West? You joined the army?" I joked.

He chuckled. "No, but I got another kindof surprise for you."

A woman's voice was saying something and Pete laughed out real loud. He had never been a sorehead but he had never cackled like a hen before either. The woman's voice was up higher now, saying something like no no.

"You there, Abner?"

I had a sudden memory. "Hey, Pete, you seen —"

But he was already in. "Abner, you tell your pa I got Willi Mae right here. You tell him that."

My heart jumped. I was sweating all over. A curious idea was that I wasnt sure whether I wanted to hear her voice. It had been years, before I rightly remember. All I really knew of her was that she put Pa into a chair and he ~~rabbitshunched~~ rabbit-humped everytime he waited to hear whether she was dead or maimed. I held on tightly to the phone, my elbows pressed closely to my ribs, hiding inside from what Pete was saying. He laughed again.

"Hey, Abner, listen, she's going to talk to you."

But it wasnt me she spoke to. She let loose something in a shrill voice that declared Pete was a rotten no-good. He laughed like she had stuck pins in him and then the line went dead. I shook the hook.

"Pete? Pete?"

I didnt like the sound of my own voice and hung up gently. I walked out of Jeb Coombes', considering.



CHAPTER SEVEN

Pa drove into town next morning and tooted his horn at the service station before I was up. I got out to him. I said, Morning, Pa, looking at him. Pa was aging. He had the lines beside his nose and the vertical ones on his forehead. He looked at you a little ~~unsure~~ unsure, as if he wanted to find out whether he was right. His strength was still capable, he wasn't shambling or anything like that, but his eyes were too willing to negotiate.

"You got a minute to spare, son?" he said.

"Sure, Pa. What do you want done? I thought I had her all fixed up last week."

"It isn't the car. Let's go out to Lookout Rock."

I climbed in.

We didn't talk ~~as~~ while we drove out of town. A frost was on the ground, the chill rose into the car. We didn't have a heater in the car. Pa drove hunched up at the wheel, peering through the wipers. It was a bleak morning. He pulled up at the Rock and I only looked at it when I got out of the car. I tasted the bile in my throat.

It was an anger not at what <sup>they</sup> ~~somebody~~ had done to my work ~~at~~ but ~~at~~ what they had done to Pa. I had dry-packed those rocks until my hands were ~~so~~ raw and sore, raising the wall chest high and meaning to come out and do some more. I knew that when Pa went by the Rock coming into town, he would see that somebody had ~~been~~ understood. But ~~at~~ the wall had been smashed. The <sup>rocks</sup> ~~stones~~ were all over the wreckage, strewn by the sledge that had battered them in.

"Sep Logan, that son~~a~~ of a bitch."

"Stop it, boy!" Pa said sternly. He rubbed his jaw and



said less harshly, "Why Sep? Why would he go to all that trouble?"

"Because he came out to the station and wanted to know whether I had helped you with the wall."

Pa turned to look at me. "Helped me with the wall? What wall?"

"Yesterday morning when I came out here, I saw that somebody working.  
had been/~~xxxxxx~~ A rock border had been placed around the wreckage."

Pa nodded. "That was me. I reckoned that ~~planning~~ putting  
the rocks there would sort of keep it from/~~scattering~~ <sup>strewn</sup> all over the road."

"I thought it was you but I thought you were putting up a wall since Coleman Roberts had said the body couldn't be buried in the cemetery. So I put in a lick."

"You mean you took it higher."

"Yes. High as your chest maybe. Now somebody has knocked it down, Sep Logan."

"Why do you say it was Sep?"

I told him how Sep had been in to town and jumped me. Pa nodded.

"Then it would be Sep. He hates long."

"We're going to put it up again."

"They would only knock it down again."

"So we keep putting it up back."

"That would be a fool thing to do, son. Think straight," Pa said.

We thought all the way back to the service station, Pa sitting straight as a ramrod at the wheel. I was mad in a rough way at Sep for tearing down my monument. Just as I had squared my conscience with Pa. He could have let well alone seeing we weren't trespassing the Nigra on any man's land. But Sep was a born violent



man, unable to bottle up his feelings.

"What are you going to do now?" I asked Pa when we got back to the gas station.

"Got to think it over. Maybe I'd better have a talk with Sep. He hates long, but he can be a reasonable man."

"You going out to his place?"

"I reckon. Time we had a talk."

"But Pa, you did all you could. Why not leave it to the county? Let Mayor Roberts look after it."

Pa nodded. "Perhaps I will but Sep oughtnt to have knocked down your wall. Fool thing to do." He was eyeing the station. "That Pete Sawyer got a water closet in the place?"

I showed him the way, grinning a little about how whenever he came to town, he hankered to use all the fixtures we didnt have back ~~in~~ on the farm. But he was a stubborn man too. He was forever holding that a battery radio was more powerful than the ones run off the town electricity. While he was holed up in the back of the station, I thought of Pete's telephone call. It hadnt really gone out of my mind but something held me back from mentioning it to Pa. There had been a bad moment when Pete had left me holding the dead hook with nothing coming out of the phone but <sup>cracklings</sup> ~~crackles~~ until Mis' Amanda the telephone operator butted in to say the party had hung up. While I was gassing up a couple of fellows out front, I decided I to leave it for awhile. Pete would ring again, I felt sure. Something had turned sour when he wanted to talk with me, but he would ring again.

Pa came out and said he was heading for Sep Logan's place.

"You tell him morning from me. He forgot to tell me when he came out," I joked at Pa.



Folks who had gone ~~XXI~~ to look at the wreck must have reported the funny business out there to Mayor Roberts for about mid-morning he drove over to the station.

"Abner," he said, "I just been out to the wreck and I hear some talk about you and your Pa putting all them rocks over it. What's going on?"

Nobody had thought much of Coleman Roberts and if the year he ran we had been normal, he would not have gotten in at all. He is liable to up and bluster like a turkey gobbler for no reason at all but that he reckons he is not beholden to you. Before the election, he would come sidling into Jeb Coombes', a place he never used to visit, begging for votes. But after we shooed him in for want of other candidates, he took to wearing collar and tie all the while. I had heard talk in Jeb's that he ~~was~~ was as popular as a hot water faucet in hell.

"Well, Mayor, Pa and me thought we would save the county money but we hadnt got around to telling you yet," I said. "How come you heard so quickly?"

"Mis' Amanda ——" he began and then he stopped, his little eyes tight on me. Of course I knew the gossip that he had been courting the town telephone operator for a long time. Folks grinned behind their hands and said they would be worthy of each other. She was a bony, long faced woman whom nobody hardly liked. It was said she listened in on telephone conversations and relayed them to Coleman Roberts. If so, he must have had ~~an~~ a hide like an alligator's to run for elections after the things folks said about him on the phone. I guessed Pa must have stopped in at Jeb's and mentioned the business at Lookout Rock and somebody may have telephoned from there.

"Didnt I tell you we would be putting that Nigra in a



sinkhole. What's come over you and your A pa?"

"The body's been lying there two days now and nobody's done much about it. Leave it like that and it soon will be stinking up the county."

"There's nothing there to stink up the county. It was all burnt to ~~AA~~ cinders and you know it," he said angrily.

"What we did wouldn't do any harm," I said.

"Except that you're taking the law into your hands. That's all. No harm at all."

"What law? Is there any law against cleaning up the public highway? America was built on folks lending a hand, mister," I said. That was how Pa would have put it.

"I don't want anyone to lend a hand in my town," he snapped.

He was beating me over the head and I didn't like it one bit. If it comes to that, I didn't like him either. He had no cause to lay into me.

"Your town? Who gave it to you, mister? Maybe we loaned it to you but we can take it back again."

"You? You haven't even got a vote," Mayor Roberts sneered.

"You're just a big country boy. I hear you want to go to college? What for? So's you can spell Pete Sawyer at his gas station?"

I didn't like what was trying to bust out of me. I swallowed down on it and then managed to grin at ~~theexpensive~~ him. The more I looked at his ~~X~~ high collar and the twitch at his cheek which had been put there by his fury, the more I grinned until it came out in big, fat gusts of laughter swamping all over him. It drove him back to his car and he climbed in and slammed the gears formidably. I hoped he would strip them.

By afternoon I had heard he was getting a crew to go out



next morning. Talk was that they ~~were~~ would dump the whole mess in a sinkhole. Mayor Roberts being coroner, he would sign the papers. It would have gone by but I took to thinking of Pa and how he had looked when he came out this morning. He wasn't a man of words or pretences; he could hold in pain better than a mule for I had never heard him whimper when the Lord knows there had been cause, what with Ma going and Willi Mae. I knew why he had looked so broken up this morning. Pa was one of the few men who truly believed in being the Good Samaritan. ~~When~~ He had gone to cheat the flames of a human being and the fact that it had turned out to be a Nigra hadn't changed his reasons. It was entrenched in his book that nothing should change his reasons. He had seen his friends break their reasons on their knees and throw them into the flames around the automobile and he had been hurt deep. He was my pa, all I had and he had been hurt deep.

Around noon I locked up the station and got out Pete's Ford pickup and drove out to Pa's. He wasn't home when I got there and he wasn't in the field either so I waited. I sat in his old rocker with the frayed cushions. When I put out a hand the ~~knob~~ of the radio knob/was exactly within reach. Just like Pa, I gave a twitch of the wrist and heard the tubes hum as the power surged in from the battery. He had only begun keeping in touch with the outside since Willi Mae left. This was his life. He was attached to the plow all day and at evening he would wash up, have supper and go seek news of Willi Mae through a worn wooden knob.

He drove in shortly and left the car in the front yard beside the pickup. He came in and blinked the light out of his eyes looking around for me. I rose from his chair and he came over. Pa was real dragged.



"What brings you out here, son?"

"Came for a talk," I said. "How was it at Sep Logan's?"

He sat down before he talked. "Sep's bad. Dont know why that fellow hates so much. Its got into all of them, his sons too."

I knew Sep's sons, five of them big hulking fellows and the last two were twins my age. They hadnt gone <sup>long</sup> to school and Sep kept them leashed to the farm so they hardly came into town even, so we never saw much of them. They talked slow and little but there hardly was anybody better in the county at fishing or farming or shooting guns.

"Dont want to stir up trouble. Enough trouble around as it is," Pa said to himself.

I looked at him hunched on the chair, staring at the floor. He had sounded funny.

"What kind of trouble?" I asked him quietly.

"Folk trouble. Bad kind. But Sep wasnt reasonable."

I sat ~~up~~ forward and peered at him. "Pa, what happened out at Sep's today?"

"He couldnt understand, that's all. He couldnt understand me taking on so about a nigger, he said. A dead one too. One of his sons laughed and said maybe because the dead ones were the only good ones. That way. That way was how the talk went. Them laughing and me trying to talk to them."

I could see the seven pairs of mouths laughing, eight if you counted Sep, although I didnt figure he would do much laughing. Pa trying to ~~XL~~ tell them how he felt about things and they laughing the hollow-log ho ho ho of the ignorant Logans.

"Pa, Mayor Roberts is going to dump the body in a sink-hole tomorrow," I said coldly.



For awhile, he said nothing. Then he rose and went to the door. He looked up at the fire blackened logs thick as hams from which he had gouged the rafters for the house. He had axed the oak after firing them at the stump and handsawn them for the rafters. The floor was of yellow poplar, rough ~~sized~~ chiselled but firm as stone. Pa used to tell me how he had started on the house himself with only Ma to help but after a week he had looked up the trace one morning and seen our <sup>kin</sup> ~~xxxxxxx~~ from the other side of the county coming in. They had walked behind the waggon carrying their guns and tools the eighty miles to come help him build his house. In a week we had three rooms up and a gallery and then they went away as quietly as they had come. Pa had added another couple of rooms and he was prouder of it than Mayor Roberts of his courthouse.

"No, he wont do that," he said.

"He's getting a crew for tomorrow morning," I said. "He's going to do it. He's mad clear through."

"So am I," Pa said so softly I almost never heard him.

He was a sudden man. Like a hound dog sitting under a tree all night waiting for a coon to come down, Ma Pa could look at a problem for hours and then solve it with a decision. Then he proceeded to work and the thing he had decided to do was like a main bone in him, supporting him against whatever outcome. It never afterwards mattered to Pa that his decision had been no solution at all.

"I'm going to put him on my land," he said, looking out at it, the open fields and the rocky hillsides his hands and knees knew every inch of.

You can say I was a little nervous. I cleared my throat.

"Pa, we'll be bucking a lot of folks. They wont cotton to it."

"A man doesnt do what's right without bucking folks, Abner.")



"Mayor Roberts might use the law against you. I hear tell he's a vindictive man."

"I wont be breaking any law. He could only bring the law against me if I broke one of them. I'm digging a hole in the ground, on my land, and shovel in some — muck. That's how they figure it. Aint hurting anyone, except maybe myself. And maybe, you?"

He looked quickly at me. I didnt duck from it although I wanted to. I thought of going away to college, found myself thinking it and didnt make any effort getting off the comfort of it. I would be away out of Malagoosha County, away from the frozen faces and the spit over the shoulder and the grudging grunts that would follow us Hammond afterwards.

"You hurting bad, son?" Pa asked.

But I wasnt hurting bad. I knew him and loved him and wherever the hell he wanted to go I would go along with him. I loved the lines on his face and the simple, capable, proud hands which had been kind to me as a kid and had taught me much, and the good man that he was. I wasnt hurting once I had torn my mind from the squalid corner it had ~~retreated~~ retreated into and faced back to my pa.

"Not so much I cant swing a shovel with you," I said. "When you plan on doing it?"

"Later today. But we could start in on that hole. How about the gas station?"

"The hell with it," I said suddenly angry recalling Pete Sawyers. "It can wait. Come along."

We got picks and shovels and Pa picked a place among some rocks a good distance from the house. We shucked our windbreakers and went to work. It was close enough to the road so that when the Logans passed, we could hear the shout and looked ~~up~~ to see what they were



getting at. The Logan boys were piled all over Sep's old Chevvy, hanging out of the windows and one of the twins was draped on the bonnet. It was being driven slowly past and I could make out Sep at the wheel grinning. And all of them were yelling like a chorus, "Nigger-lovin' Hammond! Nigger-lovin' Hammond!"

They had passed the house and were going slowly along, looking back at it and never saw us until they ~~XXXXXX~~ were on us. One of the twins was first to see us. His eyes flew open and he yelled, "Hey, there they are!"

Then Sep saw us too and the grin was swept from his face. With a frown he stared at the road and dug into the gas so the old automobile jumped scared. The boys shut up quickly and ducked back into the car. Pa ~~was~~ stood there looking down on the loam our tools had turned back.

"Now how do you like those filthy, ignorant, poor trash Logans!" I yelled at him. "How do you like that! Calling us names!"

Pa shook his head. "I never knew Sep would be like that. Something has come over him."

"I'd like to put this shovel all over him!" I bawled at Pa, barely seeing him through a mist of anger.

Pa looked at me and said quietly, "Let's dig."

I dug that hole so furiously he had ~~xxxxx~~ to stop me or I'd have ended up the other side of the world. We shaped it rightly, widening the shoulders and tapering the head and ~~xxxx~~ foot. Most of the men around our part of the country knew how to make graves since we did all our own burying. We went to the tool shed and went to work on a coffin. We worked all ~~xxxx~~ afternoon knocking together the rough box and were through before dark. We put it in the pickup and drove to Lookout Rock.



The wreckage was as we had left it. We shifted the rocks and the ~~bar~~ charred wood until we got down to the corpse. In the light of the torch I saw the poor, burnt out thing our fire had made of the coloured man and I was sick. Pa waited until I had finished retching. Then he made me help him wrap the body in some sacks we had brought and we put it in the coffin and nailed down the lid. We turned the pickup and headed back home.

"Cant get a preacher to do it so I guess we'll have to say a prayer ourselves over him," Pa said.

I could hear the coffin bouncing in the back of the pickup and I thought of the man slamming around in there. Nobody had known his name or even what ~~what he looked like~~ he looked like. He ~~had~~ had been a poor, scared ~~jack-rabbit~~ jack-rabbit, scared by Sep Logan's signboard and by our guns. And I believe the time I was angriest at Sep was when I recognized that even in death, ~~he~~ <sup>he</sup> was hounding ~~the stranger~~ <sup>the stranger</sup>.

"He wont know the difference," I said.

"We will," Pa said as I thought he would have said. "But it cant be helped."

I slowed for the turn into the roadway to our farm and just saw enough of them to hit the brakes in time.

"Who the hell's out there? What you think you're doing?" I hollered at them through the window, but I knew sure enough. Standing shoulder to shoulder across the road was Sep and his boys. Their faces were ~~grim~~ grim in the headlights. Under some sycamores left of the roadway I could see their car. Pa put his hand on my knee, a sign for me to shut up and we sat in the cab of the pickup watching them. Sep shaded his eyes against the glare of the lights.

"Abner," he called, "you want to light and talk?"

Pa put his head out of the window. "Get out of my road,



Sep Logan," Pa said.

"We aint moving out, Abner. Not until you tell us what's in the back of the pickup."

"Since you've asked ~~xxx~~ then you know. Get out of my road."

"We aint allowing you to do it, Abner. Its not Christian."

"You got as much Christianity in you as a copperhead. Get out of my way."

"We aint moving, Abner. No nigger's going to be buried up here."

Now there was one of three things I could do, run the truck through them, back out of there or dump the coffin. <sup>The first was the</sup> ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ one that almost killed me with wanting but I knew it would be plumb foolish. Sep Logan had seven sons and we couldnt kill them all with the pickup. But to do either of the last two would be in a sense, running away. But it was then I saw a side of Pa's he hadnt shown me up to then. I heard him grunt and reach down under the seat and when his hand lifted, in it was the double barrelled shotgun he used for squirrels. Pa leaned his head and shoulder out of the cab and aimed the scattergun. ~~xxxx~~

"Sep," he said quietly, "this here is a scattergun. Guess you know about us Hammonds over the other side of the county, wont be the first time we've had to put a gun on fool folks. Now you take yourself and your cubs out of the way or I'm going to blast you down for trespassing on my land."

I dont know what it was that went into Pa's voice. On and off in some unguarded moments, he would mention a little about some vague feud his folks had fought for years when he was a kid. And once Uncle Matt had jokingly asked whether Pa's folks didnt hold their own Massacre Day. He could handle a gun like a limb off his arm but



this was not unusual in a land where every man could shoot as well as he could walk. It was something more, a sort of furriness in his ~~knife~~ voice that crawled along the nape of your neck. Pa was going to kill.

"Pa," I said gently but it was ~~like~~ as if he hadn't heard me.

"Move, Sep," he said softly, "now."

And Sep Logan moved. He went sideways walking on the edge of his feet, his eyes big with fear on where he knew Pa was in the dark behind the light.

"Take your young 'uns too, Sep, take them off my land,"

Pa said.

They snaked off, the two older ones, Hiram and Japheth babbling ~~something~~ curses at us but going all the same for no man there that night hadn't heard the kill in Pa's voice. They piled into the automobile. Sep let in the ~~skunk~~ clutch so fast the motor stalled. When he was rolling, one of the boys yelled, "Nigger-lovin' Hammonds!"

But it wasn't worrying me for I was too busy letting the tightness out of my gut. Pa sat rigid as wood, a carved man with the back of his head glued to the headrest. A sudden man; he had me scared too but loving him so fiercely it fair shook me.

We drove around to where we had dug the grave and between us we ~~hefted~~ hefted out the coffin and placed it on the ~~lip~~ lip of the hole. What was in it wasn't half as heavy as you would expect, no doubt being <sup>shrivelled</sup> ~~spongy~~ by the flames. We got the coffin on to a couple of ropes and let it down easy. Pa and me stripped down in the chill night air and went to work. We didn't figure that Sep would give up that early and we were in a hurry to finish. After we had ~~pat~~ patted down the top soil, Pa took off his hat and motioned me to do the same. He said a few words.



CHAPTER EIGHT

Pa used to say that next to mule knowledge, what made this country great was when they buttoned teats to the auto. He claimed that after these United States were midwifed on mules, we suckled on the automobile. It produced ~~the~~ a generation that grew to like the idea of going farther faster. If there had been another gas pump ~~station~~ in town, Pete would have lost some customers by the time I got back from the farm. I had to stretch the truth a mite to pacify some irate ones; told them we went to a burying — one of Pa's kin the other side of the county. Squirting gas with one hand and making change with the other, I hustled the line and sent them rolling not too mad once they heard of the burying. After they were through, I hosed down the apron and cleaned up before going across the street for supper. I had just about finished when Jeb Coombed hailed me to say ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ I was wanted on the phone.

