

THE PLOWMEN AND THE MOB

Chapter One

Fearful plowmen journeying towards Good Friday on a cross
of plows. And in Mobtown, the blood sport boiled.

Blood sporting mobsmen riding the dark of the moon. On
a magnolia broom.

Burdened under a love load of ropes and whips for a kissin'
kin tarface cousin too shiftless to come over for it.

Boiling across the intersection at Mason and Dixon streets,
past the Cotton Exchange building, into ~~the city~~ Smoke town.

Lordy. Lordy.

Smokesville,
In ~~the city~~, downhome folk holding their aching heads,
bawled for an end to the clubbing
the shooting
the lynching
the spitting upon
singing the weary blues of an outlawed folk crazy hungering
for the law.

Singing Lordy, Lordy to the plowmen, a two hundred year old
banjo humped on their backs.

But the swampmen scurrying behind their plows, gripped
the sweaty handles and cut the crooked furrows, running for
Good Friday.

Washing away their fears in Holy Thursday's tears.

A lockstep journey of purblind plowmen. Shambling along
under a wigwam of ~~the city~~ unshorn hair shutting out sights

and sounds. Shambling along for the good of the most but thinking uneasily of the least. For didnt a plowman know that the tithe-man would come? A tax collector enforcing his one in ten?

But nobody knew when he was due. So fear bound them to the plow like love. They slept like waking. Slept with a conscience put to harlotry. Thinking of the tithe-man.

Sleep, Sheep, warbled the little harlots in Fay Hubbard's Post-Time whorehouse which Jim Bob Slocum had provided on Delta street.

Sleep, Sheep, they crooned, rocking the joint from chest to knees for a plowman's cradle.

Sleep, Sheep, they crooned, mother-lovin' a plowman to a payday dream of a titheless Thursday.

And Jim Bob Slocum hawked, spat and snapped his galluses, face wreathed in the ever-lovin' smile of a mobsman, sniffing at his magnolia and laying out the moves which would rook the lead-off fellow for the Delta street kids. But Dan Ebony, the lead-off guy ~~for~~ for the punks, didnt prove easy to rook.

CHAPTER TWO

Jim Bob didnt rook him easily.

The kids on the beach at the foot of Delta street had hung out the seine nets in the sun to dry and were washing out the boats the time they heard about Dan Ebony's ma. It took them a thought and a snap ^{of the fingers} to know how Jim Bob would rope him. So they scrubbed their forearms clean, reefed in the loose fishing trousers and went up Delta on the quick slapdown ^{of} insteps the way the kids from the small boats walk.

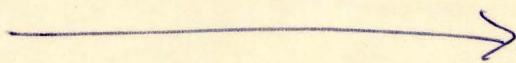
They passed Lame Hiram the cripple plunking his guitar in the water gutter; and when he saw the soft way the feet hit and how the kids secured the alleys from the corners of their eyes, he rapped the box with the heel of his hand and began to pluck the mourning blues.

For mourning is a care song, a kindness song. A love song for the lost. A guitar laughing sadly for kid-fisher^s fishing for what they could never lose.

The kids never looked at the guitar-playing punk at all.

In the same hard quiet, they passed the blacksmith shop and when Uncle Amos raised his head and saw the violence fastened to their backs, he slipped out of the burlap apron and motioned his two boys after him.

Then as the five o'clock knock-off hooted from the ice company's whistle, the men from the highway department who had been mending asphalt on Mason street stacked the ladles and turned devotedly into Delta street.

And a lick after that, the pier gates bulged and the longshoremen streamed forth, moving 

into place for the holy war on Delta Street. For a Wake in ^{Smoke}~~the~~ town is a holy war. A small protest lodged to be grinningly eaten up by a heap of ^{bank}~~the~~ charges.

It ^{was}~~is~~ a notion the nob folk up in Mobtown/ ^{could}~~can~~ forgive. "Go Down, Moses? Shooks, that aint no call to arms," Jim Bob said. "Only Smoke's a ~~the~~ belief in the upcast eye and the splayed foot shuffle that aint going any place till the saints go marching in."