I got over there fast, excited that it could be Willi Mae. Slamming through the door, I skidded up to the booth, banged my shins a couple of times as I ~~smashed~~ squeezed in and shut out the astonished faces in Jeb's.

"Hullo!" I yelled into it. "That you, Wil — I mean Pete?"

There was a lot of noise and somebody was singing <sup>Lulu</sup>~~XXXX~~ mountain songs but not good as Belle. The phone gave a ~~few~~ few clonks as if somebody had dropped it and then I heard Pete's voice.

"Hullo! Hullo!"

It went again and there was a confused noise of voices.

"Pete — Pete — what's going on?" I yelled.



He came back but a lot crazier than before.

"Listen, Abner, that sis — you know what that fool sister of yours doing? I tell you, she's —!"

The phone went dead, but not before I had made out Willi Mae's voice yelling something at him. I stood there helplessly looking at it before I hung up. I had my hands in my pockets and my shoulders rabbit-hunched like Pa's when I shambled out of the booth. Folks in the ~~Xa~~ store stared at me and Jeb said, "Anything the matter, Abner?"

I shook my head and went out. I couldn't make head or tail of it but there was a lot of <sup>worry</sup> ~~worry~~ in it. Pete had sounded angrier than a scalded cat and I was sure that was Willi Mae who had screeched something before the phone was hung up. I didn't know what was going on. If that goddam Pete would only ring when he could talk. I went into the station and locked up and went to lay down on Pete's bed. I rolled a pillow under my head, turned on his radio and got ~~zizx~~ Lulu Belle singing 'Ree, raw, my Dinah gal'. Her voice was clean as a piney wood.

I couldn't tell Pa anything now until I was sure. He would only worry, and he had enough on his mind right now for we were both waiting to see what Sep Logan would do. I would have stayed the night at Pa's but he threw me out. He said I had promised Pete to stay with the gas station and that was it. But with one of his grins made richer by their infrequency, he showed me the shotgun and said Sep would be the worse off if he showed up. I hadn't quite dozed off when a rapping came at the window. I figured it was somebody coming in late for gas so I called "Coming," and threw a coat on. Then I heard my name called ~~zxx~~ in a whisper and recognized Olivinia's voice.



"Abner, dont turn on the light," was what she whispered.

There ~~xxxx~~ had been a catch in her voice that made you think she was liable to bust out bawling anytime. I eased quickly outside and met her under the overhang ~~by~~ by the washroom. In the glow of the streetlight, her eyes shone at me out of <sup>the</sup> ~~/X~~ shawl covering her hair. I wondered how she had got here from Jeb Wishaw's. I could smell the night scent on her, the warm, sweet, sleep sweat, the bed sweat that made me almost die to put my arm around her and say, Kitten, Kitten, but not knowing if she recalled the kiss she had taken or whether she was really my girl.

"You kiss me now, Abner," she whispered.

Bold as a puppy she was but I wasnt going to have her believe me a dam' cottontail so I kissed her. She came into my arms easy as water and I smelt her hair and neck and felt the flow of her along me and reckoned there was nobody I would rather marry after all.

"How did you get here?" ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~

"I borrowed Pa's car. He's gone with Sep Logan," she said.

Well, I knew something would be up but I didnt reckon on Sep calling a gathering so quickly. But in a sense it was a good thing for all of the others were Pa's friends and they would stop Sep doing anything foolish.

"What's doing? What's Sep doing?"

"They've gone on to Uncle Matt. Sep is calling them together to see Mayor Roberts. They're going to ask the mayor to have your pa give up the body."

"Pa aint going to give it up," I said. "Aint going to give it up at all."

Not Pa, who this night with the dirt on his hands had bowed his head and prayed over the grave, I dont know whether I'm



right or wrong, whether ~~Xan~~ You made them different on purpose, but  
this one's finished and he needs to rest. ~~XXXX~~

"Oh, Abner, ~~XXXX~~ he'll have to. He'll have all the county against him."

"Not all the county. Not me."

"Yes, you were great. Sep told Pa you were there with your pa holding a scattergun on him."

"On him? He alone?"

"He said his sons were there too but he had to hold them back when they wanted to jump you. Says he didnt want no killing~~XX~~ and they would have taken you easy."

"Yeah, easy," I said, recalling with a grin how they had sloped off careful as 'possums in a meadow. "When they coming in to see the mayor?"

"Soon's they've been around to <sup>the rest."</sup> ~~XXXXXX~~

"Where's your pa's car?"

"I left it down the street. Didnt want anybody to see me coming here."

"Okay, you go on back now. I'll take over."

"Abner, I'm on your side."

"Sep called us nigger-lover. Its bad to be called that."

She was smiling at me now. "So what do I care~~X~~ what they call you? I'm on your side. I'm your girl."

It was nice. She felt good along me although I was a little scared holding her but I guess girls do that to all the men. You hold them and you know they're strong as hickory yet you wonder if they'll break. I took her back to the car and she headed out of town. Then I went back to the gas station for Pete's pickup.

I kept the headlamps ~~right~~ on until ~~thay~~ I was at the front



door, didnt want him to think/<sup>somebody</sup> I was sneaking up on him. I switched off and climbed down ~~xxxxxxixkax~~ facing the door and called, "Pa, its me."

His voice came from behind me. "Sure, son, go on in."

I spun startled. He was bulked up in a heavy wind cheater, the shotgun cradled in his arm. By God, I thought, Pa's like them old Indian fighters you read about.

"Pa, Sep's gone to the Mayor."

He chuckled. "Then I guess I can get in out of the chill. Wasn't sure whether he wouldnt have doubled back hoping to catch me. ~~xxxxxxx~~ But if he's gone to the Mayor then ~~if~~ he's going to be legal."

"He's getting Uncle Matt and the others to go with him."

"They'll go," Pa said flatly.

"I ~~fix~~ figured they mightnt."

"They will. They wont come to me first when Sep tells them the trouble I went to. They'll be madder than a catamount that I havent given up."

"Suppose the Mayor gets a court order against us?"

"Cant get an order against me for <sup>something on</sup> my own land."

"Remember, he's the coroner, Pa. Maybe he has the power."

We were sitting in the dark. Pa got up and lit the lamp. He went back to the rocker and rocked a little.

"That's true. Hadnt thought of that. He can call for an autopsy, but nobody ever called for an autopsy on a Nigra before."

"We never had them dying in the county," I pointed out.

"Then he can cut open what's left, right here, and afterwards, we'll bury it."

Pa spoke so coolly, I didnt want to ask him but I had to know. I

"Suppose the Mayor wont let us? What do we do then?"



He took a time answering. He spoke softly, looking down.

"A man must be able to do what he wants with his own property. I aint much on learning, but that's how this State and this nation grew. Nobody's going to make it any different, not if we dont let them. Our business, yours and mine and everybody else, our business is not to let them."

I knew what he meant. He had raised me and taught me more than I had got from books. He had taught me not ~~wik~~ by talking, but by doing. He had taught me how to get up ~~at~~ in the early morning without a grumble, to gulp the hot sorghum and coffee and go out to ~~thexxuxkxxx~~ harness the mules and commence the work and sweat ~~it~~ only by which we could own this land. He had taught me the respect due our neighbors' by keeping his own fences tight.

"I think I'll stay the rest of the night," I said.

"No need to," he said.

"I think."

He didnt argue and we sat up talking now and then, dozing a little until dawn. At dawn, Sep and the rest ~~thexxuxkxxx~~ of them hit us.



CHAPTER NINE

A fog hung over the ground and they came to us out of it. I had dozed off and woke ~~wizzxxRx~~ when Pa shook me. Light was <sup>play-</sup>~~stream~~ing all over the walls and streaming around the floor.

"A bunch of automobiles coming. Guess its them," Pa said.

I jumped up and ran to a window. I counted four cars.

The lead one was just turning into our road. Pa took up the shotgun and motioned me to follow him. He opened the door and leaned the gun by the jamb then stopped in the doorway as the first of the lights touched us. The cars halted. First out was Mayor Roberts and the others followed into the light.

Pa said, "Hold up, Mayor."

"Abner," Mayor Roberts said, "this is a friendly visit."

"Funny hour for a friendly call, Mayor, leastways as I see Sep with you. Last time he was here, it wasnt friendly."

I could make out Uncle Matt and Jeb Wishaw and Jilson Swift and Micajah Hoe and all of Sep's seven sons. The fog swirled in the lights from the automobiles, washing ghostly around them. Mayor Roberts cleared his throat and nodded.

"I heard about that, Abner. The report wasnt good."

Uncle Matt said, "Abner, what the hell's come over you?"

"Nothing that wasnt there before, Matt," Pa said.

"Why're you making trouble over a dead nigger?"

"Never made any trouble over a live one, Matt. Didnt like the stink this one raised in all of us, that's all."

Mayor Roberts held up his hand. "Wait a minute, Abner. You havent got the law on your side. The law's on our side."



how'd  
 "Now/~~how'd~~ you make that out, Mayor?" Pa asked mildly.

"You know we never had a Nigra in the public cemetery before. Not in the city of Malagoosha 'tany rate."

"Perhaps they just never died here," Pa said. "How does that make it the law?"

"Maybe they do it over where you come from, but not on this side of the county!" Sep Logan shouted.

"Guess you're wrong, Sep. Never had them there either, least not before I came away."

"Nigger-lover!" Hiram Logan said low and bitter.

Jeb Wishaw turned on him swiftly. "You stop that now, you hear?"

Mayor Roberts turned his head. "That's slander, boy," he said sternly. "Make him shut up, Sep."

"Alright, he aint talking anymore," Sep said with a backhand blow ~~xx~~ to Hiram's mouth that jerked his head sideways. "You go ahead and do your duty."

Mayor Roberts faced Pa again. "Abner, we want you to get rid of it."

"So I did," Pa said bland as cream.

"Dig it up. We going to dump it in a sinkhole."

"I went to a lot of trouble, Coleman. Now I got it right proper put away."

Japheth Logan twisted his head and spat. "Jeezam, in a coffin too. A white man making a coffin for a nigger."

The way he said it, we, Pa and me, didnt look so good. But it would be hard to explain to Japheth and the rest that we hadnt made a coffin for a nigger at all, but just a burnt out husk of a man who didnt have no colour or anything.



Sep Logan leaned forward, his eyes jumping and said,  
~~Unleashed his, Abner,~~  
 "Where's the young 'un? I see he brought Pete Sawyers pickup but we aint seen him since we came. He holed up inside?"

They hadnt seen me slip from the porch before the cars halted but while they had been talking to Pa, I had done what he told me to do. Pa had told me to look in the automobiles if they ~~had~~ brought guns; ~~but~~ they all had come light.

"Dont know exactly where he is right now, Sep but I reckon he aint far off," Pa said, throwing his hand at the dark.

Pa was showing me he was a man full of tricks as a bagful of squirrels. The Logan boys looked ~~unhappy~~ uneasily around and Hiram was making to slide off. ~~Instantly~~ I moved back off the cars into the deep dark, watching him.

"Now dont you go sliding off into the dark at all, Hiram," Pa said mildly. "We Hammonds dont like ~~any~~ folk trespassing on our land, especially in the dark."

Uncle Matt shook his head and said, "Abner, you getting right down to war."

"Not so, Matt. Just keeping my fences repaired. Some people around seem to have forgot a man has fences."

"Abner," Mayor Roberts said, "we aint here to make trouble. Sep and the boys gave me a report. My duty to the county is to rectify ~~existing~~ the wrong. You're wrong. You think a little and you know you're wrong. Sometimes a man is for one thing but most people around him is for another. Way how we run this country as I see it, a man goes with the majority. The best in us comes from the majority."

Out in the deep dark, the fog dripping off my nose, I listened and Mayor Roberts was making a lot of sense. The law says drive on the right side of the road. A fellow who drives on the left is going to hurt himself and some other fellow. But, hell, I could



see what Pa meant. He was in off the road, where a man goes private. Sep and the others could have left him alone there. As Pa had pointed out, it wasnt even a live Nigra. I ran my hand over my face wiping off the moisture.

"Coleman," Pa said, "if we ran this country that way, we'd be no better off than a flock of sheep."

Hiram Logan had been hulking his shoulders impatiently for some time and finally he spoke.

"Pa, we know where they put the nigger. Lets get him out."

Sep nodded. "Guess that's the way we ought to do it, Coleman. Me and my boys here will dig it up."

Pa stiffened in the doorway. "You got a warrant that says so, Mayor?"

"I had that warrant the day they elected me, Abner."

Pa leaned forward. The lines in his face deepened.

"You better go, Coleman. All of you better go."

"Abner," Jeb Wishaw said, "we're your friends. You forgetting that?"

"Yes, I am," Pa said. "That way when I see you again I wont remember what happened this night."

"There wont be a single one in the county with you, Abner. You going to be alone," Micajah said, "except for your cub."

"That so," Pa snapped.

"Aint going to help the boy nohow, either," said Jilson Swift. "You remembering that, Abner? Going to college, aint he? They'll talk about it there."

"Pa," Japheth Logan bawled like he was hurt, "let's dig it up."



"Mayor, you ready?" Sep Logan said roughly.

In the doorway, Pa's hand went aside and I knew he had the scattergun.

"Mayor," he said, "you better know, I'm armed. My son's out there. We got you treed."

Mayor Roberts seemed to tremble all over. "Abner Hammond, you threatening me?" he said hoarsely.

"Saying I aim to protect my property, that's all, Coleman. That's in the law."

"You standing for it, Mayor?" Sep said.

Pa's hand came out with the gun but he held it cradled so it held offense for nobody.

"You going to lead the trespass on my land, Mayor?" he asked. "You tell Sep."

Mayor Roberts stood there breathing angrily but it was plain as cornpone he knew he couldn't go with Sep.

"I aint dropping this, Abner. I'm warning you," Mayor Robert said. "I'm coming back."

"Come back with a warrant," Pa said.

"You aint going, Mayor!" Sep said angrily.

"He's got to," Uncle Matt snapped. "Abner aint listening to reason tonight."

They headed back for the cars and I backed behind a poplar so the lights wouldn't hit me. In the glow of the light, I could see Sep's sons with their heads out of the windows searching the dark for me. Then they said it like a chant, humming with hate, over and over:

"Nigger-lover, nigger-lover, nigger-lover."

Like bees in a gourd, chanting it so it filled my skull and I felt unclean. The engines rattled and raced. And low and dis-



tinct came the Logan hate-call, already the hump on my back.

## CHAPTER TEN

Next morning I drove into town and went over to Miss Amanda's. She sat at the switchboard in a front room by a ~~windaw~~ street window. She was a crowney, mousey little woman until you saw her eyes. They snapped and crackled like a bobcat's. They were black as buttons. They jabbed and probed at you, putting in the barb and watching with shiny interest for the pain to ~~XXXXX~~pop.

"Morning, Miss Amanda. Know if Pete Sawyer phoned/<sup>again</sup>~~last~~ last night?" I asked.

She made a great show of ~~zhinking~~ recalling, her head on one side. But she would no more have disremembered than I would skin a live polecat.

"Now let me see. Did Pete Sawyer telephone Abner Hammond? Come to think of it, I think he did," she said after awhile.

"He say anything? He left any message?"

"I rang over to Jeb Coombes but they ~~zay~~ said you had locked up and gone."

"You told Pete that?" I said in dismay for I didnt want Pete to think I wasnt caring his business.

"Not in my place, I'm sure, Abner," she said, her eyes careful on me. "Just told him the party wasnt answering."

"And Pete, he didnt say anything?"

"Not that I could hear. There was all this noise."

"What noise, Miss Amanda?"

"You know, the usual. The music going and folks singing. You get to wondering what kind of house this Pete's staying at."

Bobcat eyes raking and clawing the coat of a furry little animal he making a meal of.

"The usual, Miss Amanda? What usual?" I asked all silk



and cream.

But she was sharp clear through, Miss Amanda. She wouldn't fall into the trap by letting on she listened to every phone call in town. The unconcern on her mousey little face was as false as a revenue fellow's handshake.

"In a manner of speaking, Abner. Now you must excuse me," she said, fingering the metal contraptions she poked the board with.

I wondered what story she would spread around town. No doubt it would go to Coleman Roberts first since she was sweet on him and he not a man averse to gossip. But Miss Amanda was like drouth or poison ivy; you put up with her or avoided her.

I opened up the gas station and unlocked the pumps and got out the hose to wash down the apron. Oil and gas stains/<sup>congregate</sup> ~~gather~~ on the concrete real fast and/<sup>a fellow needs to work</sup> ~~hard to stay ahead~~ hard to stay ahead. I got a good head on the power hose and sent it gouging and tearing at the stuff, washed the foot of the pumps and followed up with the scrub broom. A couple of fellows were real considerate, waving to me and saying they would be back for gas rather than busting into my cleanup job with their dirty tyres. As I worked, I kept an eye on Mayor Roberts office, to see who went in and out. And plenty did, more than I would figure needed the druggist this early. It wasn't necessary to wonder, when they came out, what the mayor ~~had~~ and they had talked about. They would all pause on the steps and look over at me, most of them scowling but a few just looked puzzled. One of them, Adam Shelby, came over for gas. I was tooling in three dollars worth when he got out and came to stand beside me.

"Hear tell you and Jeb Wishaw's daughter Olivinia will soon be called out in meeting," he said.

He was a nice fellow and his son and me had been out together couple of times hunting geese. He didn't mean anything bad, you



can always tell by the eyes. Pa used to say that after a little practice you could always tell when the black bear would charge. That mean old fellow couldnt keep it out of his eyes nohow.

"Folks talk, Mister Shelby," I said. "Talk so much they get ahead of themselves."

"One of the loveliest girls in the territory, Abner. You couldnt do better. Your pa ought to be right pleased."

I squirted in the gas, waiting for it. Didnt take long either.

"Heard he wasnt too pleased last night though," Adam Shelby said.

"Folks talk," I said.

"Lot of us think a man ought to be able to latch his door on what company he wants."

The hose jumped in my hands. This was the first time anybody had said that maybe Pa had a few rights. I put on the tank cap, locked it and gave him the keys.

"I'll tell him for you, Mister Shelby," I said.

"Sure," he said. He looked a mite uneasy. "You tell him ~~th~~ that. Tell him Mayor Roberts aint a bad fellow. Maybe they should have another talk."

I took the five from him and ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ gave him two. No use talking to him any longer. His eyes had changed.

"Hunting season ~~XXXXXX~~ soon, Abner. When you coming out with me and my boy?"

"I'll give you a holler," I said.

He drove off huffily and I knew I had done it wrong. Ought to have played him longer and maybe find out what Mayor Roberts was up to phoning all these ~~folks~~ men to come in and for a talk. I hadnt seen Jeb Coombes cross the street yet. When that happened I would know that Mayor Roberts had got the pack with him.



Jeb Coombes was a man who understood power like an ax. A quiet man behind the counter of his grocery store, he moved the length of it soft as a cat for all his bulk, serving flour or cloth goods with equal quickness, talking in the low rumble that used few words to say a ~~lot~~<sup>whole</sup> load of meaning. And now and then he would look over at the fellows shaking hands with General Lee and ~~wink~~ he would hold authority over them for the time it took him to give a nod and a wink. And the talk would lag, as if it was scratching its ears, while the men looked up at Jeb, nodding back until he turned again to the folks he was serving. He was tender as pap with women, but I've seen him <sup>use</sup> his fists like cleavers on a couple of city fellows one Massacre Day inside his store. He had more influence than any one man in that part of the county but he was not lightly bought. He didnt have much use for Mayor Roberts and Mayor Roberts knew it. If he was getting the town up against Pa, he would ~~go~~ line most everybody behind him before tackling Jeb Coombes.

Sep came into town in the afternoon and went straight to the mayor's office. Then Uncle Matt too and afterwards Jeb Wishaw drove in and Olivinia was with him. I had known she was coming in for a preaching man from some foreign place upcountry was ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ at the meeting house tonight. The town was filling up pretty fast. I ~~was~~ was jumpy with wondering what Coleman Roberts was planning. So long as they all stayed in town, Pa was alright alone out there. It would take a smart fellow to sneak up on Pa with him on the warpath. I had made up my mind that if there was any movement out of town, I would be on their heels. My own bird gun was lying on Pete's bunk and I had brought out a pocketful of shells from the house.

At dark, Olivinia slipped away and we met in the shadow



behind the station. She came close to me and touched my face with her fingers. She traced my jaw and said, "You'll be shaving after a year in college."

"Could be there wont be any college," I said.

Her girl body was along me now, hard at the knees and soft and hard again, her face close to mine.

"That aint no way to talk. You go to college. Neither you nor your pa nor me would like it otherwise, regardless."

"Regardless of what?" I asked. Maybe Jeb Wishaw had spoken in front of her.

She pulled down my head and kissed me and I had never been tongued before so it was like something exploding in me, busting loose every way. My arms were iron around her. She didnt move except for the ripples that ran over her and I guess we were both moaning.

She moved her head away and whispered, "There could be folks around."

She was that cool, where a second before she had been in the boil with me. There was a lot to learn about women. She was out of my arms with a movement that was almost a dance. I felt ~~angry~~ anger.

"How could you kiss like that? You've been kissing fellows?"

"No other fellow but you, Abner Hammond."

"You put some truth into that now. I never taught you that."

She stiffened angrily. "You couldnt teach a deer how to run," she snapped.

Itwouldnt be sense angering her further. I had lost out on Adam Shelby and there were things I needed to know. There was a lot I didnt know about girls. Perhaps they came to things like kissing as how a partridge came to flying. They never had much to do anyhow and could spend their time thinking up how to flurry a fellow.



"Spoke out of turn," I said. "Dont be mad."

But I think I must have turned humble too quickly for she paused in fixing her hair to peer at me.

She said, "That you did. I have to go now."

"Where you going?"

"To the meeting-house. Pa and Ma came in for the meeting."

"Thought he came in to see Coleman Roberts."

"That was part of it." She paused and then said, "You come on to the meeting house. We'll sit near the back and I can talk to you."

"About Pa?"

She hesitated. "Yes, about your pa."

She waited while I pencilled a card saying where I was and we walked to the big clapboard meeting-house down on Boone Street. It was pretty nearly filled but we found an empty bench near the back and sat down. The preacher hadnt come to the platform yet and folks were singing hymns while they waited. Jeb Wishaw was near up front and when he looked around for Olivia, he saw us sitting together. He frowned and made as if to rise, then he sat again and whispered to his wife. She shook her head and looked back at us. Olivia and she smiled at each other.

"About Pa?" I said.

"That was a bad thing to happen last night," she said. "Everybody's saying Mister Hammond shouldnt have acted so."

"Not everybody," I said, remembering Adam Shelby. "At least, not altogether."

"At any rate, mostly. Way they see it is now that your pa has done what he wanted to do, he ought to back down to folks' wishes."

"If folks had come in a better mood, Pa might have listened to them. Who does Sep Logan think he is, coming with his army?"



"Trouble is its no longer Sep Logan but all the others too."

"Yeah, your pa and Uncle Matt and the others. That's not the whole section."

"Jeb Coombes' with Mayor Roberts too."

I stared at her. "Who told you that?"

"Pa was there when he had a long talk on the phone with Jeb.

Jeb Coombes is backing him."

I covered up the ~~XXXXX~~ <sup>shock,</sup> and yes, the ~~XXXXX~~ <sup>hurt.</sup> Jeb Coombes had been pretty close to Pa. He had stayed with us once when he was resting up from his operation for appendicitis and ~~XXXXX~~ he often came out for Sunday dinner.

"Backing him ~~up~~ in what?" I demanded.

"Abner Hammond, dont go <sup>porcupine</sup> ~~XXXXXX~~ on me," she said.

Folks were clapping their hands and singing and presently the preacher came out on the platform. He was short and thin, with a large head and dressed in black alpaca. You expected he would have a thin squeak of a voice but what came out was so booming you looked around to see if there was someone else.

He had walked out to the front of the platform, his short legs chopping down like a thresher machine and stood stiffly still, head thrown back and eyes closed. Everyone sang louder as he prayed holding the bible like a <sup>weight</sup> ~~XXXX~~ before him. Then he opened his eyes and held up his hands and the singing <sup>reared up mule fashion</sup> ~~BLESSZNYXZLIXEZAZZANEXZREXEXZINE~~ before it jammed down its foreleg and halted so quickly fit to throw you. I had heard he was a mighty knowing preacher and we all settled a little broader on the ~~launches~~ to hear him talk.

He came at us fast. "How'd you like to see Jesus Christ kick that Castro out of office, huh? And Kchruschev, take that Kchruschev, how'd you like to see Jesus Christ standing beside him that day he



banged his shoe on the table and saying, 'Put on thy shoe,' saying, 'Kehrushhev, put on thy shoe.' Huh? That's all. Just saying, 'Kehrushhev, put on thy shoe, man, put on thy shoe!' How'd you like to see that, huh?"

He was a rousing man and folks just sat there deeper and deeper saying over and over again Amen and Alleluia the way they do when the preacher's running straight on the trace.

"Olivinia, you tell me about Coleman Roberts," I whispered to her.

"Listen to the preacher, Abner."

A preacher's good as this one was good for hours with me any evening but the one where Pa was being treed.

"Got to know. Its my pa."

She turned and looked at me steady, the hazel in her eyes flecking the lights like gold. "The preacher's got something to tell you," she said.

Didnt know Olivinia was getting religion nohow which aint bad when a fellow has the time for it. But this was what I didnt have and I would have pulled stumps and walked out of there if I hadnt wanted to know about Coleman Roberts pretty badly. I reckoned there wasnt anyone else I could learn from so I sat and waited. After the preaching was over, she might be in a fitter mood. XXX

"And take that NAACP, the nigger communist group up in that den of iniquity named Jew York," cried the preacher. "How'd you like to see Jesus Christ climbing aboard one of them busses they all want to ride on, holding his lily white robes around him and climbing aboard and pointing a finger at them and saying, K 'Niggers, you get out and walk. That's how I made you to be and that's how its gonna be!' How'd you like that, huh? And talking about that nigger communist



bunch, let me tell you, you aint safe from the devil no matter where you be. No, brothers and sisters, nobody's safe from the devil.

"Not even in this sovereign state which the good Lord done over into paradise for you, His chosen children. No, sir. For I hear them nigger communists have done moved into the county."

Fa and me had been plumb fools. We could have had our heads blown off. That dead nigger had been one of them. What had been busting Sep and the others apart was knowing that the communists had moved in while Fa and me had been stopping up the wrong hole. We had been a couple of dopes.

"Whyn't you tell me? We'd have left that corpse alone."

She shook her head and looked at me a kind of mournful. Guess the fool part was peeping out. But she could have told me rather than giving me a riddle-me-ree about listening to the preacher.

"You gonna have to clean up if you want to go to heaven!" the preacher was yelling. He got a storm of amens and alleluias, he was that good.

"Its like you're at the casting ground one of them frosty mornings. When the master calls the roll and you answer to your number, you got to cinch your saddle and be ready to move out for that old fox is bad."

"That old fox communism is smart and bad."

"And the nigger communists are double bad because they hate the Lord."

"He hates the Lord for making him black and he hates the Lord because he's a communist."

Olivinia looked at me solemn and said, "It aint what you're thinking, Abner. Coleman Roberts' loaded the preacher like a gun."

Gosh, I thought. By golly.

"Yes, sir. Them nigger communists so smart I hear they throwing sand in the eyes of one of the most respected folk around here. I hear that after the Lord met one of them nigger communists



coming into town on the devil's work and struck him dead, you good people of Malagoosha figured on dumping the anti-Christ into a sinkhole. But what happened?

His voice fell down so low you had to pull your ears to hear him.

"Along comes the devil and takes the spirit of that double hater of the Lord and breathes it into one of your most respected folk. And this poor benighted fellow who has become the devil's tool takes that nigger corpse and <sup>hides</sup> ~~buries~~ it in the <sup>Lord's earth</sup> ~~XXXXXX~~ of this county. And now all of you are accursed."

It wasn't good nohow. You could feel the hate coming.

"How'd you like ~~XXXXXX~~ one morning to see Jesus Christ climbing up the steps <sup>to</sup> the gallery at the courthouse, his lily white robes held up off the ground so as not to be dirtied by the accursed land, and point a finger at you and say, 'Cursed be ye, for ye have denied me and taken in the anti-Christ! Eternal damnation be yours!' Huh? How'd you like you and your children to be eternally damned!"

I don't know who started it first but a lot of faces began turning towards me, Jeb Wishaw among them. He beckoned with his head at Olivinia, telling her to get up from beside me but she just sat there her eyes straight in front.

"It's Mayor Roberts," she said low. "I heard Pa telling Ma Mayor Roberts had got hold of the preacher. That's why I wanted you to listen."

I went out of the meeting-house after they had started stomping and singing a revival hymn and went back to the station.

The noise was still going over at the ~~sixxian~~ meeting-house when I got out Pete's pickup and headed for Pa's. He was sitting in the



rocker by the radio listening to Lulu Belle singing My Gal Is Billy-be-Damned. Whether a song called for sour ~~ma~~ mash or molasses in her voice, Lulu Belle could serve it up better than anyone else. She was famous all over the state but I guess because we were two lonely men, Pa and me had adopted her for our own.

"Pa, the town's coming for it," I said.

His face in the lamplight was all bones and hollows. He looked almost sickly, a kind of trouble he had never had before being hard as oak.

"There's been a talking?"

"No, Pa. They didnt talk on it but the preacher did."

"What preacher?"

"The one we heard about last week. He was at the meeting-house tonight."

"He's a foreigner, aint he?"

"Yes, but Coleman Roberts got to him."

"And the townfolk? He stirred them up?"

"Yeah, and your friends too. Jeb Wishaw and Uncle Matt were at the meeting-house."

Pa thought and said, "You spoke with Jeb Coombes?"

I swallowed. This wasnt good for Pa at all. "Jeb Coombes' going along with Mayor Roberts."

He looked concerned and said, "Could be you're wrong, son?"

I shook my head, staring <sup>into</sup> ~~at~~ the little softwood fire he had kindled to take the chill off. It was down to coals and would burn out quickly but we never used our winter <sup>cutting</sup> ~~warm~~ this early.

"When do they reckon to come?"

Olivinia had told me about the talking she had heard from her pa. "They're calling a meeting tomorrow noon at the courthouse. Mayor Roberts will take a vote but he wont have any trouble since



the preacher has ~~done~~ threatened them with hell fire for taking in a communist."

Pa looked hard at me and I told him what the preacher ~~had~~ had said.

"Coleman Roberts is a bad man," Pa said. "We've never had any trouble with Nigras in this county. 'ot quite a few over where our family are at, sharecropping and running their own little farms but I dont reckon this Nigra communist bunch he's talking about ever got in there at all."

"That preacher looked wicked as a hellbender when he spoke. Olivinia tells me Mayor Roberts wanted them worked up so he could raise a real posse among them."

Pa stopped rocking. "Posse? What's he doing with a posse? What about the police?"

I couldnt help a grin. "Coleman Roberts aint forgetting you're a Hammond, Pa. He remembers you met him with a gun. Maybe he doesnt think his three man police force much good with you on the warpath."

He was looking off but it was hard to tell what he was thinking. He had this way of going off by himself and sometimes when he came back, he was a sudden man. Pa came to grips with trouble like a muskallonge/~~approaching~~ <sup>to</sup> a bait. He stood off, looking at it his jaw closed and locked cautiously but when he lunged, ~~it was a~~ <sup>he</sup> on it.

"Coleman aint doing the right thing," he said.

"What you going to do?"

"Wait here for them."

I had an idea. "Suppose we <sup>took</sup> ~~dig~~ it up and <sup>buried</sup> ~~planted~~ it some place ~~else~~ else, they wouldnt know where to dig."

He said softly, "They aint going to dig, son. Not on my land."



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"But, Pa, they got guns!" I cried. "You and me alone, we cant stop them!"

A little shine of laughter was in his eyes when he looked at me. "That truck of yours outside. Reckon it can do a hundred miles and back before morning?"

"Pete's? Pete's truck? Pete's got it going ~~like~~ faster'n a preacher out of hell. What for?"

I didnt figure Pa~~x~~ was <sup>set</sup> ~~was~~ on running away but it crossed my mind that he was thinking of toting the ~~guy~~ corpse to some hiding place where they couldnt find it. Maybe that was what he meant when he said they wouldnt dig on his land. Pa could be playing it smarter than they.

"Got a chore to do. Got a couple to do before morning."

"But why take it a hundred miles? Lots of woods around. We could find a place."

"Aint taking it anywhere son," he said. "That poor Nigra needs the rest like I told the Lord."

I stood up before him. "Pa, you didnt hear me. Them folks are going to come with guns. We aint set to shoot it out with all of them. You got to do something before they get here."

But I was being mad at old stone face. He sat there rocking cold and w~~h~~ withdrawn. After awhile he said, "Going to send a wire and see some folks." He rose. "You take the car and leave the truck. Go on back to town."

"I'm staying here tonight."

He got the look that I hadnt yet tried to buck since once he long time I said Willi Mae wasnt worth hog tripe to go on mooning about. He could move swift as a painter and the day he turned on me I had thought he was going to pop me on the mouth but he had stopped in time.



"You go into town. Dont come back till I send for you," he said.

I drove back to town and parked near the gas pumps. It was later than ten. Usually, by this time, most folks are at home but tonight there were lots of people at all the corners with the biggest group on the courthouse lawn across from Mayor Roberts. I sat in the car, the window halfway down, listening around for talk about us.

Fellows who go scratching their ears around in the dirt will, like hens, pick up dirt. Reckon I had it coming to me but that didnt lessen the blow.

They all seemed to be talking about us. That was allowable since twice now Pa had put the gun on folk doing no more than going to dig up a Nigra corpse. But then my hardworking ear scraped up this piece of dirt, and, brother, I was done for.

"... no good white trash," the fellow was saying. "I aint surprised that girl of his, Willi Mae's ~~whoring~~ whoring down in Florida."

I whispered the denial but had little hope that I was believing it enough to be calm. I thought of fists, rocks, jack handle, anything to kill a fellow with, wallowing in the luxury while knowing that a wrong word could have them coming down on me and messing me around proper.

It was too close in the car for the heat in me so I got out into Saltlick. With the collar of my coat turned up, the flaps on my cap down, I could be any of the young fellows walking about. I moved around a little but soon I was being glad to bolt into an alley. I leaned my head against a wall, some tears mingling with the vomit. Somebody had found out that Willi Mae was living in a Key West sporthouse and they were all talking about it.



With me it wasn't a question whether Willi Mae was in a whorehouse. I didn't know her enough to tell whether she would turn bad. All I thought of was Pa and what this would do to him. I believed he loved Willi Mae more than me but it didn't crawl me. I had never lacked affection from him. Folks said he spoilt me. They pointed to the college talk in proof. Only a man who spoilt kids would encourage them in this talk about college. While they knew that Willi Mae had gone, they didn't know about his nightly agony at the radio or the rabbit hunched on his shoulder.

Who could have found out about Willi Mae? I thought of all the folk who may have recently left Malagoosha for the outside. And then, so sure was I that I never argued it, I thought of Miss Amanda. She had ~~as~~ fairly told me when she said, "You get to wondering what kind of house Pete's staying at."

I stood away from the wall and cleaned up the dirt on me. With no plan, but in a lather to queer her somehow, I returned to Saltlick and went over to Miss Amanda's. She was still at the switchboard. Folks who didn't have a phone at home would go to her window and giving the number they wanted, use the public instrument in the booth outside her window. Pete had <sup>only</sup> called me in Jeb Coombes because he knew how friendly me and Pa were with Jeb.

Halfway ~~up~~ down, I was in shadow but my legs were lit up in the light streaming out of her window. She was talking into the mouthpiece, pumping out scandal, you could tell, by the way her lips warped over like a crossbill bird busting pine cones. I thought of her spreading the news through town, whispering it, chuckling it and maybe to Coleman Roberts thaying it with a lithp and my fingers yelped to wring her scrawny neck.

Miss Amanda had ~~looked~~ looked up a couple of times since I ~~stood~~ <sup>stood</sup> ~~clean~~ there, wondering to whom the legs belonged. The lit up legs



and the face in shadow. She had a goddam guilty conscience, plain as pome.  
~~There~~ There was no slackening in her unease. She was shooting swift side glances to see if I had moved. I stayed, savagely enjoying her discomfort. I thought of a way of giving the nasty minded old crow a real fright. So one time when her eyes were off me, I stepped forward, putting my face in the light. And when she shot that worried look again, it hit her. Lord, it hit her.

Fear laced her eyes. Her mouth dropped open. She jerked back to the switchboard, her hands shaking and jolting as the plungers skittered all over the slots. She pawed at the board with fingers desperately spread as a rabbit's hindlegs bolting down a hole. I was still giggling to myself when a lightless automobile slipped <sup>down the</sup> ~~SIXXXX~~ street.

The two patrolmen who stepped out were the whole Malagoosha City force. The tall one was Joe and the short one was Shorty. I knew them well as they bought gas at Pete's. We weren't friends. Joe was a burly, hardfaced fellow who had been on a big city police force before he came to Malagoosha. Shorty was mostly always grinning, no matter how angry he got. I've seen him on a Massacre Day beating a drunken outsider with his fists until he passed out. And he grinned all the while.

They came at me, one on either side, flashlights blinding me,

"Why you scaring Miss Amanda to death?" Joe asked.

"Looks like we caught a Peeping Tom. First time we ever caught a Peeping Tom," Shorty said, the grin in his voice.

"Why're you standing outside Miss Amanda's window?"

Joe said.

Seems I'd been stupid. While I'd been standing out here laughing at her, she had phoned the Mayor who had sicked the police on me. It could mean a <sup>load</sup> ~~load~~ of trouble for me, things being what they were in the town.

"I was just passing," I said.



Shorty laughed out loud. "Passing? Then mister you must have been going real slow for according to Miss Amanda, it took you all of twenty minutes to get by her window."

I shrugged. "I'll move along," I said, easy as I could.

But with a blow from his forearm, Joe nearly took my head from my shoulders.

"You dont until we say so. Mayor Roberts wants to ~~xxxxxx~~ have a talk with you."

~~I saw it then.~~ Miss Amanda must have phoned Coleman Roberts who ~~sent the two patrolmen.~~

"There're two of you and the law makes three," I said angrily. "Go ahead, beat me up."

"Sure, anything you say, Lip," said Shorty as he dug his fist into my belly. I went over, feeling as if I had no knees. A booted foot kicked me in the ribs and I rolled over on my side.

"Okay, lay off. The Mayor only wanted us to dust him off a little before we took him in."

"On your feet. Get going before we really work you over," said Shorty.

I worked my way to my feet and staggered over to the car, holding my gut while my legs threatened to march off sideways on their own. Shorty drove, backing and filling and heading back up Saltlick Street. He rode the car right up against the sidewalk before Mayor Roberts' office.

As I limped out with Joe's hand on my arm, one of the men in the knot on the courthouse lawn called out, "Joe, who you got there?"

"A Peeping Tom," Shorty called to him, grinning.

"Peeping Tom? Who's he?" the man asked.

"Name of Abner. Abner Hammong," said Shorty.



My name exploded all over Saltlick Street.

"Abner Hammond! A goddam Peeping Tom!"

Up and down the street and the knots at the corners started in fast until a crowd was formed before the office door. And they were calling other things too.

"Abner Hammond! White trash! Nigger-loving Peeping Tom!"

Shorty was grinning all over his face as he took ~~me~~ a long time walking me up the steps to Coleman Roberts' office.

"Give him to us a little before you take him in, Shorty!" begged one of the men.

"Let him go, boys!" yelled a woman. "Let him run for it!"

They were closing in on us. ~~And~~ Shorty peered into my face.

"Now dont you think that's a right dandy idea, Abner? Want to make a run for it?"

A woman knocked my cap from my head and one of the men <sup>struck</sup> ~~hit~~ me between the shoulder blades. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~

"He and his old man suck up to niggers! His sister's a cities! Jeezam! harlot in one of them big ~~sixty~~ The boy's a Peeping Tom! ~~What~~ What a family!"