All the folks in ^{Smoke}~~the~~ town had heard by now how Dan Ebony's old ma had crossed over Jordan in the tarpaper shack on Delta. And since Dan ~~the~~ the Glory Man was on the run from Jim Bob and the Mob, none of them doubted that Cap'n Jim would try to rope him in his anguish. They didnt like it nohow, but what's gonna happen is gonna, regardless. So all ^{Smoke}~~the~~ town turned out to Wa ke poor Daniel ~~the~~ into the arms of the Mob. If he had to go, he oughta go big.

Out came the roundhouse men, rough and smoky as their engines.

Out came the gin folk, humped with ^{praying}~~the~~ between the rows/ ^{that maybe}~~the~~ they get a share of the crop to fill their cotton pickin' bellies, sugarbag loaders smelling of molasses past the sweat, shoeshine ~~the~~ boys, busboys, hod carriers, tobacco pickers, delivery boys, janitors, pullman porters and all the other go-fetch folk.

The street doors of ^{Smoke}~~the~~ town clicked continuously as all the true citizens came out for the Wake, beat-up shoes slipping and scrabbling on the heat-greased asphalt.

Out from Mason and Dixon came the barrowgirls, stillfaced ~~the~~ as saints but supple hips sliding under their skirts. And cautiously on the edges/ ^{came}~~the~~ the famous thieves whose real names

"Because I'm too young and white-eyed to be an Idiot. Because the kid-fishermen who call themselves the Snics, wont have me."

"How old are you, boy?"

"Sixteen in the courthouse. Sixty with being scared of a frigging Mob."

"Guess I'd better make you into a full fledged Idiot soon. You almost Mob bait now, the way you talk."

"Jim Bob rules the world from delta to duodenum, but, Lordy! To see them Snic kids go! 'he old hymn-singing/^{smokes}~~They~~ look at the new kids and go about moanin' low with pride and fear." He rolled his eyes, adding, "Man, a body just plain shiver out of himself to see the respect them Mob folk show since the Snics latched in!"

"No!" Joel whispered. "The attitude is wrong."

"Yes," the boy said. "I'm gonna give up poetry."

"Rain will fall from the clear blue sky and the earth will bloom enough so that/^{smokes}~~They~~ and Mob will lie down together, replete and hateless," Joel whispered in shock.

The poet held up the model of the boat he was whittling. He blew at the chips. His long, unflagging mouth ran lightly along the words as he purposed to ruin the hope of a fool whose sin was in believing.

"Rain will indeed fall, Master. Fire and rain and whatever the hell else you say. But for now, tear your eyes off the sky and look at the old schoolhouse which Jim Bob turned into this ripsnort of a whorehouse."

So Joel the Idiot wearily turned his eyes outward, away from the inwrought agony of Them and Us and looked towards the street's bayou end.

"You nub of obscenity," he smiled at the poet.

The boy's eyes softened as he looked at the little harlots.

The girls issued steadily out of Fay's whorehouse.

"A desecration," Joel murmured miserably.

"Conscripts of love," the poet said. "Brought in by Jim Bob to comfort the plowmen with news of home."

"What home?" Joel asked.

"The plowmen are homeless and therefore cuntless. Jim Bob comforts them with news they want to hear. If news was a gopher and you were allowed to enter the Post-Times whorehouse without getting your ~~ass~~ ^{smokey} ass burnt off, you'd have seen that old gopher nosing a nude thigh here, a sweating navel there, slipping to each the tipoff that the old ma of Dan ~~Ebony~~ had beaten them in her tarpaper mansion on Delta street."

"You know a good deal," Joel said.

"Jim Bob has passed the word that they should Wake with us smokes. ~~When~~ When the plowmen hear of this, they'll be convinced that the Mob and us are one in love. They'll be comforted. There'll be no tithe-^{day} ~~day~~"

"She comforts them with apples," Joel said.

The poet looked lovingly at him. "Sometimes you're one hell of a good guy," he said admiringly.