It brought a big, ugly laugh from the crowd and hands flailed at me before Joe grunted and said, "Alright, back up, now. Let us through."

He had his gun out, brandishing it and they fell back so we could enter Mayor Roberts office. We went through a hall and into his room where he sat behind a desk. The preacher I had seen earlier was with him. Close up, the preacher was ~~X~~ worse than in the meeting hall. His face was the color of chitterlings after the salt water soak.

Mayor Roberts looked at me so long, my face twitched.

"You're as rotten as your pa," he said.



"I wasnt doing what they said," I told him.

Shorty gave me a hefty swipe across my wounded mouth.

"Calling the Mayor and all of us stinking liars?" he snarled at me. "Didnt we catch you peeping at Miss Amanda's window?"

The preacher shrugged inside his alpaca jacket and said, "Is this the sinner, Mayor?"

"He's the one. Abner Hammonds brat," Coleman Roberts said.

The preacher rose, no taller than my collar stud. He pointed a thin finger at me. "Boy, you want to be eternally damned?" he yelled. "You want to go to hell with your pa? To feel the flames licking at your boot soles, and then creeping up your legs, feeling the blood popping and boiling, burning your organs and wrapping around your belly? To feel your eyeballs shrivelling in the heat?"

"Alright, Preacher. Cool down," Mayor Roberts said. He was a pompous man and somewhat foolish but you had to mind his office. Since he had been elected he was whining less and folks were getting to think he was looking more like a mayor.

"Tell me, boy, your pa still aiming to keep that nigger on his land?" he asked.

whipped  
I had been/~~XXXXX~~ enough to be cautious. "He aint been talking to me. He told me I shouldnt come back to the farm until he sent for me."

"You were at the meeting-house tonight. Afterwards you were seen heading out of town for the farm."

"Yes sir. I figured on staying the nightbut he sent me back in."

"Joe here tells me you went out with Pete Sawyers' pickup and ~~AM~~ came back in your pa's car. Where's the pickup?"

I could see Joe and Shorty out of the corners of my eyes



how their hands hooked in a little at the question and I knew they would be swinging at me if I didnt watch my step.

"Left it with Pa. He said he wanted to borrow it and I should use the car."

"Why did he want to borrow it?" Mayor Roberts asked softly.

Already my face felt as if a mule had stepped on it. I felt a shrinking at my gut, waiting for the blow. ~~XXXX~~

"He wouldnt tell me. He almost hit me when I asked," I said.

But I was so scared, they must have heard the honesty in my voice for nobody struck me. Coleman Roberts looked over at Joe and Shorty, seeking to confirm what he was thinking. Hell, it had been plain even to me. Pa was going to move the body.

Mayor Roberts said, "Alright, Abner. We're going to let you off this time but dont you go peeping at any more windows in this town or we'll ride you out on a rail."

I didnt bother to tell them again that I hadnt been molesting Miss Amanda, at least not that way. They wouldnt have been convinced ~~anyway~~ anyhow. I was bad all through.

Suddenly the preacher's eyes blazed at me. "Where is your scarlet sister?" he ~~rapped~~ boomed out.

And all the caution I had held on to so carefully, left me. I wanted to kick my foot through that hog tripe face, to break his pipestem arms and legs.

"You filthy, dirty, hog swill eating son of a bitch!" I yelled, leaping at him. I only got in one lick before Joe and Shorty were on me, but I felt his nose go under my fist. Joe and Shorty dragged me off and I reckoned if another whipping was due, I wouldnt just stand and take it as I had done before. But the surprise was that nothing happened. They just held on to an arm each and cakewalked me



out of the room. They let me out ~~the~~ the back way, laughing softly all the while although I Shorty couldn't help planting a foot to help me out. I didn't know whether the crowd would be waiting for me so I made it through alleys to the station. And there I laid down on Pete's cot until some of the soreness had gone. I stripped and went to the shower. Where the boot had made contact with my ribs was red and swollen and my mouth still bled. Otherwise, I guessed I could be shipped to market. I had a warm shower and a glass of warm milk and slept. By the time I woke, I was almost as intact as before Joe and Shorty had met me.

Pa! I thought when I was fully conscious. It was ~~fixxx~~ nearing six o'clock. I went out of there fast as I could and burnt the road for the farm. Pa was not back when I got there, so I sat in the car, hunched in my jacket against the cold. We had never had a heater in the car.

Day was creaking up out of bed, the Fall chill in its bones when I heard the pickup. A ~~xxx~~ redstart flew by on a nervous tangle of wings. The trees in the yard dripped. The pickup turned into the gate and stopped as its headlights touched the car. It came on again slowly and I opened the door and stepped out. Pa pulled up and switched off the lights. He stood a few feet off, staring at me. His face was filmy with sweat and I knew he must have driven all night. He wasn't pleased, but he wasn't as angry as I thought he would be at me for coming out. He put his hand in his pocket and handed me the ~~xxxx~~ key to the house.

"Go inside and light the lamps," he said.

It was a funny order to give but I took the key and turned for the house. Just then, he said something in a low voice. I looked around and my hair stood on end.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Out of the covered back of Pete Sawyer's truck came three pairs of the longest legs I've even seen in my born days. The legs were wrapped in blue overalls and even in the low light I could see the patches. Then followed the other ~~part~~ portions of the ~~many~~ bodies and the three rangy old fellows stood in the yard studying me. They were carrying rifle guns, long almost to their shoulders and they held them like they grew out of their hands. They wore old felt hats, squashed down on their heads. They had a hound dog stillness, pointing for grouse in the wet. They had Pa's face too, the hook to the chin he used to say was all you needed to know a Hammond. They were tall with a slight stoop at the shoulders, hollow chests and flat bellies.

The one in the middle spoke, "This the boy, Abner?"

Pa said, "Abner, come and meet your uncle Shad, your uncle ~~Meshach~~ Meshach and your uncle Abednego."

I had always known Pa was a last child but coming so far back of these three, it was no wonder he had left home. They could nearly make a half again as tall as Pa and they were old. But you didnt see it how they stood, light and ready like bobcats, or how they sent the rifle guns into the other hands with a little toss as they held out for a shake. Uncle Shadrach, the eldest had ~~all~~ snow white hair straggling out from under his hat. Uncle Meshach and Uncle Abednego had darker hair. All three had eyes blue faded as their denims. They had sturdy, quick grips ~~as if they didnt~~ as if they didnt want to occupy those hands too ~~long~~ long before tossing back the guns into them.

"He's growed," Uncle Shad said. "He's going to be tall,



like his uncle Abednego."

Uncle Abednego was no ~~max~~ shorter than Uncle Shad that I could see, maybe half an inch but they were folks who reckoned closely, I would come to find out.

"Reckon we can call the boys," Uncle Meshach said.

Uncle Shad gave a swift little whistle you hardly heard and my hair stood on end again. For this time another three came out of the back that were the spitting image of the uncles, except that they were younger. They were burlier too, bareheaded and they looked at me from under their brows. They carried guns in the crooks of their elbows and one was biting chaw.

"Abner, meet your cousin Abraham, your cousin Isaac and your cousin Jacob," Pa said.

We nodded at each other. Uncle Shad whistled again and they began trotting back to the truck. Pa said something sharply and Uncle Shad whistled again. They stoped, turned and came back.

Pa said, "Go on and open the house, Abner."

Pa was a sudden man. He could make up his mind and go, quicker than any man I know. Coleman Roberts and the other fellows had pushed him to the wall and Pa hadnt dragged his foot. He wasnt a man to knuckle under and since he couldnt fight all of Malagoosha town, He had just upped and ~~guxxfex~~ fetched his kinfolk. And you only had to look at the six of them to smell gunpowder. Pa never talked about the feuds back in the mountain country where he came from, but now and again something would drop and you could snatch a peek.

I got the door opened and went in and lit the lamps. The uncles and cousins came in. They stood in a crowd at the door of the living room, looking around and I could have sworn they sniffed.



They were wild in a way, how they prowled forward into the room, looking at things and turning softly on the balls of their feet.

"Abner, its so big. What you want with so big a house?"

Uncle Shad said.

"Hell to defend such a big house, Abner," Uncle Meshach said.

"Should knock out them glass windows and put in loopholes, Abner," Uncle Abednego said. "Fellows rush you, you got a caution keeping them from slapping you with a bullet."

The three cousins looked at me from under their brows. One of them shrugged as if he couldnt figure how we had been so foolish. Then he shot a quick look at the uncles and I found out that the big, husky bears were scared of the three lean old wolves.

"Never been anything but a peaceful country, Shad," Pa said. "Folk over at this side hardly ever fight over anything."

Uncle Shad squirted tobacco juice into the fireplace.

"Peace aint a thing that stays around, Abner," he said. "You ought to know that. Aint never had a war, there'd never be a peace. You want to war now and then to get a peace. Just like summertime and wintertime."

The three cousins had found the radio and were touching it and looking at each other. Uncle Shad whistled sharply and they straightened quickly.

"Ought to leave them in the truck," Uncle Abednego said. "Cant abide them in the house."

"Heard you had a girl," Uncle Meshach said. "Where's she at?"

"Not here," Pa said.

"Aint never ought to send away your women when there's going to be a war," Uncle Shad said. "Need them to load guns, fetch water



things like that."

"Guess Abner left home too early, never learnt how to fight a war."

Nothing showed on Pa's face as he looked over to me. "Son, want to start the coffee?"

We fixed a whole mess of bacon and greens and coffee and the uncles and cousins ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ did mighty well with it. Pa and me went out to put the pickup and car in the shed and I told him about Mayor Roberts. I didnt know how to talk about Willi Mae so I left that part out. Pa didnt say anything, just stood there thinking.

"Even if we can keep them off with Uncle Shad and the rest, we aint going to have ~~thexzherx~~ the uncles and cousins here forever. How is it going to end?" I said.

"But why ~~xxxx~~ did you stand at Miss Amanda's window?" Pa said. This was the weak bit but I couldnt tell him the real reason.

"Guess I was just plumb stupid," I said harshly. "Wanted to watch her operate the telephones. She's real good to watch with it."

"You werent to know that Coleman Roberts had gone bad," Pa said. ~~XXXXXX~~ "Aint blaming you too much."

It was time to change the subject and I said, "You think Uncle Shad and the rest will shoot?"

"If I give the word," Pa said.

"Why you?"

"Its my war. I bring them in."

"But, Pa, if they do, ~~thzx~~ if they killed anybody, they could be tried for murder."

"Hoping they wont. But if folk trespass on my land after they are warned, then its their fault. Coleman Roberts will have to show me a ~~vaxzxak~~ law warrant to dig up my land and I dont reckon he can get it."



"But he's coroner! He can get a warrant to exhume the body!"

"Coleman Roberts' never been anything but a two-bit druggist," Pa said. "He turned mayor when we werent looking. He wont put anything on record that will throw him out of office, such as officially digging up a corpse and throw it in a sinkhole."

What Pa meant was that Mayor Roberts, acting as coroner, would have to record what he had done with the body, and as Pa had said, there wasnt any law in the state saying a man couldnt bury whom he wanted on his land. But what lay ahead could be <sup>real trouble.</sup> ~~XXXX~~ Once they started firing off their guns, folks ~~na~~ could be hurt, and worse. What with Willi Mae gone ~~XXX~~ bad, and now this, it could kill Pa.

<sup>dead</sup> "The nigger aint worth it!" I said savagely.

Pa breathed heavily in anger before he said, "You go back to town. You go back now."

"I aint leaving," I said. "Nothing you can do to make me leave."

"Then ~~if you say~~ understand this is how I'm going to have it."

I stalked back to the house seething all the way. Inside, I came upon one of the cousins with my watch at his ear. It was a watch Pa had given me when I graduated from high school. This cousin (I think it was Isaac but I never did really know~~X~~ them different) was shaking it in his big fist as likely he would scatter it on the floor, then putting it to his ear to hear if it still ticked. I rushed across the room and got up to him.

"You put that down before I rip you open, you big mountain clown!" I yelled at him.

He backed off from me, the watch in his hand. He was puzzled but not angry. The others had turned at my shout. ~~XXX~~ Uncle Shad moved so swiftly, I only had the impression of a blur before he was between



us. He snatched the watch out of the cousin's hand and cuffed him. He turned and faced me, his eyes cold. He handed me the watch.

"Here's your timepiece," he said softly. "Wasnt doing any harm, only liked to listen to it. When this is over, you can fight him but not before."

"I'll fight him any damn time," I said. ~~XXXX~~ I looked over at the cousin who was by now looking as if he would like to jump me. "I'll flatten your big hulk and throw you in on top of the nigger," I said, chucking all my fears and frustrations on him.

Uncle Shad said, "What nigger?"

"The one we got in the hole out in the yard. The one all this fuss is about," I said.

Pa had come in and was standing by the door. Uncle Shad looked at him.

"You got a nigger in a hole in the yard, Abner?"

"A dead one," Pa said.

"Hell of a thing they should want to fight you for," Uncle Shad said.

And he went back across the room to where he and the other two uncles had been sitting, doing nothing but chewing and now and then pulling back the bolts on their rifle guns. But me? I stood there with my jaw hanging, looking at Pa and looking back at them trying to figure out these people that would come a hundred miles for a fight without knowing the cause, just because a kinfolk beckoned.

The sun had scattered the mists when ~~XXXX~~ Uncle Shad rose.

"Guess we ought to look at the land. Got places we can hole up in case, Abner?"

The others rose too and they went outside with Pa. I followed to the door, watched them going through the <sup>high</sup> grass in the yard. The blades hardly moved as they passed.



CHAPTER TWELVE

Along about early afternoon, Uncle Meshach at the window looked ~~ak~~ out and said, ~~ZMBIXX~~ "Automobile a-coming."

Uncle Shad looked up from the radio and nodded at the cousins. They had been sitting knees up, on the floor, ~~buzxkxkx~~ listening to the music, snapping their fingers and slapping their legs to the tune but they lumbered quickly to their feet and were through the door before you knew it. Uncle Shad and Uncle Abed-nego stayed where they were, their ears nearly touching the set.

This fellow at the radio station had got hold of one of Lulu Belle's newest album and he was riding it barebacked. He had gone through Barbara Allen and The Hangman's Song and Sourwood Mountain a couple of times already. Far as the uncles were concerned, he could go through it a couple more times. Pa had gone out to see after the mules.

I went over to Uncle Meshach's window which held a view clear down the mountain road. The dust was spinning out behind the car which was a good distance away yet, but Uncle Meshach squinted his eyes and grunted and said, "Coming fast enough to bust a britches but I cant tell if its a filly or a mare."

Pa's kinfolk sure talk funny, I thought, dividing motor cars into sexes. However, I got it when he said, "She sure sends that automobile a-flying anyway."

I've got as good eyes as anybody I had met before but here I was, only about seeing the outline of the driver at the wheel, yet Uncle Meshach could tell it was a woman driving; was even worried that he wasnt sure whether she was young or old.



Suddenly Uncle Meshach snorted disgustedly.

"That darn fool Abner went out without his rifle gun," he said.

"Aint got a rifle gun. Got one of these here bird guns," Uncle Shad at the radio said.

"You reckon he wants to get his head blowed off? Going out without his rifle gun with a feud on."

Pa was coming from the barn, looking down the road as he ~~came~~ walked. He had been feeding and watering the mules.

"Abner left home too young," Uncle Abednego said. "He aint never been in a real war."

I said, "Listen, you, Pa held off the Mayor and a whole bunch of men here the other night with just a bird gun and guts."

They all three looked at me and if they had been smiling men, what flit on their faces could have been pleasure.

"Well, now, I reckon," Uncle Shad said.

Uncle Abednego said softly, "We aint talking about guts, son. Your pa is a Hammond. We just talking about having knowledge about war."

Uncle Meshach beside me said, "Filly."

Jeb Wishaw's car was turning into the road. Olivinia was alone in it. I ran for the door and got ~~next~~ to her as she was braking. ~~up~~ The car almost rolled over my foot and I had to hop out of the way and lope alongside it calling to her, "Hey, stop!"

When it finally halted, she was still hunched over the wheel staring open mouthed at the three cousins shambling over from behind the barn, the long rifles trailing on the ground, shaggily bareheaded and looking at her from under their brows. I waved a hand at them and said, "Git! You're scaring the lady!"



But they kept coming and when they reached the car, they just stood there staring at her.

One of them, maybe Abe, said, "She's pretty, cousin. Yours?"

Olivinia said weakly, "Who are they?"

"My cousins. From over the mountain."

"Oh."

I waved a hand at them again and the low whistle came from the house. They faded softly, still looking back at Olivinia.

"Visiting?" Olivinia said.

"Kind of," I said. "What about you? Visiting?"

She was small and neat and clean in Jeb Wishaw's ~~old~~ dusty old auto. She had a bow in her hair and the frock was bright as if she was going to town for market day.

"I heard what happened to you last night," she said.

"That was a joke."

"Joke?" she asked angrily. "They most tear you down. Look at your face."

"Aint so bad. I got a nose. Preacher maybe aint got one today."

"That did no good, Abner. He preached again this morning. Folks coming out to dig up the Nigra — even if it means shooting."

I grinned. "Yeah, that's why Pa's got visitors."

She stared at the house. "Them? Nothing much."

I was still grinning. "You aint seen the others."

She drew her eyebrows together. It was true as the sod cousins had said, she was pretty.

"What others?"

"The uncles. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego."



Pa was coming from the house.

She asked, "You mean your pa brought in his kin?"

"Kind of," I said.

"Why ~~did~~ your pa did that?"

Guess I stared. Hell, she knew what they had done to me last night and what they were aiming to do today. She had told me herself. Uncle Shad came out and whistled at Pa. Olivia hadnt seen them yet. Pa stopped, waiting for Uncle Shad.

"Pa figured I got enough beating," I said.

"They're ~~his~~ his fighting kin. His feuding kin I've heard my pappy talking about," she said.

"Maybe."

"There'll be fighting. They'll kill."

"Townfolk coming out here today bringing guns too," I said.

She said roughly, "But we got folks there — we got kin among the townies!"

Pa was shaking his head at Uncle Shad. My uncles Meshach and Abednego stepped from the house and went over to Uncle Shad and Pa. Uncle Shad looked at them and they nodded. Pa shook his head and said something. They didnt like it and all three spat on the ground.

It was true about the Wishaws having folk in town. All of Pa's friends had kissin kin in town because if you looked far back enough, everybody that end of Malagoosha were related. But not Joe and Shorty who had come in to do the police job, and not Coleman Roberts, I hoped.

"Your pa will be out there too, carrying a gun," I said.

"We aint to blame if he gets trouble."

"Pa wont be there, neither will Uncle Matt or the others,"



she cried. "Pa talked Uncle Matt out of it and ~~he~~ Uncle Matt went after Micajah Hoe and Jilson and the others — all your pa's friends. They reckoned it had gone far enough and said they'd leave it to the town folk."

"Whyn't they say they'd talk the town folk out of it?"

"But you know the townies got their tails up. You heard the preacher working on them."

"So you think we ought to make them dig up the Nigra," I said.

"Didnt say that." But she looked away.

"You scared of what they might do?"

She jerked her head to me. "Yes, I'm scared!" she whispered between her teeth. "Its turned bad and you dont have to be a goldurned fool!"

The uncles and Pa came up so quietly, Olivinia hadnt heard them until ~~WHEN SHE SAW~~ Pa spoke.

"Visiting, Olivinia?" Pa said.

She turned at his voice and then I heard the gasp and saw her hands cover her mouth as she took in the uncles. They were no angels to behold, standing tall, grim and shaggy in their patched overalls, forearms dangling down from the rifle guns they had slung deerwise across their shoulders. You could smell violence and blood on them if you went thinking things, but even if you hadnt known of the feuding Hammonds, they looked dangerous in their long, flat stillness, standing hip jointed, chawing burley and the forearms hooked on the rifles.

"Right purty girl your girl, Abner," Uncle Shad said.

"She come to load our guns?"

Olivinia, her eyes popping, just shook her head. Uncle Shad spat on the ground and said, "Pshaw. Reckon you did. You want



to light and visit, then?"

She shook her head. Then her mouth went stubborn as she fought down the flutters. "No-o. N-no. I aint staying."

Pa said gently, "Then you go on home, Olivinia. Go straight home."

Uncle Shad shook his head. "Reckon we cant, Abner. Girl goes out of here and says we holiing up here, we lose the surprise."

"I dont want a surprise, Shad. Just want folks to know we aint weak and that way, ~~they~~ they wont try anything," Pa said.

"They will try. Anyway. They vexed enough with you, they'll try, no matter."

"You turn around and hightail back home, Olivinia," Pa said.

"We cut her down before she hit the gate, Abner," Uncle Shad said. "We blow off her tyres."

Pa just got smaller and meaner and then seemed to go softly wild, opening like a flower aflame at Springtime; only, Pa's blooming was poison. His ferocity was appalling.

"You do it, Shad and I shoot you in the middle, close up, with my squirrel gun," Pa whispered.

I knew now how he had coped with his brothers when he ~~had~~ lived over the mountain. Pa could mad up until a bobcat looked gentle as a rabbit. I opened the door of the car and rammed into the seat beside Olivinia.

"Turn, girl, turn," I said low.

She fumbled a little but got the motor started, ~~and~~ backed up and made the turn and rolled for the gate. I wa ited for the boom and the lurch, but nothing happened and we got out to the public highway. I reached over and cut the switch. The car rolled a few feet and stopped. Olivinia crumpled to the steering wheel. She



of was weeping all over herself, the way girls cry. I said for saw

"They wouldn't have done a thing," I said. "Pa wouldn't make them."

Seemed like I said the right thing for she came up fast off the steering wheel and knuckled the tears out of her eyes. But when she turned to me, well, I knew I had guessed wrong. She looked as ferocious as Pa.

"You fool! You and your pa and the three scarecrows back there — and — and — the — the other three lumps of — of —!"

"We aint done nothing wrong!" I protested. "Didn't you hear Pa say back there he didn't aim to surprise the townies? All he wants is for them to stay off his land!"

"You shove a gun at folks and tell them stay off your land?" she blazed. "You think they just going to back off and ~~EX~~ run?"

"They better!" I raged back at her.

"Your folks are going to shoot at them! Going to shoot at Pa's kin and Uncle Matt's kin and the rest!"

"Then tell your pa and Uncle Matt to go stop the townies from coming! Tell ~~XXXX~~ Sep Logan to take his seven chunkies and stop them! And while ~~you~~ you doing all that talking, tell Miss Amanda stop spreading lies about Willi Mae — tell 'em all just leave us Hammonds alone! There aint none of you in Malagoosha good as my sister Willi Mae!"

That didn't ought to come out but by this time I was real red-eye mad. She just looked at me as if didn't see me and said, "Get out."

Well, I git. Maybe it oughtnt to have come out but they had no right thinking up them things about Willi Mae. She almost knocked me catercorner as she tore off. I walked back to the house. They were all back inside by then, the uncles and the cousins sitting on



the floor around the KK walls. Their knees were up tKto their chins, the guns between their knees held tighter than a woman. Uncle Shad looked up and cocked his head from side to side.

"Aint heard no rooster crow, Abner," he said. "How you tell the time?"

They were kin but that didnt make them less stupid. Saying they would shoot off guns at Olivinia.

"Pa bought a clock when he escaped. A stinking clock. Pa went soft," I said.

Pa said sharply, "Abner, you ~~ya~~ keep quiet now."

"Bu - but, what's this? What's he talking about shooting at Olivinia? Suppose he missed and hit her with a bullet?"

Uncle Meshach looking at his boots said without looking up,

"Your Uncle Shad never miss~~XX~~, boy."~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ He added, "We dont, either."

"All us Hammonds shoot good, boy. Your pa, too," Uncle Abednego said.

"You're wrong, Uncle Abednego," I said. "Guess I could hit the barn, close up."

One of the cousins spat sideways on the floor and I started for him.

"Wipe it up, you filthy son of a bithh!" I shouted, standing over him.

Before I could do much more than blink, Pa was on me. He grabbed an arm and spun me around.

"You go outside and walk it off. Go look on the mules in the barn," he said.

"But look at them!" I shouted. "So they call us white trash in town and say things of Willi Mae! See these and they'll know we're poor white trash!"







He looked over at the uncles.

"Got to get to Key West," he said.

Uncle Shad nodded. "You go, Abner. We can clean up here."

"Dont need to to that," I said. "We could take you back and detour down to Key West."

He ignored me like I hadnt said a word. "Less'n you want to stay and then we could go to Key West with you, Abner," he said.

"Maybe you got to do some fighting down there, Abner," Uncle Meshach said.

"Shucks, maybe the boys could stay here, take care of them townies and we could go with Abner," Uncle Abednego said.

Pa came out of where he had been. "No, we'll straighten out this and then we'll take you back, Shad. Got to go to Key West alone."

"Pa," I said, "we ought to go now. Willi Mae — "

He said to me softly, "You shut up now, boy."

He said it sort of furry, it pimpled my back. I didnt talk anymore.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Along about four o'clock, they came at us. Coleman Roberts' car was in the lead and we counted a dozen or so behind him. The cousins had been out in the yard piling wood. They shouted something that sounded like, "Folks a-coming!" and the three uncles got to their feet and went out without a word. By the time I got to the door, they had disappeared. They just seemed to have been swallowed by the land.

I turned around and said, "Pa, where're they?"

Pa was pulling on his jacket. "You wont see them, Abner," he said.

They were blowing the horns in the cars and yelling things now as they neared our gate. I could hear what they were yelling and Pa turned so pale, the stubble on his <sup>face stood out.</sup> ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ I took down my gun and put in two shells. Pa heard the click as I closed the breech and he turned and looked at me for awhile.

"Guess you should stay out of this, Abner," he said.

"You kidding?"

"Wont do you no good when the time for State comes. Fighting for Nigras ain't so popular."

"I aint fighting for Nigras. I'm on my pa's side."

He smiled a little. "Dont take a man's side, son, or you wont be any better off than Shad and the rest out there — and you dont think much of them. Take the side of an idea, Abner."

"Yeah? Wish we had invented something that could turn niggers — hell, Nigras white. That would end all strife."

"Why you think they want X to be white?"

"They ought to. Save their asses some."



"Maybe you're right. Though I aint sure. Folks are funny. Take that bunch out there. If I were a Nigra, I wouldnt want to be one of them."

They were beating the sides of the cars and yelling like kids on Massacre Day. I pulled aside the curtain and looked out. Mayor Roberts ~~KKK~~ had stepped from his car and was standing beside it, looking towards the house. I looked for any of Pa's friends but none of them were there. Not even Sep. I looked for Joe and Shorty, but they werent there either. These were all folk the preacher had worked upon, town folk. Mayor Roberts was smoking a cigar and seemed to be grinning around it as the people in the other cars kept banging the sides and shouting the names.

Pa said, "You stay in, Abner. If I need you I'll holler."

He opened the door and went outside. The shouts rolled down on him.

"Nigger-loving Hammond — white trash Hammond!"

Mayor Roberts allowed it to go on enough, he figured, to scare Pa before he held up his hand. He called in the stillness,

"Told you I'd be back, Abner. Told you, didnt I?"

"Sure," Pa said. "I believed you. Did you bring the warrant?"

Mayor Roberts held up his hand to stop the shouting.

"I brought it," he said grinning, "several of them."

He waved his hand at the ~~KKK~~ crowd behind him and everybody burst out cheering and laughing. It was good, I reckoned. Coleman Roberts has turned smarter since ~~M~~ he was elected. And by the looks of it, he'd be elected again.

"They aint legal, Coleman," Pa said.

Everybody laughed again, including Mayor Roberts who took out his cigar to do it properly, from the belly.

"Naw, but they're mighty powerful, Abner. Want to see them



tear out your fences so as to ~~show~~ show you their warrant?"

Pa waited for the laugh to die out and said, "Why dont you leave him in peace, Coleman? He aint troubling anybody anymore?"

Mayor Roberts held up his hand, ~~WIZNIZXXXXX~~. He stabbed the cigar towards Pa.

"Get this, once and for all, Hammond. Folks around here a int hating niggers. You got mules in the barn? We love them as <sup>mules.</sup> you lome them mules. You'd shoot to protect them. But I dont see them sleeping in the house with you."

"Maybe they do!" yelled a voice from in the crowd.

"Nigger-lover!"

"Let's go get him and his ~~XX~~ nigger!"

They left the cars and were coming on foot towards the gate. I eased the gun to the window sill and waited. I hadnt heard a sound from the uncles, but I wasnt worried. To tell the truth, as I looked ~~X~~ at the crowd, some carrying shotguns and others pieces of lumber or old chains or whatever, I felt glad about Uncle Shad and the others some place out there. I had been playing a guessing game about where they were, whether behind the haystack, or the barn, or our automobile. But when they showed, I was all wrong.

Pa held up his hand and called, ~~XXXXXX~~ "Mayor Roberts?"

Coleman Roberts stepped out in front and held up both hands and the crowd backed up behind him.

"Wait a minute, boys, let's hear what Abner's saying."

"Mayor Roberts, you come on my land without a warrant, reckon you know you'll be trespassing."

"Is that all, Abner? You had your say?"

"Had my say, Mayor," Pa said.

"Alright. Alright. Now hear this. ~~XX~~ I'm going to count



to ten. If the gate aint opened at ten, I wont be able to control these fellows. They'll just have to come in and take out the nigger themselves. X One. Two. Three."

He counted by poking the cigar towards the sky. Dont know whether it was that Uncle Shad couldnt count beyond three or he just got plain impatient, but before Coleman Roberts could say four, Uncle Shad shot his cigar in half.

For awhile, after the crack of the rifle gun, there was a dead silence. I looked for the smoke and saw it curling out of the yard grass. Then I knew I'd been wrong all along. Uncle Shad and the rest could go to earth like animals. They were part of the earth. They could use the folds and the knobs, the rocks and the valleys and the ridges. In the right places, you wouldnt know they were there until you stepped on them. And then, I reckon you'd wished that you had stepped on a ~~muzzum~~ cottonmouth.

Mayor Roberts' hand was still in the air as if the shot had frozen it there. He looked up at the shagged end of ~~his~~ <sup>his cigar,</sup> his mouth open. And then before he could say anything, another piece of the cigar disappeared as Uncle Meshach showed me how well the Hammonds could shoot.

Up to now, none of them had shown themselves. I learnt afterwards about who had fired. We only knew then that the shots had come from two widely seperated places. Then I heard Uncle Shad's peculiar whistle and the yard exploded. From every direction, rifle-guns spoke and the hats of the townies went flying. Uncle Shad and the rest just fired like lightning and folk out there lost their hats. I think the first of them to break were those who found their hats and clapped them on again, only in the instant to lose them. They ran for their cars, leaving the hats on the ground. Mayor



Roberts was last to go and I was strangely glad that although he walked quickly, he didn't run to his car like the others. For I had known them all my life. It was bad that they had turn wolf, trying to bring down Pa and me. But although I was proud of the uncles, I didn't want them to think that all Malagoosha town folk were cowards.

As the last of the cars pulled away, Uncle Shad rose, knocking straw from his denims. One by one the others came from earth. They were as expressionless as if they had just risen from bed, shaking bits of grass and pebbles from their overalls and taking the old felt hats from their shirt-fronts where they had stuck them when they took cover.

Uncle Meshach was checking his sights, pointing the gun into the sky and squeezing off.

"Gun acting up?" Uncle Abednego said.

"Darn if I don't think I nicked ~~xxxxx~~ an ear," Uncle Meshach said.

"Maybe a speck of dust flew in your eye," Uncle Abednego said.

"Maybe," Uncle Meshach said.

Nobody said anything to Pa. They came walking back to the house. The cousins went to the gate and began picking up ~~the~~ hats which had been left on the ground when the townies bolted. They set them on the fence posts ~~sixxxxxxxx~~ and began popping at them.

Pa said, "Abner, want to heat some coffee?"

Uncle Shad whistled and the cousins gave up target practice and came in. They all sat on the floor, cleaning their guns. Watching their hands on the rifles, I remember Pa telling me that the gun had been the earliest plow used in the United States. It had



conquered the land, chained it to be of use. Pa used to say that us Americans were well served in tools to build and destroy. One time he heard a fellow on the radio say we made the most powerful guns, built the biggest churches and grew the hugest ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ grain of wheat. All we needed was to make the <sup>tallest</sup> ~~biggest~~ man, Pa said, and that was up to all of us. What we had to do first was to learn how tall was tall.

I knew they came no taller than Pa. I knew his guts were wrenching to go after Willi Mae but he had put in the hoe and he would ~~go~~ go to the end of the row. But what ~~XXXXX~~ would be the end? Pa <sup>foolish</sup> wasn't a ~~XXXXXX~~ man. We could whop the fellows a couple of times but in the end, Coleman Roberts would find a way to bring the law down on us. If it was even for disturbing the peace. Bringing in the uncles had socked them — but only for awhile.

While they were cleaning their guns, I took Pa aside.

"Pa," I said, "what's going to happen now? They'll come back."

"We hold off two or three days and we'll be alright," he said.

"Two or three days? Something going on here I dont know about?"

"Maybe," he said calmly.

"But — how long can this — this army hold out?" I asked, waving a hand at the uncles. "And while we're at that, how long will they stay?"

"Long as we want them to."

"What about their own homes?"

"This is their home, Abner, where their kin is."

"And what about Willi Mae?" I said brutally. "Aint you going to look for her?"

He closed his eyes and I sort of wished he'd belt me. But I guess he had seen through me. They come no taller than Pa.



He said, "You got a chore to do."

That angered me. "Chore? You talking about chores at a time like this?" I shouted.

I heard a snigger and one of the cousins said, ~~KKoyK~~ "Boy's gone soft."

I whirled for him but then I heard plash and he was clawing oily wool out of his eyes. Uncle Shad had ~~unwaringly~~ almost without aim flung a cleaning rag straight in his face.

"Abe, you shut up, you hear me?" Uncle Shad said.

Pa said, "You must go into town."

I stared at him.

"You go into town and see Jeb Coombes. Tell him to talk to Miss Amanda. If Pete Sawyers phones again, he's to take the call. Want to find out where Pete's staying."

"Go into town? You crazy?" I whispered.

I walked over to the window and looked out. It was darkening. There was no sign of life on the road. It made sense that we should find out where Pete was. This Key West could be a big place with a heap of streets and houses. It was a place where they always seemed to be playing some kind of music. God Almighty, maybe it was as Miss Amanda had said. I didnt have any way of telling. If it was true, it would break him for sure. But I needed to know. If this thing held out, I'd be going back to Jeb Coombes to find out. Then I'd take off for Key West myself before Pa knew it. I'd bring her back before he found out, if I had to drag her.

I went back to him and nodded.

"How will you do it?" he asked.

"I'll take the pickup and hide it in the brush before I get into town. I think I can get to the back door at Jeb's without being seen."



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Jeb Coombes' store was built of stone and brick. The walls were a foot and a half thick, the windows small and high ~~up~~ so the Indians couldn't see in, even if they prowled right up, back in the time two hundred years ago when it was built. The rafters were of split ash, the walls panelled in cherry. Jeb was proud of the place and kept it clean as a hound's tooth. It is said it had been ~~first~~ built for a blockhouse and later turned into the first courthouse. There was a big main entrance on Saltlick Street and a smaller door in the alley near the filling station. It took me a time to make it to this door for Malagoosha town was jumpy tonight. Most of the crowding was around Coleman Robert's place. Automobiles were packed tightly on the courthouse lawn. I had my collar up and my cap pulled down and had put a limp in my walk. Yet I was cat nervous, walking past the knots of folk and hearing our name mentioned at every turn.

I knew I could get to Jeb Coombes' but what scared me was talking to Jeb. I'd <sup>reminded</sup> told Pa about Jeb and he said, "Tell Jeb its Willi Mae," that was all.

When we came to town I used to hang out with Pete Sawyer most of the day while Pa and the others sat in Jeb's shaking hands with old General Lee. I hadn't been with them every minute of the day. There were things about their friendships ~~that~~ I didn't know. What I knew was that one burnt out husk of a nigger had blown those friendships ~~thats~~ apart. And what had happened out at the farm today wouldn't begin to patch it up again. Yet Pa had seemed to believe he could count on Jeb Coombes. I didn't relish the idea of Jeb



grabbing me for Joe and Shorty.

The alley door was closed but not locked. It opened on a passage that ran past a couple of rooms making up Jeb's living quarters and ended in the space behind the bar. There was a ~~XXXX~~ cutoff door between the passage and the ~~X~~ bar. One light bulb was burning in the passage. I turned off the light and crept up to the door. It wasn't so thick I couldn't ~~XXXXX~~ hear the noise in the bar. I tried it and got a crack. Joe was somewhere down at the other end, out of line with my sight. To the left I could see the grocery portion of the store, darkened and empty. I eased the door a little more and got one fat edge of the stove and then as I looked past it, just a piece of Sep Logan's face. I pulled it shut quickly.

The floor under my foot and the wall at my back felt solid and sure. I wanted to stay there in the dark~~XXXX~~, safe and warm, just drop the whole stupid business. Pa had been crazy believing this would work.

I cracked the door again and picked up Sep Logan~~ASZKDXBX~~ talking "... goldurned army, the way Coleman Roberts tell it."

"Dont know how come Jeb Wishaw didnt know about this," Jilson Swift said. "That girl of his ought to have seen something when she was out there earlier."

"If I had a daughter and she was snucking up to that brat of his I'd take leather to her," Sep Logan said.

"We didnt any of us know Abner would turn out how he did," Jilson Swift said.

"He ought to stop her before she turns bad," Sep said.

Uncle Ma tt Connant cleared his throat and said, "Cant believe everything you hear when you know where you heard it from. Knew her ma before she died. Knew her pa before he turned crazy.



Willi Mae wasnt born bad none at all. Maybe she saw her pa turning contrarious and lit out before it touched her too."

I listened but didnt hear Olivinia's pa. ~~JEBXXXXXXXXXX~~ Jeb Coombes came along the bar and <sup>I</sup> put my lips to the crack and said, "Jeb, Jeb Coombes," in a hoarse voice but he went right on by so I reckoned it hadnt been loud enough. Grinning nervously at myself, I waited for him to come by again and I called louder this time. His footsteps halted and I thought he must be looking around <sup>seeking</sup> ~~trying~~ to locate the call for who in hell would expect a voice to come <sup>out of</sup> ~~from~~ a crack?

I said hoarsely, "The door, Jeb. Want to talk with you."

Then I flattened to the wall. Jeb was a brawling man who couldnt move easy if he tried. Sure enough he flung the door open and peered into the half dark of the passage. Standing further out, he'd have brained me.

"Behind the door, Jeb. Dont want to show myself to folks outside. You wait there, going to turn the light on."

I hoped to God Jeb hadnt forgotten that he and Pa had been close. I could feel Joe and Shorty rattling my teeth in their fists.

I worked the switch and stared into Jeb Coombes' popping eyes.

"Wouldnt have come but Pa sent me," I said flatly. "He figured you wouldnt turn me in but I figured different."

The door to the alley was open~~ed~~ and even if he was stronger than me, he couldnt catch me to the alley with one of my legs in a ball and chain.

"Why you figured different?" Jeb said.

"You're with Coleman Roberts," I said.

He said slowly, "I run a business in this town, boy. Mayor Roberts aint the soft mayor we all thought he'd be."

Even if he had been just going along on the pull, I wasnt



going to trust him too close. Just likely he might be ~~thinking~~ thinking that grabbing me might help him with Mayor Roberts.

"Pa sent a message."

"What message?"

I told him about the phone call. He looked sick and shook his head.

"The town's turned rotten," he said. "Tell your pa I dont believe it."

"Sure," I said.

He said, "What's this crazy story I hear from the fellows who were out at your place? Who's your pa got out there?"

I shook my head.

"You can tell me. Your pa knows different about me. You can talk to me, boy."

But I'd done Pa's chore and was backing out of Jeb's place.

"How'll your pa know when I hear from Pete?"

That needed some thought. If Jeb Coombes wanted to trap me, that would be the time to do it, when I returned for the answer. Then I had an idea and grinned.

"You write it down on Sep Logan's signboard. Just ~~write~~ write down the address. I'll come along some time to look at it."