"That doesn't buy you/ ~~anything~~ ^{anything}. You got to study hard to be a Fool," ~~Joel~~ Joel said.

"They'll get the news on Thursday from Fay's reporters in the schoolhouse that Them and Us are cheekier to jowl than a rump to a seat."

"To pullulate Jim Bob," Joel said warmly.

"Goddam, you're swinging, Master!" said the poet on high.

"Here's some more. Did you know the hairy swampmen lay then on desks and typewriters? I hear their backs read like the bill of rights. Fractured. Yuk yuk."

Joel clapped down his hand flat palmed on the street and said, "Words, words, words, you a parliament, boy?"

"A rump parliament. The debate continues in Fay's whore-

house. Here's another. Did you know the plowmen go to bed with their boots on? Yep, podner. They swing aboard them chippies, boots and all."

Joel flung his arms apart in a gesture of crucifixion.

Folk slithered and sluiced along, an army of heels and toes in a softshoe jive to wake Dan ● Ebony straight into the arms of Jim Bob.

"You're snubbing me to the cross without cause, boy!" Joel cried. "Dont you know if you give the little harlots sufficient slack, folk will not only come to believe, but will act like what they say is true? Boy, you still got lots of studying to be a Fool."

"The spunky little editors. Look at them, Master, look at the whispering as they brush silky thighs/~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ by, the concave, the knob of Venus wind scoured and rain lashed for the moment of truth."

Joel swallowed. He said weakly to cover up, "Spunky? What word is that?"

"Skunky. Skunk you, Master. They all draftees to Jim Bob like me to you," the poet said wearily. "Lets watch Fay and get us a couple of hard ons. Folks need witnesses."

And Joel looked down Delta and witnessed the high knee kick of a sporting Mob woman putting out the/~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Smokesville news for a ~~XXXX~~ plowman. Selling honeyed time to a plowman willing to be hoodwinked into false beliefs. Selling with a warranty hung to a mobsman's claim that no honest man had a greater love than seperate but equal.

Witnessed Joel: the bitch apologists for a misjudged Mob struggling with rope and club to snuck the maverick notions into seperate but equal slots. The agony on a fool like Joel, speared on his hope of a seperate but equal peace. The agony that wrung his lips in a hard won, Idiot's grin. "The useful publishers coming to Wake with us so the plowmen will know that Mob and ~~XXXXXX~~ smokey alike, we wallow in love like hogs at a ~~XXXX~~ swill," he groaned.

His eyes full of duplicity, the poet looked at Joel.

"I forgot to tell you. Them plowmen so scared to leave their plows, they hustle off the girls and race back to the swamp still buttoning their flys," he said.

"The nation was built on fellows buttoning their flys ," Joel said coldly.

"Solid, Master!" cried the poet, so proud that Joel was reaching.

The little harlots hobbled in pairs behind Fay the madam and her aging starter, Tony. They walked clench-rumped, their bottoms Sunday quiet as they published the news of a mutual anguish. For the passing of an aunt or uncle bereft Mobtown and ^{Smokestown} alike.

"Sing," ordered the madam over her shoulder as they neared the corner at Mason.

"Sing!" Joel the Fool cried fiercely as they divided the ranks to pass around him and his pupil the boy-poet.

And their heels clacking in unison to the beat of the song, ^{Smokesville} all fell in behind them, the fieldhands and the houseboys, cupbearers and ostlers, lackeys and flunkies. And only the fishing-kids walked their own way on the quick slapdown of insteps the way the Snics of the small boats do. But the others wheeled into the yard behind the whores a ll singing the Battle Hymn Of The Republic.

The poet applauded simply, with handclaps. He was too moved for words.

Joel said when the singing was inside the yard, "Boy, you seen any of the famous thieves from up No'th?"

Joel knew there were many thieves from No'th down to do their bigmoneyed best to hold off the Mob from Dan ~~●~~ Ebony. They would stack him with funds, but they wouldnt bring guns.

Sure. He knew the big twin-seed guys would be around but sly as catamounts eyeing Jim Bob, walking in the pitch shadow of the money bags. Stacked higher than a hanging tree. He knew, but the boy should learn to find out.