He chuckled and it looked square as shooting, but Mala-goosha had turned sour and I wasnt for swallowing how a fellow looked.

"Beat it, boy. Close the door behind you," he said.

I went out quick and lost myself on Saltlick Street. Folks didnt seem to be bedding down tonight. I took a look at the station. It was all dark but I knew better than ~~trying~~ going in there. I walked out of town, past the wreck at Lookout Rock and



found Pete's truck.

Pa<sup>w</sup> came up alongside as I stopped in the yard. He leaned on the cab <sup>while</sup> I told him everything that had happened at Jeb's.

"Jeb aint lying. You could have trusted him, son."

"Better this way, Pa," I said shortly.

No lights showed in the house but when we went in, I saw that they had covered the <sup>windows</sup> ~~doors~~ with stuff. A lamp was turned down low. I screwed up the wick and they were on the floor. There were <sup>only</sup> ~~only~~ four mounds <sup>under the</sup> ~~under the~~ blankets. I looked at Pa<sup>w</sup> and he motioned outside. The others were out there, ~~padding~~ padding around on guard.

Pa<sup>w</sup> gave me coffee, ~~and said they had prepared the~~ ~~one~~. We sat there talking together in low voices. I wondered whether he had listened to the radio tonight. <sup>A song from Lulu Belle</sup> ~~It was a canton, the way that gal could soothe~~ ~~both~~ ~~feel~~ ~~better~~. <sup>~~~~~</sup> ~~~~~~~~~ ~~would make us~~ ~~like she was pining to us special~~.  
Sometime later I woke, stiff with cold. Uncle Shad was

sitting up in his blankets. His eyes caught the light as he <sup>looked</sup> ~~looked~~ at <sup>leathery</sup> ~~leathery~~ me. A grimace creased his ~~leathery~~ face.

"Just listen to them coming," he said, "noisy as beavers."

He scared me, saying it so easy, <sup>bar</sup> ~~so~~ though I listened hard, there wasnt anything out there <sup>said</sup> ~~the~~ the whistling frogs and silence. Uncle Shad didnt seem to have ~~any~~ anything but the others sat up too. Uncle Abednego and one of the cousins <sup>went</sup> ~~was~~ missing. They rose with their rifles in hand, ~~standing up~~ ~~standing~~ shedding the blankets like <sup>well</sup> ~~like~~ dogs coming out of a stream. Pa<sup>w</sup> wasnt in the room either so I guessed he was outside on guard with the other ~~two~~ two. Uncle Meshach chopped his hand towards the lamp and I blew it out. The light outside was soft and ghostly, the moonshine lost in the mist. <sup>just went out the door and</sup> ~~As~~ As they had done before, Uncle Shad and the others ~~just~~ ~~disappeared~~ disappeared. I still hadnt ~~heard~~ heard anything out there but I had no doubt at all. Pa<sup>w</sup>'s kin were witchy, the way they could see and hear and shoot. They spat on floors and







Our kin

~~But~~ The power was

hard,

The uncle ~~had~~ blasted them

the house.

"Shoot back

*Bert*

"Hope they believed me, <sup>but</sup> that's <sup>h</sup> to keep them off. Dat want anybody hurt bad," Paw said.



"They get the idea you're doing that, ~~Pa~~<sup>I asked.</sup> what's to prevent them coming right in?" ~~Pa~~<sup>Abner</sup> asked.

"Not when they come like that, ~~Pa~~<sup>Abner</sup>. The time to watch is when two or three of them drift in to talk peace. They dont know who we got out here, or how many of us there is. ~~They'll want to count heads.~~ They'll want to count heads," Paw said.

Not even Jeb Coombes knows, you remember that, I said to myself looking at Pa.<sup>w</sup> He looked back at me as if he knew I was thinking about holding out on Jeb.

"They aint never going to count heads, Abner," Uncle Shad said softly.

We sat out the dawning and then the kinfolk went to sleep. I went out to the barn after Pa.<sup>w</sup> He was feeding and watering the animals.

"You get some sleep, Abner," he said, "you got to see Jeb Coombes tonight."

I stood right there and said, "There're things I ought to know."

He was rubbing down a mule. He said mildly, "What things?"

"Things like how long you figure we're all going to be ~~fooling around here,~~ <sup>fooling around here,</sup> and why. We could get away now."

He looked at me but his eyes ~~held nothing I could~~<sup>held nothing I could</sup> read.

"You getting tired of ~~this fooling around,~~<sup>it,</sup> son?"

"You ought to give me something, Pa.<sup>w</sup> You ought to say what we're waiting for. I know you're waiting for something. You cant hope to keep them off forever. You ought to tell me what you're waiting for."

"Your Uncle Shad and the rest aint asking, Abner."

Anger jumped in me. "They dont care, Pa.<sup>w</sup> dont you see?"

I shouted. "They dont care so long as they can shoot and chew and spit! You think it matters to them that you moved over here and



raised your family and folks respect you? They're still in the one room log cabin sleeping with the hogs!"

He ~~looked~~ <sup>worrying,</sup> plumb worn out with warring and worrying. But if he couldn't end the ~~log~~ <sup>worrying,</sup>, he hadn't needed to go ~~there~~ <sup>him</sup>. And even if his pride was to blame for prodding/into it, we had dusted them enough to retire with our tails up. <sup>He didn't have any cause to keep at it until they had his hide.</sup>

"Folks respect a lot of people who ~~don't~~ <sup>Hogs aint got no respect for even.</sup> respect themselves at all, Abner," he said. ~~XXXXXX~~ Shad and the ~~XXXX~~ <sup>others</sup> respect themselves for they aint asking anything out of this more than folks leave me to raise my own hell with myself. <sup>I</sup> I didn't aim to bring you into this, son. You came back."

"And maybe I should pull out?"

"Maybe." He went back to rubbing the animal.

He had that quiet way of making you look inside.

"Pa," I said, "What makes you think those others don't believe in what <sup>they're</sup> ~~they're~~ doing?"

"Sheep," he said, slapping the word at me. "They feed along as ~~XXXXXX~~ other folk herd them. They don't raise their heads to look where they ~~are~~ going. <sup>Sheep.</sup>"

"Just like the mules you say built this country."

He gave a sure enough laugh and patted the mule on the rump. "A lot to learn about mules, boy, if you figure that way. Nobody pushes a mule. He'll lay back his ears."

"But - but, Pa, just supposing they really believe?"

[ "Then <sup>He looked at his hands resting on the ~~rough~~ mule skin and ~~it was~~ very quiet in the barn.</sup> they'd crawl under the bullets and dig out that corpse even if they had to use their fingers," he said softly.

"Except maybe they don't think a nigger's worth all that trouble," <sup>I snapped at him I said real nasty.</sup>

Pa dropped the brush and turned to me. His eyes ~~were~~







CHAPTER FIFTEEN

We got Lulu Belle on the radio about midmorning and it was a sight to see the uncles and the cousins as she did King Henry Followed With His Mourning On. She would be shooting skitters along your spine with a sinewy note wrapped around the twang of a guitar and then, of a sudden, she'd whiplash her voice enough to smoke out your eyes. Everytime this happened, the Khgk shaggy heads of our kin broke off from nodding the timing and turned to each other, grinning out of powder blackened faces.

Uncle Shad hit his fist in his palm and said, "Gosh, aint never heard it sung so before."

"Like she was washing down peaches with corn likker," Uncle Abednego said.

"Wish we could take her back with us. Folks would sure come to hear her sing," Uncle Meshach said.

"Aint you got radios over at your end of the county?" I asked.

Uncle Shad looked at me. "Couple of folks have but we never did bother with none of them new notions. Reckon if we'd heard this girl before, we'd likely storebought one long ago."

"Automobile coming," one of the cousins at the window said.

Pa got up quickly and went to the window. He said without turning around, "Police. Trouble."

Joe and Shorty, I thought. I wanted to beat in their heads so much, I was shaking. Shouldnt hold a grudge so long, but nobody had ever pounded me before.

"Uncle Shad and me will meet them. Rest of you, stay inside," Pa said.



"I'm coming out, Pa," I said.

He nodded. Wasnt much use hiding me when they knew I was here. We stepped down into the yard and waited for the police car. I looked back at the house and nothing stirred but knowing what was inside, I had a tingle at the back of my neck. They were uncanny, the quick, soft way they moved and the lightning in which their hands/~~was~~ the rifles became when needed.

The police car was boiling in. Joe and Shorty must have been expensive to the county, the way they drove that car. They rammed it to a halt feet from us, leaped out either side and walked towards us, their hands on their guns. Pa was facing them squarely but just before the car stopped, I had noticed how Uncle Shad turned slightly so that one shoulder was near pointing at them. The butt of his rifle-gun rested on the ground and his hand extended downward, grasped the stock. By this time, everything Pa's kin did was being noticed by me.

Joe and Shorty stalked towards us, toes pointing outward, strutting like roosters. Their eyes were all over the yard, stabbing quickly at the house and the barn. Shorty looked at me and grinned broadly.

"Well, looky here Joe, if it aint our friend, the Peeping Tom," he said.

His eyes were all crinkly at the edges, amused at me. He took a look at Uncle Shad, saw nothing but a queer looking old fellow and looked back at me.

"Well, well, you looking fit again. We didnt muss you much now, did we?"

Uncle Shad quirted tobacco juice and said, "This the fellow what took the lick at you in town, Abner?"



"That's right. Both of them," I said.

They both looked at Uncle Shad, their eyes cold.

"Aint your size at all," Uncle Shad said and spat at his feet.

Joe said, "You taking it on, old timer?"

Uncle Shad just leaned on his rifle and looked vaguely out. Maybe Joe and Shorty thought they had faded him. Shorty was grinning real broad again.

"What do you fellows want?" Pa said.

Joe pulled at the peak of his cap. They were still sending those hard, puzzled looks around the place. Joe reached in his hip pocket.

"Got a warrant from town to search your place," he said.

"Heard you had bad characters ~~hiding~~ holed up here. That a fact?"

"Werent you here last night with the others? Didnt you tuck and run with them?" I blurted out.

"The Peeping Tom's got his voice back, Joe," Shorty said.

"We didnt work him over enough last time."

Joe was slapping the warrant in his hand. "Matter of fact, we ~~XXXX~~ didnt make it. But we heard you had an army."

Shorty pointed his chin at Uncle Shad and said, "This the army?"

Uncle Shad jerked his head at Pa. "I'm Abner's kin. Come a-visiting."

Shorty was watching him with his mouth wide open. He grinned and said admiringly, "Well, I never. A real mountain man. A regular hick. You know, <sup>since</sup> ~~XXXX~~ me and Joe came out to police the town, we thought we'd seen ~~xxx~~ all the hicks there were. But here's a regular one. Mister, where's your buckskin?"



Uncle Shad was sniffing like he smelled a storm. "Abner," he said, "this polecat country?"

Joe and Shorty stiffened. Pa said, "Aint never had a do your army. Where you want to/~~XXXXXX~~ searching?"

The way how Pa said it must have convinced them he had nothing to hide but they were puzzled all the same.

"Way we heard it, there was considerable shooting here the last two times Mayor Roberts came out. ~~W~~ They say it sounded like a gang of soldiers," Joe said.

"Was anybody hurt?" Pa asked.

"No, nobody we heard about except one fellow says he had a nick on his ear but even he wasnt sure it was a bullet."

"Now, aint it funny that all this shooting going on and nobody get shot?"

"Yeah," Shorty said. "That's what I was thinking. But so many folk ca nt be wrong. Even your friend Sep Logan said there was shooting last night."

Pa's eyes were level. "Could be me and ~~my~~ Shad here, not seeing each other so long, were celebrating the Fourth of July a mite late," he said.

"Or early," Uncle Shad said distantly.

Shorty was chuckling, his fat belly jiggling.

"Now wouldnt that be fun. Sending a whole pack of folks ~~zoom~~ scooting with squibs. That what it was, mister?"

Pa shrugged. He said, "Go ahead and search."

Joe said, "Maybe we will." He looked curiously around.

"What we'd like to know is, where did you plant the nigger?"

Pa said softly, "Get off my land."

Joe said through his teeth, "You want me to slug you and



take you in?"

"I told you it was polecat country, Abner," Uncle Shad said. "The stink's coming through."

Shorty snarled out something and clawed for the gun holstered on his hip. And in my born days, I havent seen anything like what Uncle Shad did. Only his wrists seemed to move but the long, heavy rifle was swinging through the air and Shorty went down as if he had been axed.

By that time, I was moving too. For as Uncle Shad began his swing, Joe went for his gun. His eyes were on Uncle Shad and he didnt see me as I crouched and drove my right fist into his gut. <sup>That old mole blow I wrestle with Pa has got lots of beef in my arm. Joe</sup> gasped and I came up and smashed a left at his chin and <sup>buried the right in his gut again.</sup> repeated with the right. I <sup>am</sup> strong ~~for my age~~ and hate was in me. <sup>on the ground</sup> Down Joe went to ~~the ground~~, floundering beside Shorty. Shorty was out, but I showed Joe my foot and watched the fear come into his eyes before I stomped his face. I lifted my foot again and was flung backwards to the ground. I was quickly up, facing Pa.

"Why'd you do that?" I yelled at him. "Dont you know what they did to me?"

<sup>you aint going</sup> "Because/ ~~I aint~~ you to grow up to be like them," Pa said. "You did enough."

Beside us, Uncle Shad said softly, "You reach that hip gun, son, and I'm going to tear off an arm with a bullet."

Joe had been trying to get at his gun but he looked up into Uncle Shad's rifle and his hand ~~fell~~ away. I went over and took the gun out of its holster. I slapped him not too gently on the side of his head with it. Pa didnt say anything.

Shorty was coming out of his sleep. He was up on one elbow, blinking around when I took away his gun and slapped him harder.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Joe was in better shape so he took the wheel and drove Shorty ~~XXXX~~ to town. They went easy enough for Pa pumped the shells out of their guns and handed it to them empty. Pa told them to git and they went into the car, not a grin on Shorty. I did all the grinning and he killed me a couple of times with his eyes. They went easy enough, but Lord, they'd be back. We all knew they'd be back. Even Uncle Shad and the others seemed to think they'd be back for they took those rifle-guns apart and cleaned and oiled them proper. One of the cousins went to the pickup for another gunny sack of bullets. When I'd taken a look in there earlier, it was plain they hadnt thought travelling worth much more than toting extra ammunition. They <sup>went about</sup> ~~XXXXXX~~ lighter than a coon with a hound dog on its tail.

Pa and Uncle Shad were over in a corner of the room talking. Afterwards Uncle Shad called the cousins and ~~xxx~~ they went over to the tool shed. Pa told me to turn the pickup so it <sup>faced</sup> ~~XXXXXX~~ the gate.

"Reckon on making a run?" I asked him.

"Come nightfall, we'll know."

I turned the pickup and went over to the tool shed. Nobody was there. I came outside, wondering what was up, and then I heard the thud, thud. I got it quickly. When I reached the grave, the cousins were already down past their knees.

We got the coffin out, closed the grave again and ~~XXXXXX~~ <sup>that light, a couple</sup> handled it over to the pickup. It was ~~featherlight~~ of the cousins carried it with no trouble. Pa was by the truck waiting. He took off his hat and so did Uncle Shad and the rest. The wood had mold clinging to it. Pa cleaned it up with a few sweeps of his hand. Dwight L. Moodie. I wondered what he looked like. For the first time



since folk had started dealing our lives on what once was, I wondered what he looked like. I could guess he had been taller than Pa, but not tall as me. All his people sort of look alike, so it was a task putting features on him. He may have been an ordinary fellow. He had been driving an ordinary car although the throaty way the engine had sung, showed care.

"He was caught alone in the middle of hostiles," Pa said beside me. "He ran but he didnt make it."

"You believe he knew anything?"

"Couldnt have seen Lookout Rock until he was on it. My Maybe a whiff of a second before he died, his brain registered the white wall. But that was all."

Uncle Shad came up and looked in at the coffin. He didnt take off his hat or anything. He reached in and touched the wood.

"Mighty fine box you fixed up, Abner," he said and went away.

"Must have been scared stiff, taking off like that."

Pa shrugged. "Scared? Cant tell. Man doesnt have to be scared to run. Man has something big enough to live for, sometimes he might run," Pa said.

"We wont ever know."

"Aint got to know," Pa said sharply. "Just think it."

We sent the cousins for hay and strew over the coffin. We didnt figure on a disguise or any of that stuff. It was just that things didnt look so raw with the hay over it. Uncle Shad whistled and the cousins trotted off. He was over by the fence along the gate. They talked awhile and then walked a little way either side of the gate.

"Let's quit and eat now, Abner," Uncle Shad said as he came back. Only one of the cousins was with him. I looked



around for the other two but they had vanished.

After they had eaten, Uncle Meshach got up and nodded to the other cousin. They went out and presently the other two came in. They ate also and went over to sit by the radio, looking at me. I sighed, got up and switched on the darn thing. If I lived long enough I'd buy them a radio, I promised silently.

When the whistle came, everybody got up and looked at each other. Uncle Shad grunted and we all went outside. It was a dark afternoon, the sun was behind heavy clouds. The woods beyond our fence was dark in oak and sycamore, softly slashed in sections with a bold river birch. Near the ground, goldenrod and the purple ironweed splashed among the roots. The road to town ran through the wood and we could see ~~along it~~ a distance along it. It was empty, but things had got so, I was trusting the uncles more than my own eyes. I believed there were enemies in the wood.

Pa said, "You go back inside, Abner."

I shook my head and showed him the shotgun in my hand. "Not this time, Pa. This time there wont be any picnic shoot-the-pig."

He looked down and said, "Want me to call it off, dont you?"

"Not if you got strong reasons."

"I got strong reasons."

"Then I'm just like Uncle Shad and the other kinfolk. I aint asking questions."

"We pull out at nightfall, whatever."

I smiled and shook my head. "Pull out? How? Think those out there going to allow us to pull out?"

"We'll just start the truck going and keep our heads down."

"If we're still alive by nightfall."

"We will be. You watch your Uncle Shad and the rest," Pa said, nearly grinning that time.



There was no harm watching them. Come next feud, I'd know what to do. I could hold night classes at State on how to fight feuds the Hammond way. Could help the fees. I twisted my head and practised a spit.

But I watched them and when they went to earth, I found cover too, watching the wood. Nothing moved in the dark tangle. It was uncanny. You knew folks were out there <sup>marking</sup> ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ you. <sup>Enemy</sup> folk maybe <sup>aiming</sup> ~~XXXXXX~~ at this moment to <sup>bring down the foresight in</sup> ~~find you in the dark~~ line with some <sup>section</sup> ~~portion~~ of your vulnerable body. Yet, nobody showed. I twitched nervously and looked back to see if my legs were <sup>exposed</sup> ~~showing~~ around the knob of <sup>land</sup> ~~earth~~ <sup>which I was hunting.</sup> ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ behind. Uncle Abednego and two <sup>were</sup> ~~one~~ of the cousins ~~XXXX~~ to the right; on my left, ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ a few yards forward of me, Uncle Shad and another of the cousins. Somewhere ~~behind~~ back of my position, Uncle Meshach and Pa were forted.

Nothing happened for awhile. Uncle Shad's grey ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ head was switching from side to side. <sup>Sometimes for minutes</sup> ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ he would lay perfectly still then he would jerk in another direction as something else caught his eye.

Once he turned over <sup>on</sup> ~~to~~ his back and spoke to Uncle Abednego. They could have been sitting on the front porch swapping gossip.

"I counted to forty," Uncle Shad said.

"Maybe more. I stopped after thirty or so."

"Nearly poked one awhile ago."

"Me too. Got <sup>the color of red?</sup> ~~hair the color of red~~"

"Same one. Restless as a bird," said Uncle Shad, rolling over on his belly again.

My eyes were bugging but it didnt do any good. I couldnt see anything but trees.

More time passed and Uncle Shad called softly, "Abner, you set on waiting?"



"Will be dark in a couple of hours," Pa said behind me. ~~XXXX~~  
 "Then we  
~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ take the truck and go."

Uncle Shad grunted. He said, "Reckon you ought to know though. If they come out ~~XXXX~~ of the wood we'll have to drop a couple to chase them back in. Figure if we nailed them down now, they'll stay in there until dark. That way, nobody gets killed."

"Pa dont want anybody killed," I said nervously.