"You seen any of those fellows from up No'th?"

The poet snatched at Delta street with his hard young eyes and caught the shy famous thieves.

"Some," he said.

"Name them," Joel said irritably. He didnt like things done sloppy. "But use Mob names. Walls have ears."

"Blues Singer, Boxer, Decathlon," the boy said. "Outfield, All Conference, Storyteller —"

"That's enough," Joel said, catching a falling star in an empty asparagus tin. "Jim Bob's gonna burn our heels because the No'thnuhs come to sit-in with us."

The boy waited. Old and pinchfaced for his sixteen years, he waited.

"You're going in," Joel said.

The boy nodded sombrely.

"Wait for a knot of nobler men," Joel said.

The boy nodded and waited. He knew that mobfolk knew ^{smoke} a/ ~~he~~ no more than you were acquainted with your immortal soul. Only on Sundays when Preachin' Uncle Mose hit you with a brand from the devil's furnace. But a ^{smokey} ~~he~~ was aware of the Mob like a crown of thorns: you moved, and you knew they were there. So although he was going ~~in~~ into Ma Ebony's yard, he would use the approach that would provide him with a head start out of trouble. A lot of ^{smokeys} ~~he~~ done up by the Mob had been made ready for the cutting table because of the company they kept. The Mob owned eyes everywhere, even in a fish fry or a Wake.

His face nut-creased, he sat slat legged like Joel in the middle of Delta street among the empty cans and worried that a poet had nothing but his words and those could be buried with him. Come the angry days, the magnolia days and no man waited for a poet in the rush off the streets. Every day was a bankruptcy sale and no time for stockpiling his shelves. He knew the ease and ~~the~~ squeeze of heat and cold; the rejection of the affluent years or the sudden solicitude to embrace his scrawny neck in the days of lean kine. All this Joel had ~~the~~ told him.

The boy grinned as he disentangled from the rest of ~~the~~ ^{Smoke} town. He wouldn't go into the Wake with the kind of company Jim Bob might later kick his gut out for. Jim Bob allowed him and Joel to live, prosper and even flourish because he liked the clean thinking, the pride of place in a goddam fool.

"What are you thinking about?" Joel said.

"Goddam," the young poet said.

"That's nothing to think about," Joel said. "Here comes a knot."

Then with a grunt to Joel, he slipped into the yard among some uncles such as Preachin' Uncle Mose the dogcatcher and Uncle Jud the junkman and Uncle Remus the carpenter who sometimes told stories. Preachin' Uncle Mose was bowing right and left for on Sundays and wake-days he was a deacon and no goddam dogcatcher. The poet went in fast but watchful. He sprang smartly back as he went too close to the boy-fishers.

"The crazy Snics!" he whispered into the hollow where his bowels had been. For the glitter from the tiny knives stuck inside their belts had splintered in his eyes. He backed swiftly away and found a place behind the madam.

CHAPTER THREE

"The old mammy was Dan Ebony's ma," Fay was saying to Tony the Banker. "She used to work in the Jew shop at the corner of Oxford and Little Rock ~~before~~ before the Reconstruction when we had to tear it down. All us folks in the Mob was sorry when we had to do it but I guess we had to. So when he died accidentally like 'cause, poor guy, he got so fired up he wouldnt move out when we was bringing down the roof, we put up a plaque saying he died like any good downhome boy defending his honour."

"Yeah," Tony the Banker said wearily.

"Name of Levine. But when we got around to putting up the plaque, we sort of slipped up and spelt it M-a-c capital E-l-e-v-i-n-e. MacElvine. So folks wouldnt be ashamed of him or anything."

"That would fix it," Tony said absently.

He was a No'thnuh who had moved down to magnolia land when the opening came in that huge curiosity known as Fay's whorehouse; the barn of a place which had been the schoolhouse but which the Mob had now made into a catchall of bank, news journal and cubicles for the little strumpets who gave a guilty plowman grace for a week. The Banker had no use for Wakes; but as he said to himself when Jim Bob hired him, "Let's face it. We're involved body and soul and automobile with the lunatic magnolia fringe what runs the cat house to cool a plowman's conscience on a Thursday-Friday."

Jim Bob had hired him because he knew all about tithes. He could fake the books for a purblind plowman.

"Mammy Ebony has a sister named Aunt ^{Salvation} ~~Levine~~ the madam said.

"You're a newspaper," the Banker grinned.

"Dont call me that!" Fay said sharply.

"You're a journal," The Banker said.

"That's the

~~word~~ word we use down here," Fay said, nodding. "We dont cotton to the loose No'th way of talking. I aint a low echelon editor in that cunthouse for nothing." She looked sideways to see if he grinned. She liked to see the Banker happy.

The Banker belched and stroked his belly under the Jamaica silk shirt. The weave slid away under his hand and he knew that no matter how a man might allow his mind to roam when the crap crept high, the feel of such a shirt spurting under his fingers was a trap he would be reluctant to step away from.

"That's Aunt Salvation over there. Big as a Mack/~~truck~~ truck. The one wearing the headkerchief. Tough? Huh. Like rubber. She's got more friends among the Mob than a Catholic in hell. Yet she takes no sass from nobody. Tough like rubber."

"She's all rubber except for her teeth," the poet said behind them. "For recreation, she fondles a bull mobster with her rubber fingers. But she cracks boulders with her teeth."

The Banker jumped. He recovered and said bleakly over his shoulder, "Watch that coon go."

He knew the poet, a runt who figured that not being a Snic, he had liberty to breathe. He could peel the thickest skin with words he took out of the air like a conjuring man.

"Yessirree. Aunt Salvation aint soft," Fay said. "Dont know why the Mob made her an aunt."

"The Banker should be an aunt," the poet said, not able anymore to resist it than a pup a post.

Fay turned her head and looked at the boy and said, "Go away."

"But the Banker's a foreigner!" the poet protested. "He aint one of us! He's only a foreign correspondent!"

"You better go now. ~~Go~~ Go, coon boy," Fay said softly.

And the poet who had survived the Mob because he knew the tigers from the kittens, sloped away soft as a snowflake. He stood instead among the uncles. The uncles who were the conscience notes from Mobtown to ^{Smokesville} ~~Smokesville~~ against tithing time. A ten-carat coin from a mint of penance to make any mobster punishment proof.

You racked the shotgun and put away the joy-rope and do-si-doed until dawn.

An aunt and an uncle were for buying more dawns.

"We've got a lot to do tomorrow," the Banker said, looking at his selfwinding strapwatch. "Them plowmen will be lusty for withdrawals, come Thursday and Friday."

"Banker, you're No'th trash," Fay said angrily. "You'd pimp at your mother's buryin'."

The Banker rolled gum in his cheek and said, "What's a Wake got to do with us? You passin' for ^{smoke} ~~smoke~~ or something? You want to make Jim Bob figure you got tar on the feathers you aint showing?"

"I've got Mayflower blood, you No'th immigrant," Fay said. "We all downhome folk got what you aint got. This is our territory, even if you think we got funny ideas."

"Your ideas aint funny, aint no funnier than lighting a butt with a stick of dynamite. But I should worry? I cash in."

"Pimp," cried Fay softly. "Pimp, pimp, pimp."

"Pimp and circumstance," said the Banker feeling right as rain. He smiled at the whole Wake.

"Why do you want to make our ^{smokes} ~~smokes~~ unhappy? Why do you want them to lose their catfish rights?" cried Fay.

But the Banker only shrugged. He was used to the ~~smokes~~ Mob's gobbledegook that could doublethink them ~~into~~ to a love-hate switchback deep inside a magnolia maze. He said, "Where's the glory

Man?"

"We've got good [redacted] boys down here. Daniel made college," Fay said. "I hope the Mob never puts him on the cutting table. They should do it quickly so he dont suffer."

Tony the Banker laughed with a clash of false teeth.