"Aint killing anybody," Uncle Shad said. "We wing a couple, the others will know we mean business."

And Pa shocked me by saying calmly, "Shoot, Shad."

Uncle Shad had been lying full out but now his body seemed to lengthen along the ground. The rifle slid forward and his long, tapering fingers closed around the metal plates at the trigger. His cheek <sup>in the grass,</sup> snuggled to the stock, elbows rubbing out places/~~on the ground~~ the grey head motionless. I sneaked a look sideways at Uncle Abednego, at the iron profile buried against the weapon, mouth opened and his lips working over his teeth. Behind me, lethal as a rattler, his capable hands enclosing the death in his gun, Uncle Meshach was doing the same. On their bellies and chewing blades of grass, my cousins didnt do anything but watch the wood.

Uncle Shad squeezed off first and the others fired instantly. I guessed they all scored, from the bawls of pain some folks loosened over there, but I didnt bother to look. I was too busy trying to burrow into the earth. The lead came whining and humming but there <sup>anybody</sup> wasnt/~~anybody~~ over on the other side ~~exp~~ who could shoot like the uncles. They belted us like a hailstorm. Yet they kept inside the wood for no sooner than one more foolish than the rest ~~showed~~ shoved out of the trees, one of the uncles would nail him. ~~XXXX~~ But I was jumping everytime the uncles fired. Fighting was one thing; ~~kill~~ kil-



ling was another. Somebody would swing and he wouldn't be from the other side. Mayor Roberts was sure to sooner or later have the law sitting on his side.

"Don't worry, son," Uncle Abednego said beside me. "This ain't a blood fight. We ain't aiming to kill anybody. This is just a disagreement between folks."

Disagreement, he called it. He must have seen my nervousness for he had rolled over beside me. He was lying on his side, loading his gun.

"Uncle Abednego," I said, "You know what this is all about?"

"Sure," he said, busy at the magazine. "Your pa and some folk had a falling out. They too many for him so he's got to show them he's got kin."

"Wha - what about the nigger?"

"Sure. Him too."

"Him too, what? Doesn't it bother you that you're getting shot at over a nigger?"

He stared surprised. "Son, he's dead."

"But that's what the fight is about! It's because of him!"

"Hell, no, 'taint that," Uncle Abednego said. "It's because over there of them/— and maybe us, too."

He rolled like a log going downhill back to his position and instantly his gun was hammering again.

A new high sound between a whine and a whistle rose above the noise of firing. Presently a voice hailed us. I recognized Coleman Roberts' voice and I figured he was using the hailer on the patrol car.

"Abner! Abner Hammond! Can you hear me?"

Everybody stopped firing.



"The Mayor's going to talk to you," said the voice from the hailer. It sounded like Joe. Wished I'd done more to him.

The hailer spluttered and coughed and the new voice spoke.

"Hammond!"

Our name has that pistol sound and in Coleman Roberts' mouth it exploded over the meadow.

"Hammond, you'd better surrender. I got hundreds of men out here."

"Crook," Uncle Abednego grinned into the ground, "he aint got more'n fifty."

Uncle Abednego's cheek was pressed on the ground, <sup>one</sup> ~~an~~ eye roving the sky and over me and along his rifle as he listened.

are here  
"Joe and Shorty/~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ — I've got <sup>a</sup> ~~the~~ warrant ~~now~~. You shoot now and you're fighting the United States."

That was too big to hit us with. He had no cause to do that. Pa and me had no reason to fight the United States. My pa approved the United States more than any folk I knew, except maybe the way Sep Logan approves the ~~army~~ armed forces.

"Shooting him aint shooting the United States, son," Uncle Abednego said. "He's talking a mountain to hide that he aint got a anthill."

<sup>(clatter of the tractor came louder.)</sup>  
~~The whining we had heard had settled into a steady clatter which I ~~soon~~ found out to be a tractor. It broke out of the trees, high and yellow, rocked forward and ~~stopped~~ halted. When it bobbed forward again, we could glimpse enough heads behind it to know what they were up to. I'd seen it often enough in the movies <sup>in</sup> Malagoosha City, <sup>except that</sup> ~~in those~~ the soldiers <sup>attacked</sup> ~~were~~ in behind a tank.~~

Uncle Meshach said softly behind me, "Shad, that <sup>fellows driving that contraption,</sup> ~~man~~ he's

"What's that?"  
he said.  
I heard it too often a while.  
"A tractor."  
Smuchey's bringing a tractor."  
Coleman Roberts cleaned his throat and the hailer and yelled again.



biggerin ~~the~~ a moose in a cabbage patch."

Uncle Meshach was on slightly <sup>higher</sup> rising ground and he could see the driver ~~was~~ crouched <sup>at</sup> ~~the~~ the levers.

"You take off some fur, Meshach," Uncle Shad said.

~~I saw, as a glance on the tractor but this was~~  
One glittering eye belonging to,

Uncle Meshach ~~was~~ ~~the~~ raked <sup>whipped</sup> along the barrel as he put the bead on the ~~the~~ driver. His gun ~~went~~ off <sup>WHIPPED</sup> and the driver yelped, <sup>he</sup> spun backward out of his seat as the tractor slewed and halted. ~~Exposed~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~was~~ caught exposed, <sup>being</sup> swung off course, were a dozen Malagoosha men, ~~about~~ <sup>Sep Logan was with them.</sup> The uncles and cousins opened fire and ~~hysterical~~ scampered ~~hysterical~~ <sup>back</sup> them back into the wood.

<sup>we could hear them</sup> ~~They were~~ howling and swearing <sup>back</sup> in the wood but they kept well <sup>away</sup> ~~back~~ from the edge and all you saw was the dark green wall of trees. Then there was a lot of low talk and <sup>one time</sup> a cry <sup>of</sup> pain.

"Hammond!" Mayor Roberts voice <sup>slapped</sup> ~~flew~~ at us again. "Listen. <sup>listen for</sup> Some innocent boys are <sup>going to walk</sup> ~~running~~ out of here. You shoot them and it will ~~just~~ be plain murder. You hear me?" <sup>Hammond.</sup>

I looked back at Pa. <sup>he</sup> He was puzzled. Then ~~his~~ his eyes widened in shock. <sup>and</sup> I turned back to the wood. I got it worse than Pa. For shambling out of the safety of the trees, were Sep Logan's seven sons. They came out yelping ~~around~~ and looking back over their shoulders, walking with their bodies bent over, holding hands in a tortured chain as Sep's voice drove them from the rear. I guess all of us were just too open mouthed to do much else than stare. ~~THEY WERE~~ On ~~the~~ they came in the broken walk, knees <sup>and</sup> ~~up and~~ <sup>their paw</sup> ~~tumbling~~ sideways in terror but not daring to halt for ~~the~~ <sup>at them to get over</sup> ~~the~~ was right ~~in~~ behind them, barking ~~the~~ ~~the~~ to the ~~empty~~ tractor. Sep worked them right up to ~~as he would~~ a mule team and the tractor ~~as~~ ~~the~~ climbed aboard while the boys, still



banding scared <sup>but mad too,</sup> ~~and angry~~

...uring former nations they were too scared of  
their people to stop.

~~men~~ <sup>men</sup> dragged themselves to the front and  
formed a <sup>line</sup> ~~mark~~ between us and the tractor. Sep got the motor started  
turned <sup>in front, bawling</sup> ~~for~~ <sup>that</sup> their pa to ~~leave~~ <sup>long</sup> ~~all~~ <sup>let them</sup> of but  
and ~~MAKIN~~ for us, the boys ~~agreed to~~ <sup>with it</sup>. Out shot men

again from the wood and ~~handed~~ <sup>was</sup> forced up behind the tractor ~~off the~~ <sup>up the</sup>

~~way~~ towards ~~the~~ ~~house~~ <sup>ms.</sup> Sep's boys were carrying on real <sup>and interesting for</sup> ~~bad~~ <sup>bad</sup>. They bawled and yelped but Sep <sup>last night</sup>

XXXXXX "Abner," Uncle Shad called, "who's the fellow driving?"

"Sep Logan," Pa said in disgust. "Those boys are his sons."

Uncle Shad chewed some more and said, "Reckon I'm going to kill him, Abner."

"No," Pa said flatly. "No killing, Shad."

Uncle Shad chewed some more. He knew Pa. And Pa had got behind him. You can see he was sorry Pa had got behind him. You could hear it in his voice that he wanted to kill Sep but Pa had said no killing, and ~~Pa~~ Pa had got the drop on him.

"Hell, he's got a ~~gun~~ gun on me too," Uncle Meshach said.

I looked around and sure Pa had slipped backward and had Uncle Meshach also before him. Uncle Abednego chuckled.

"Akmer, you aint forgotten a thing," Uncle Abednego said.

"Should have dusted him some more when he was <sup>small,</sup> ~~like~~ Uncle

Shad said. ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~

"Alright, we ain't gonna kill them no more can make them sorry they came," Underhead <sup>snarled</sup>.  
All six of them began rippling their shots, laying down the

All six of them began rippling their shots, laying down the bullets in a line.

100 <sup>bullets in a min.</sup> ~~think at which~~ the Sep's sons halted when the dirt began kicking into their faces. Sep gunned the tractor, roaring it behind them.

He crept up and nosed them with ~~the~~ it and a couple almost fell into the bullets. We were all looking for Sep but

couldnt see him, he was crouched so low on the floor that ~~he~~ ~~was~~ ~~not~~ ~~visible~~

which rep had hoisted to give him more credit.

We didnt want to shoot through the machinery; a wild bullet could render him lifeless although Sep had it coming to him.



Uncle Abednego had stopped firing ~~for some time now~~ and when I  
 I looked to see what had happened, darned if Uncle Abednego wasnt  
 bouncing  
~~wasn't~~ around like he had the St Vitus Dance. I most  
 shouted at him until I saw he was real collected, just juggling  
 his sights around for a mark on Sep Logan.

"Abner," Uncle Abednego said, "reckon if I took an arm  
 off that Sep Logan you wouldn't have any cause to shoot me?"

[A] ~~is all,~~ <sup>arm</sup> Pa warned.

Uncle Abednego showed his teeth and snapped the trigger.  
 Sure, he got Sep Logan. Got him in the shoulder and Sep tumbled  
 off that tractor and hightailed it back into the wood only a shake  
 ahead of his sons and the others who had been talking behind it.

There was silence in the wood and we all stretched out  
 and let go some of the tension. Although maybe, <sup>the tension</sup> ~~that~~ was only in  
 me. For I never saw any signs of <sup>fighting</sup> ~~teasing~~ in the <sup>mountain kin.</sup> ~~uncles~~ or the  
~~cousins~~. They just lay loose on the ground, the uncles chewing  
 slower and the cousins tickling their noses with blades of grass.

"Hammond," Coleman Roberts slammed from the hailer, ~~XISVAX~~  
 "I've wired for state police and phoned the governor for the  
 national guard. This place will be swarming by nightfall."

The national guard. We didnt have a chance. And bringing  
 in the state police would mean road blocks. The hailer squawked  
 Uncle Matt's  
 and ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ voice came from it.

"Abner, you bullheaded fool, aint this gone far enough?"

Guessed they were all out there. All of Pa's friends,  
 turned against him because he quit the herd. [For some time, one  
 of the cousins had been peering about, mostly overhead, trying to  
 locate where the booming talk was coming from. He seemed to have  
 spotted it for he birddogged a little to the left of where Sep



had entered the trees. Stealthily he put his rifle into firing position. Slyly he worked the rifle onto ~~EA~~ the target and with a look of deep cunning on his face, he pulled the trigger. <sup>Mayor Roberts</sup> ~~The~~ ~~killer~~ was cut off in mid squawk as a bullet crashed into ~~ixx~~ the hailer.

We were all laughing and slapping the earth to which renewed gunfire soon pinned us. But the cousin who had shot, laughed doubled, his ~~KNEE~~ knees at his chin, crazed with it and it caused him to jump up straight into a bullet. It caught him with a slap, spun him and downed him. Uncle Shad was over there faster than a greased rattler. He turned him over and ripped away the ~~SHIRT~~ shirt, looked at the wound and spat tobacco juice into it.

"He bad?" ~~KNEE~~ Pa called.

"Naw, ripped the skin some and went by," Uncle Shad said.

I turned my head and spoke to Uncle Abednego.

"We wont have a chance when the guard comes," I said.

"Aint worse than revenue runners," Uncle Abednego said.

"Aint worse than pneumonia or snakebite. A man's always got a chance."

"How we going to cut out of here with the national guard and state police out there?"

Uncle Abednego had a way of ~~speaking~~ talking in short, rapid sentences, his head twitching in a new direction with each sentence but his eyes never off my face.

"Who's the guard? Who's the state police? Just folks."

"We cant even take off and leave the pickup. We could get away on foot but Pa aint leaving the coffin."

"Son, he leave that coffin and he leaves himself. Wouldnt be a man no more. We aint aiming to leave the coffin."

"Uncle Abednego, you think anybody's going to care next week, after we're all shot to pieces? Take the niggers now. You think any



nigger in the whole <sup>will</sup> world will care that we got shot up over one of his dead people? Leastways they'll laugh like hell."

"Aint the people ~~that~~ who dont care that matters. Its the people who care. Aint the pepole who dont care what changes things. Its the folk who care."

"Who wants to change anyway?" I said. "People dont want to change, they only want to live."

Uncle Abednego rested his palms on the rifle barrel and his cheek on the back of his hands. He was as comfortable on the ground as somebody ~~was~~ lying in a soft bed. The firing had lulled and likely if he hadnt been talking to me, I got the idea that ~~that~~ he could have gone to sleep right there and woke the instant something moved. He jerked his head at me as if the thought had just settled.

"There aint no change. What we call change is just righting. Say we set out to make a trace. From here to the other side of the county. But we got to climb mountains, ford rivers, go through ravines. Cut into woods. Only time we ~~see~~ see where we headed is at certain places. We get to those certain places, then we straighten the trace which had got all twisted when we couldnt see. We just righting the trace. Folks call it change."

We were quiet for awhile. I said, "Uncle Abednego, ~~you~~ you really think we can get pass the national guard and the state police?"

"Maybe not," he said. "They got these fast shooters."

"Why dont you talk Pa into leaving the coffin? We can get away on foot. Trhough the back lands."

He didnt answer. He didnt have to. He looked it. I felt lower than a gopher.

The plane came over a few minutes afterwards. It was a small ~~plane~~ <sup>one</sup> and had ~~army~~ <sup>army</sup> markings. It flew low and we could see the pilot looking down at us. A big cheer went up from



the men in the wood. They fired at us. Guess they felt good.

I looked back at Pa. He was calm faced, talking to Uncle Meshach and watching the plane out of sight. It flew in again and just floated lazily around like a hawk looking over a chicken run. Uncle Meshach rolled to his back and pointed his rifle. Pa spoke sharp to him and he looked disgusted and rolled to his belly. Soon after the sirens were wailing.

The white top state police cars rocked into sight far down the road and a man came out of the wood and waved them to a halt. I counted four of them. They just sat on the road, clean and neat, <sup>and out of it now,</sup> <sup>having brought down our</sup> ~~bringing~~ doom on us. Uncle Shad looked up at the piece of daylight left and he didnt like the size of it. The officers ~~were~~ trotted into the wood after the man who halted them. <sup>they were</sup> ~~they were~~ working through the blueberry and the honeysuckle, walking soft over the pine needles, carrying the <sup>first new gun to burn us. The machine gun and</sup> ~~weapons~~ <sup>Re was sawed off for us.</sup> ~~to turn on us.~~ <sup>First</sup>

A squawk and splutter back in the trees signified another <sup>Pinkie</sup> had been brought. The two unwounded cousins looked excited, peering eagerly about to locate it. <sup>Figured they wanted to even the score.</sup> ~~Figured they wanted to even the score.~~

"Hammond!"

A new voice of stronger authority than Coleman Roberts' rushed down on us.

"Hammond, this is the state police talking to you. We're giving you five minutes to drop your guns and stand up with your hands in the air."

There was a dreamy expression on Uncle Abednego's face as he lay on the ground listening to the words. The cousins were edgy, hunting the source of the voice. The light wind blowing down ~~with evening,~~ was shaking Uncle Shad's mop of white hair. They were all ~~hazkazz~~ bare headed, having crumpled the battered old







But I tell you, he's ~~hickory~~ hickory. Sure, the pain ~~at~~ of hearing Willi Mae's name, struck at him. She was the wound ~~that~~ that hadn't healed. His eyes darkened and lightened instantly.

"You climb out of here and keep running," he said. "Anything goes wrong, see Jeb Coombes. He knows everything about the farm."

"There aint anything going wrong," I said, staring at him.

"Those fellows out there, they aint like the first lot, not like Joe and Shorty. They aim to come in and get us."

"Why dont you tell Uncle Shad and the others to pack up?" I said. "Tell ~~him~~ them its all over. You did what you could."

He said, "Wouldnt be true. Aint yet done all I can. You go now, son. Got to talk to that fellow before the five minutes are up."

"You said we wouldnt be in any trouble before nightfall. I'll wait for nightfall."

The hailer made more noises and the ~~state~~ voice called again, "Hammond, ~~the five minutes are up~~, we're coming in for you."

Pa stood straight up, <sup>a</sup> calm figure, not too tall, not short, just an everyday man in washed and <sup>patched</sup> ~~streaked~~ denims. A foolish aging man to most of <sup>them</sup> ~~us~~ there; in a way, to me too for I didnt understand it all. He had been worked over by storm and <sup>drought</sup> ~~drought~~ and hardship. A bone in <sup>one</sup> ~~his~~ shoulder was higher than the other. The floppy old hat was snugged down on his head, covering the back of his neck as he had always worn it in all seasons.

"Mister," he called, "want to have a word with you."

He faced to a silence in the wood. Uncle Shad away over on my right was cursing softly. We didnt know how many guns across the way were sneaking up on Pa. Maybe the state trooper on the hailer was struck dumb as me. We just hadn't expected it. The voice from



the hailer was quieter.

"You Hammond?" it asked.

"That's him alright! That's the nigger-lover!" yelled a man from the wood.

"Shut up!" the trooper barked. "No body shant asked you!"

"Let's drill him!"

A gun went off and Pa fell. He fell at the knees as if he was praying and then toppled over on his side. Hell broke loose in the yard as all our kin began firing. I wasn't aware how I reached him. He was lying on his back, his face twisted with pain. I ripped ~~away~~ his shirt open and saw the wound high on his chest. His eyes were opened, shiny with the pain.

"Pa!" I was crying with the tears running into my mouth, crying with his head in my lap, crying ragged.

He said, "Te - tell - tell them to stop shooting."

I shook my head violently. "No! Let Uncle ~~shad~~ kill them a ll! Let him kill all the sons of bitches!"

Uncle Meshach was beside me. He was swearing and breathing heavy with his run. He tore away Pa's shirt and stripped it down and between us we got the bandage around his back tight on his chest. Not until this was finished did we become aware of the silence. The firing had stopped, ~~and~~ There was a sound of a heavy motor grinding into second to slow it down. I twisted a look over my shoulder and saw them. There were two big military transports rolling along the road between us and the wood. The brakes finally held and a whole parcel of soldiers jumped from the rear of the vehicles and stamped on the road. ~~Xin~~

Sure, ~~XXXX~~ I thought bitterly, Mayor Roberts got his army.

From my lap, Pa said, "What's that? Who's out there?"



STET ~~REDACTED~~

"Soldiers. Coleman Roberts got his ~~national guard~~," I said. And darn if Pa wasnt trying to grin. Not only trying, he made it. Uncle Meshach ~~said~~ who had been watching him closely said, "He aint going to die. Fellow is going to die, he wouldnt be grinning."

devil will  
"Would be too darn scared at what the ~~devil~~ ~~was~~ ~~going~~ ~~to~~ ~~do~~ to him," Uncle Abednego said behind me.

"Reckon you're wrong, son," Pa said. "Governor wouldnt be sending out no national guard for a little war as this one."

"They're soldiers alright, Pa," I said gently. "Lots of them."

Pa tried to sit up and the pain knocked him back.

"Aint going to die unless you kill yourself," Uncle Abednego warned him.

Pa said, "You call them over here, Abner."