"You poor Mob trash down here, you got me hung up. You'll bawl when the mobsters castrate Daniel, but you'd lend Jim Bob the knife if he asks."

Fay nodded. "And Daniel would ask [redacted] whether its got a good edge. You No'th folks aint half way near to/^{knowing} [redacted] what it is. We love them even when they get out of line. If we can, we bring them back again. If they wont, they're better off out of it. Daniel being on the run dont mean I shouldnt bring my girls to sing at his/^{mammy's} Wake."

[redacted] The Banker laughed small, [redacted] a giggle at a time like a [redacted] lodgment tinkling in a miser's soul. Jim Bob had lawed the schoolhouse into a sporting house, a loving-mill to inform a swampman of his equity. A whorehouseful of newshands to give a plowman status in a ^{Smoke's} [redacted] eye.

"That Jim Bob is a humourous guy. He joyrides them plowboys deep in ^{Smoke} [redacted] territory so they feel big as boots. Cant blame a guy for liking to feel big as boots now and then," the Banker said.

To publish a plowman's status in a ^{Smokeowner's} [redacted] eye, [redacted] and hustle out of the cathouse to sing the gumbo tunes, foot-slapping, hand-clapping, home-coming [redacted] proof of a downhome solidarity.

"We're one, Them and Us," Fay said at the soft fat chords coming out of the Wake.

The Banker's narrow shoulders were hunched with hostility. They were all around him, rolling the big ^{smokey} eyes in a shop-worn ecstasy that only needed a whiplash a day to tease the nap of any ^{smokey} who drew too near to joy.

"This Daniel must be one great boob. Coming back down here to lead a bunch of fishing-kids who want to bed-in at the schoolhouse. He should have stayed up No'th. Could have hopped, skipped and jumped himself into a fortune," he said.

The madam shook her head angrily. She asked, "What's this hop, skip and jump?"

"Up No'th we make them world champions at ball playing, or ~~■■■■■~~ singing their stinking songs, or fighting. Real heroes." He chuckled.

He said, "What I ^{admire} ~~is~~ is how Jim Bob make out all them world aint champs/no more than thieves, once they cross the line south. So down here he calls them by their fraud names, Blues Singer, Ball Player and the rest. They show their noses he bloodies it for them. One humorous guy, that Jim Bob."

Her baked-out blue eyes punched in, arguing underneath the skin at a score of stresses that only the magnolia people knew, Fay shook her head and said, "Jim Bob dont hate them none at all. He thinks all that gravy aint good for them, is all."

"You tell that to the upcontinent folk. I'm down here and I know better."

"Watch your tongue, Banker," Fay said bleakly. "Jim Bob's got you too. He squeeze, and you got nothing dangling."

The Banker paled. He was in foreign territory, a swampman sent in to liaison the Mob who kept the plowmen happy on a Thursday when they came in to haul a week's worry.

"I aint the one to do a crappy job," he said sullenly.

"This nation wasnt built on crap."

Fay sighed. The voices were coming out like syrup now, saying things only us folk could know.

"We're one, Banker, Them and Us," she said. "Whether we live in ^{Smoke Town} ~~Smoke Town~~ or in Magnolia City which They call Mobtown."

UWI Libraries

CHAPTER ~~THREE~~ FOUR

Magnolia City was a mob town. The lawbooks were in the courthouse under a proud old cypress. The courthouse was under the Mob's lock and key. Tartown was the suburb near the swamp. ~~Tartown~~

~~Tartown~~ ^{Smoke Town} was a lost folk town, a nothing much town; a town that danced to a dirge, whose laughter ran copiously like tears, whose joy was a Wake. The swamp lay north of ~~Tartown~~ ^{Smoke Town}.

In the swamp, the plowmen worked. There was work and to spare for a plowman looking for yardage in a field of plenty. Joel who had the eyes of an eagle could ~~see~~ see beyond the head of Delta Street into the swamp, a witness of the smart/feet, ^{plowing} splayed to survive the muck rich ditch, the luck muck that slew swift as a bullet a fellow who fell. So Joel saw the plowmen's hair/ ^{grow long to the shoulder to obliterate} ~~the sights and~~ sounds that ^{could} unwrap a plowman's mind from his feet so ~~he~~ he would ~~hear~~ hear the hounds baying, ~~the~~ the ropes creaking, ~~the~~ the carpenter's hammering on a long box.