But there wasnt any need for me to, because they were already coming. They were coming like they didnt fear Uncle Shad and his kin at all. I like they didnt fear what anybody on God's green earth could do to them. There were the uncles and the cousins on their feet now, the rifles cradled but you only had to look at them to know they could be swung up <sup>for shooting</sup> before you could much as blink. But they came on ramrodding behind the king ramrod of them all, a young fellow with a pistol strapped at his hip, walking across <sup>it is</sup> a plowed piece like ~~it~~ was level land. I looked good again, and then it walloped me.

"God Almighty," I croaked at Pa, "Coleman Roberts brought out the Marines!"

It was them alright; I had seen them on manouevres going through Malagoosha ~~town~~ City and read enough about them to know the tall pride ~~in~~ they carried.







"Mr Hammond, I'm Captain Roman." He was signalling with his hand as he talked. Another young fellow came over and dropped down by us. He had a kit with him and he did things ~~Ma~~ swiftly to Pa's wound, taking off the bandage we had put on, sprinkling on a ~~sort of~~ powder and ~~other stuff on it and~~ putting on a clean bandage.

"How's he?" Captain Roman asked the young fellow.

"Bullet went in high, sir. ~~Didn't do much damage except~~  
~~tore a few muscles.~~ He'll be alright when we take it out."

Roman nodded and turned again to Pa. "Got your wire, Mr Hammond, ~~but it took us a little while to get organised. Had to~~  
~~wait until the ~~last~~ tangles down in Cuba straightened down a bit.~~ <sup>situation in Cuba cooled sufficiently. "I liked you just here," Pa said.</sup> "If we'd known what was happening we'd have gotten here earlier. Think you can <sup>talk about it</sup> ~~tell me~~ now?"

Pa told  
Pa talked. ~~XXXX~~ <sup>and</sup> how after he'd gone back to the wreckage at Lookout Rock that morning, ~~he~~ found the metal disc around the neck of the corpse and had made out that it had been Dwight L. Moodie, and had wired the unit.

Captain Roman looked over at the pickup. His anger was worse because he had it held under.

"Mayor!" he yelled.

Coleman Roberts stepped forward. He was followed by Sep Logan with his arm in a sling. Sep came and stood over Pa.

"I wasn't with shooting you down, Akner," <sup>he</sup> ~~he~~ said.

Roman said, "Who's this man?"

"Said he was a friend of the family, sir. He followed the mayor over," a marine guard said.

Pa said, "Leave him, Captain Roman. We're old friends."

The captain looked puzzledly at Sep's arm but he didn't say anything about it. He talked to Coleman Roberts.



"Is there a law ~~in this country~~ which says Negroes aren't permitted to be buried in the county?"

Mayor Roberts didn't like the tone. ~~He figured the signs were that the marines had for some reason left him for our side. But he was a man who had won the vote and he had learnt his pride.~~

"I don't have to answer you that, young fellow," he said.  
"I'm the law around these parts."

"A fine law you've got," the captain said angrily. "Bringing a mob down on Hammond."

"The governor will hear about this," Mayor Roberts said.

"Mister, this is the U.S. Marine Corps," Roman said softly.

Sep Logan was shaking his head hard at Coleman Roberts.

"Coleman, <sup>these fellows, they're</sup> ~~this is~~ the U.S. armed forces," Sep Logan said with a burst of awe in his voice.

"I don't care who in hell they are," snapped Coleman Roberts.  
"Nobody's coming into my territory and push me around."

Pa was trying to say something. I tugged at the captain.

Pa said, "Tell them everything."

"Don't want to hear anything. Just have him take your nigger and the rest of you and get out of Malagoosha," Coleman Roberts said.

"Mister, you need a lesson," Roman said. "I don't know if I'm the one to give it to you but you need it/ badly."

He had his head down and presently he turned again to Pa.

"Mr Hammond, you object to us having the lieutenant buried on your property?"

I guess we all got it except Coleman. <sup>body</sup> ~~Pa's Nigra~~ had come a far way from nothing to someone with a name. <sup>to even having a</sup> ~~name place with the proud marines.~~ We all got it, except Coleman Roberts.

"Plant that nigger here? You crazy, young fellow? What do

{ The lieutenant. Yeah Lieutenant Dwight L. Mobile.  
1. An officer in the Marine



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you think this shooting's been all about?"

at Mayor Roberts  
Sep Logan was looking ~~in his eyes~~ as if he <sup>had just growed two</sup> ~~spoke a foreign~~ <sup>hands</sup>

~~language.~~

"Nigger!" Sep exclaimed. "You aint heard the man, Coleman! This here dead man was a lieutenant in the marines!"

"Aint he a nigger?" demanded Coleman Roberts. "Aint he the nigger we agreed should be tossed into a sinkhole?"

Sep shook his head. "Naw, Coleman. He aint a nigger any longer." ~~He just passed~~

I knew Sep Logan was a little crazy about the army since the time he and Uncle Matt had gone outside and joined up in the big war, but I hadnt figured he was that crazy.

Mayor Roberts said something under his breath and looked around at the men standing outside the circle of marines. The state troopers were smoking and saying nothing. Joe and Shorty were looking a little dazed. Mayor Roberts waved at Joe.

"Joe," he called, "you come over here and take in Abner. Mister," he turned to Captain Roman, "I demand you give us protection against these - these - " he gestured at Uncle Shad and the rest of our kinfolk.

Uncle Shad fingered his rifle and looked at Coleman as if he was figuring on where to dump the body when he was through with him.

Of course, neither Joe nor Shorty made a move. Captain Roman turned a cold eye on Coleman. He said quietly, "I'm no lawyer, Mayor, but I'm pretty sure no judge or jury in this country would convict a man for protecting government property."

He stalked off and the crowd opened to let him through. He went over to the pickup and looked inside. Then he ~~snapped~~ <sup>saluted</sup>.



He was \_\_\_\_\_ Alright. But he  
and turned back to us. If ~~he~~ wasn't such a tough one, I ~~would~~  
~~couldn't~~ hide everything, he felt. Beside me, Sep muttered ~~some~~ words That-  
~~Sep said to him,~~ Said to him, ) me  
"Did the best we could," \* ~~I didn't know how to come back.~~  
and my son made it out of some old lumber we got."

"It's a fine coffin," Captain Roman said.

He called over his sergeant and spoke to him. The sergeant strode up a knoll, took out a whistle and blew it. He made hand signals and the trucks rolled forward. The trucks stopped inside our gate.

"Ask Miss Lulu Belle to come over, please," Roman said to his sergeant.

And everyone of us who heard him turned towards the trucks.  
We turned  
For there was nobody there who had never heard Lulu Belle sing the  
mountain songs the way folks ought to sing them, with a hoot and  
a throat catch for the laughter and the tears folks lives aint ever  
free from.

Out of the truck stepped one of the prettiest girls I've ever laid eyes on, except for maybe Bill Olivia. A lot of fellows sighed. She was that beautiful and with a smile that warmed you. But even the ~~signs were~~ ~~signs were~~ nothing to the sounds that went up from some of the older fellows who had known Willi Mae.

"God Almighty," said Sep Logan, "Willi Mae.H"

I spoke hoarsely. "Pa, that she?"

Of course it could be Willi Mae. Her hair was red. She had a singing mouth, nice at the corners. She walked even prouder than the marines.

"That she, Pa?"

Pa twisted his head as she came beside us. He looked a long time and said, "Living image. But it aint."

Yet I dont recollect ever seeing so much peace on a man's



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PLATE  
rattled around in my head. A fellow couldn't be that mean for so long, God Almighty.

"You talking to me?" I said ~~and~~ real bleak at him.

"They oughtn't to have done it," he said his eyes hot.

"Done what?"

"Put that nigger in the Marines. It complicates things."

"Put that nigger in the Marines. It complicates things." "Mister, you've got a can tied to your tail," I said, not

But caring if he was old enough to be my paw.

He glared at me and I glared right back. I wasn't forgetting quickly the way he had treated paw. The marine

captain came back.



face. I was glad Miss Lulu looked so much like Willi Mae. It gave Pa peace, that she favored Willi Mae. There couldn't be anything wrong with Willi Mae when she was the living image of a great lady like ~~Willi~~ Miss Lulu Belle.

"You take me to Key West when you go back, mister?" he said to Captain Roman.

"We can arrange it," the marine said.

"Key West," Pa said to Miss Lulu. "Got a daughter there, the name of Willi Mae. Looks spitting to you. Going to Key West to find her. Havent heard from her in a long time."

When Pa latches into things, he's ~~Li~~ holds it close to his chest as a ~~X~~ squirrel a nut.

"We'll find her," Miss Lulu Belle said.

Everybody leaned forward to hear her. It was the same voice on the radio. Uncle Abednego nodded.

~~RMZ~~ "Got to store buy us a radio," he said.

"Miss Lulu, how you come so far for a Ni — for a fellow you dont know?" Sep Logan asked.

"He was a soldier. And when I read the story in the papers, guess I couldn't do no better," Miss Lulu said in her singing voice.

"Miss Lulu was in Key West on an armed forces programme," Captain Roman said. "The papers picked up your wire."

Pa was sitting up by that time.

"This Moodie. Aint he got any folks himself?" Pa asked.

Captain Roman looked around. We thought he was going to speak to us but he spoke to his sergeant instead.

"Sergeant Latta," he said, "get a detail for the



burial, please."

Suddenly Sep shouted, "Mister, there was an arm!"

The captain jerked. "An ~~ARM~~ — arm?"

"Sure," Sep said. "The nig — the lieutenant lost it in the accident. Got it torn off."

"So?"

"We — we flung it in the brush. Aint it right we find it and bury it with him?"

Uncle Matt had come forward. And there ~~was~~ were Jilson Swift and Olivinia's pa Jeb Wishaw and MicaXjah Hoe, all Pa's friends who had turned against us. Or was it we who had turned against them? Pa had confused me a little.

"Going to take forever to find an arm in that brush," Uncle Matt said.

"But we should look for it, shouldnt we?" Captain Roman asked.

"Reckon we should," Sep said. "Fellow in the United States army oughtnt to be buried without his arm."

"Not in peace time anyway," the marine said. "Will you look for it?"

His eyes searched for and  
 "Sure," Sep said. ~~He turned around and found his sons.~~  
 creeping  
 Already they were ~~trying to get off~~ off but he nailed them. "Go find the arm," he said.

"But, Pa, it aint going to be easy! — something may have got it."

"You find that arm if it takes a week or I larrup the pants off you," Sep said.

They shambled off down the plowed land. ~~and~~ The lieutenant said, "When you find it, you'll let me know, eh?"

"Sure," Sep said.



"You have land around here?"

"I'm a Malagoosha man."

"Then perhaps you could even find a place to bury that arm, couldn't you?"

"Guess," Sep said, looking flustered.

Captain Roman nodded. He beckoned and spoke to a couple of marines. ~~and they had a litter~~ Seems they travel with everything, not like Uncle Shad and our folks who came only with cartridges. They returned with a litter and placed Pa on it.

UWI Libraries



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Pa and me had ~~XXXX~~ ~~XX~~ knocked it together out of whatever timber we could find but when the flag <sup>was wrapped</sup> ~~XXXX~~ around it, I swear no other coffin has ever looked more noble. And, sure, nobody in the county had ever had such bearers. In their white gloves and gaiters, the <sup>peaks of their caps forward</sup> ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ down their foreheads almost to their eyes so they looked stern as well as young, the marines bore Dwight L. Moodie on their shoulders to the grave Pa and me had dug once before. Captain Roman walked ahead, his bugler beside him. Then came Pa on his litter and Willi Mae and me. Uncle Shad, Uncle Meshach and Uncle Abednego, their jaws moving on fresh chaws, followed with the cousins behind them. Then came Sep Logan and the rest of the Malagoosha fellows. The marines marched slowly on either side of the coffin.

They rested the ~~XX~~ coffin on a trestle they had made over the hole and there was a couple of white ropes to let it down with. Willi Mae and me stood on either side of Pa. Sep Logan pushed his way in until he was right behind Pa's head. Nobody said anything to him.

The captain said prayers and then he cleared his throat and looked around. His face was still cold and angry, but as he spoke, we all seemed to loosen up and so did he.

"Before I pay tribute to this dead fellow marine, I want to answer a question put by Mr Hammond. He asked whether Lieutenant Dwight <sup>Moodie had</sup> ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ any folks. I didnt know the deceased personally, but I enquired before we came out here. Sure, he had folks. Had, I said. His father died when Moodie was a boy, killed in a race riot. His mother moved north and Moodie was schooled



there. He was commissioned in the marines two years ago. His mother died last year. Now the only folks he has are the people in this uniform."

The day was gloaming out in a chilly gray light. ~~THESE~~ It was so still we could hear the lumps of earth breaking and settling everytime the captain moved on the edge of the grave.

"Lieutenant Moodie ~~had~~ has had no battle record, ~~XXXX~~ he was too young to have been in any of our fights. Yet, in another sense, he had a good battle record. He had fought the odds he was born with, and from the reports we have had from his unit which is still stationed in a northern state, he had been doing well. So well, he had been detached for special services with the forces which had been moved into Key West ~~xxxxxx~~ recently. He was on his way there when it seems as if he took the wrong route. I think that travelling through these parts, er, disconcerted him a little. There's a signboard in the town, you know. It isnt exactly a welcome sign to everybody who comes."

I couldnt help it. I looked around at Sep Logan. He fiddled with the band on the hat he held. ~~xxxxxx~~

"One of your well known fellow townsmen, Jeb Coombes, has promised to do what he can to have it removed," Roman said.

"Sure, sure," Sep Logan said in a low voice.

Pa turned his head at the voice. "Sep," he said.

"Abner," Sep said.

Captain Roman looked over at Coleman Roberts. "Mr Mayor, you may have got the impression that I was censuring you awhile ago. You're right. I was. But that was because I was angry. Forgive me. What I should have done was to congratulate you on your fellow citizens. You see, if Lieutenant Dwight Moodie was the man



I think he was, we all think he was, he would've been proud at what took place here these past few days. For what you, and even at this late stage, I, have seen is democracy at work. Haywire as hell, but struggling to right itself. On one hand were the good folk who, in sticking close to their upbringing, were being human. On the other hand, there was this lone man, Abner Hammond, doing what he thought should be done.

"Another of the handful of great American dreams, obeying what we believe in."

In a way, that was what Uncle Abednego had said. I looked at him. He had his hat forward over his eyes and maybe he was asleep leaning on his rifle. But you knew if somebody moved wrongly, he would come awake. Softly. Opening his eyes in the shadow of his hat. ~~xxx~~ And

"But were there wrong guys and right guys in this?" Roman was saying. "War is often started because of something we lost. Something out of ourselves. Like forgetting how to be resolute. Something we lost and must sweat to regain. We have to go looking for it. Or send our sons after it."

"Like looking for Moodie's arm," I said so Sep could hear me. He glared but didn't make anything of it.

"Who started the Malagoosha war?" Roman asked. "Who lost something? My answer could be wrong, but one way to find out is to ask ourselves, who were the real Americans in ~~what~~ these issues. Just for a moment, think of your great country, for great it is. Think of your great country, its great achievements, its great people whose contributions in every field of human endeavour, in science, the arts, to the society, have become guide posts for much of the world. And while we think of these, let us remember that these contributions have come from every kind of American.



Of every race, color and creed.

"The something you ~~was~~ lost, you can find again by asking, which was right? The wishes of the community? Or of Abner Hammond. Of course, the question is only allowable if you agree that Lieutenant Dwight Lawrence Moodie, United States Marine Corps, was an American."

He looked at the flag covered coffin and then at us.

"Was he?" he asked softly.

It was plumb scary, the feeling you had to bawl.

Captain Roman stepped back and lifted his hand. Two marines began paying out the ropes and the coffin descended. Miss Lulu sang one of the songs from Moodie's people. The marines fired their rifles. The bugler blew taps.

While they were shovelling in the dirt, I caught up Pa and Sep in a whispered conversation.

"If he's a soldier, he aint a nigger. He just crossed over," Sep said absently, wolf eyes shiny blank with pride looking at the marines. *"Aint no nigger can be a marine."*

*crossed over?*  
"Just now?" Pa asked, meek as a lamb.

"Right this minute," Sep said, not turning a hair.

"Well now," Pa said in wonder.

Behind me were Micajah Hoe and Uncle Matt, two of the nicest men in the county.

"Martha's that bent on going outside, guess I'll just have to give away the durn farm," ~~MA~~ Micajah Hoe was telling Uncle Matt while he watched him elosely.

"It aint as if I wanted it, Micajah," Uncle Matt Connant began, knowing Micajah would spring the price at the first hint of eagerness. *\* BRING IN EXTRA PAGE*

I wondered it Olivinia would come with me when I was taking back the ~~uncles~~ *uncles*.



"Micajah," Sep said, leaning backwards and over to get at Micajah, "what you thinking about this business?"

Micajah looked funny. "What business?"

"About this Nigra fellow."

"Pshaw," Micajah said.

He went back to talking to Uncle Matt. They manouevred a bit around farm prices and then let it rest. Uncle Matt kissed his teeth and said to Sep,

"Sep, reckon this dont change a thing."

Sep nodded. "Reckon," he said softly.

"I dont see any niggers in that outfit anyway," Micajah said, looking at the Marines. "If that officer fellow so full of bulldust. About prejudice, why'n hell didnt he have a nigger riding in the same truck with Miss Lulu?"

"Dont change a thing. Look at our fellows," Sep said.

And while ~~the~~ Captain Roman was finishing up his talk with all ~~those~~ <sup>nice</sup> those/nosed down words and phrases the orator fellows use to close off, you could see that the Malagoosha folks had just about filled their eyes enough of Marines in white stocks and gloves and the brass shining. Everybody was shifting around, looking off towards the farms and towards town. But nobody actually moved away, us Malagoosha people being so polite and all.

"None of us aint never seen them so close before," Micajah said, looking at the marines.

Uncle Matt Conant rumbled his throat to clear it. A flush of anger ran across his forehead.

"What about the signboard, Sep?" Uncle Matt asked.

They looked at each other. At Micajah too. Folks were getting angry right around here.



"Guess Jeb thinks he's god almighty," Sep said. "Goes around talking about what he'll do with other folks property."

"Lets paint the dam' Rock!" blurted Uncle Matt. "Why the hell didnt he think of that? Telling this marine fellow he's gonna move the sign!"

More Malagoosha men, hearing the angry voices, were coming around.

"Sometimes that Jeb's too big for his boots," said Jilson.

"He wants we should chase him out of town, siding with strangers," another fellow said.

"Lets paint zebra marks on the dam' Rock," Uncle Matt said. "Nobody's gonna crash into it when it has zebra marks on."

"Then we wouldnt have to move your sign at all, Sep. A man's got a right to do what he wants with his property," Pa put in quietly.

"That's how we reckon it around here," Sep said savagely.

Folks were restlessly drifting about, wanting to go off on their business. The hole was near filled in. Micajah went back to talking to Uncle Matt about Martha and the farm. Pa was talking to Miss Lulu. I was thinking of Olivinia and wondering whether her pa would kill me if I suggested she go with me when I ~~W~~ took back the uncles.

"Lets wait to see the strangers go," Micajah said, looking at the marines.

Coleman Roberts strode across to Pa. He was that put out, funny in the face as if his collar was too tight.

"Got something to say to you, Abner," he said to Pa.

Pa didnt say anything. He just watched the Mayor.

"No need for you to go to Key West," Coleman said. He



was fumbling with his voice like fingers in a pocket. "Mi - Miss Amanda sorta checked - sorta checked it out for you. ~~MA~~ You know - those girls talk to each other all along the line. Willi Mae's alright. Those calls came from the restaurant where she waits table. Pete --- he's been at her. Wants to bring her back home."

Well, now.

We didnt say anything, Pa or I. We just looked at each other. Everybody around knew that Miss Amanda hadnt been working for Pa and me at all. She had been after digging up more dirt but it had flung up in her face. Pa and me grinned. Anyway, she had saved us a trip to Key West.

Uncle Matt said, "Abner, sorry you cant come with us to go talk to that bastard, Jeb."

"A fellow should be able to do what he likes with his property, Sep. You tell Jeb that," Pa said.

Maybe, I thought, Pa and the rest, they were just kids. Playing at Massacre Day. They would be alright when they were tired.

END

ABOUT 53,000 WORDS.