Beyond the swamp was the ~~country~~ country called No'th where the government ~~lived~~ lived, ruling by voice swampmen, mobsmen and the little lost folk.

No'th folk ~~saw~~ saw the land ~~draining~~ draining under the swamper's plows and reasoned that the dryshod days were due when the road through the swamp would be watertight, coupling No'th to all the country below, supplying a highway for a million fleeing ~~smokes~~ ^{smokes} liberated from love. So a policy took slow shape as the No'thnuhs ~~sought~~ sought to hobble the Mob with new laws.

But Jim Bob who bossed the Mob angrily snapped his gallusses and swore he had soldiered ~~too~~ too long to be

uprooted by do-gooding foreigners. Nobody would spit in his eye.

Governing by voice as they did, the No'th could only shrug and wait for the dryshod days. But the deadly, skinny kids who worked the boats beached at the foot of Delta street, saw no good in waiting. Ousted ^{from} ~~the~~ the schoolhouse to make room for Jim Bob's complex of bank, bistro and public press, they were ripe for Dan Ebony when he appeared.

"We got no time to wait, baby," the little fishermen whispered, faces clean, bone hard and unwaiting.

The night was dark. The kids had stripped the lamp sockets with rocks so a glory man grew tall in the black. Dan Ebony walked with the heel clump and the bent elbow of a proud, night-time man.

So, witness big Dan Ebony walking to a Wake. To sing the gumbo his a nger rejected, for the hope his head accepted. For even if he was lead-off man for the fishing kids who probed at the Mob with their tiny knives, it stood to reason as a prudent man he would not relinquish the old ways.

"Man, the time's come when you gotta choose," said Big Lemuel Jones, a wide, lowslung winchman from the piers who pointed like a hound dog down any Dan Ebony road, pure in heart as a hatchet.

"You wearing ^{Smoke Town} ~~around~~ around your neck. You gonna be so slow, Cap'n Jim Bob Slocum aint gonna have to run after you. He'll just wait for you," Big Lem said.

"Choosing time was when I lined up with the kids," Dan Ebony said. "Now, I'm just aiming not to lose."

"Pay attention to losing, dad. If you lose smart, the dice will come around again. You'll get another shake."

They walked softly now, nearing the Wake. The Mob could be in the territory.

Sloping softly down the night's dark seam. For a ~~man~~ *Smoke* thought that in the darkest of nights he was lit up for a mobman to see. Feeling his wrongness in the rightness of the big Mob world. He was the bruise on the brow of a Mob god.

"Its my shake now," Dan Ebony said. "They coming out fast and clicking. I'm calling Jim Bob."

Big Lem slapped angrily at a mosquito. He said, "This time they wont book you, glory man. This time they'll put you on the cuttin'-table."

So walking in the honeysuckle evening, with the ol' peach ~~flowers~~ blossoms floating down, Daniel looked inside his head for the night Jim Bob had snuck the love-hook into him. The night Jim Bob had taken him to the station house. He remembered the night.

The mobster at the desk had spoken without looking up. His head was bowed to the big hanging-book while he sniffed at the magnolia pinned on his shirt. He said,

"What you rook him for, Potentate?"

And Jim Bob Slocum, the High Potentate, said, "He struck back."

The eyes of the desk man jumped from the book and broke Dan Ebony in two.

"Struck back? No goddam sense," he said in disgust.

"He's one of them what say they got no time to lose," said Jim Bob. "Says singin' time is over. Says they got speeches to make."

"He aint no Snic. He's an old guy. He full blooded? Seems like ~~he~~ *he* got a nose," the desk man said, staring at Daniel.

"Hell, how can you tell by his nose," Jim Bob said mildly.

"Look at that Abie Linkun. Never looked a bit like a ~~man~~ *smoke or a Jew.* He fooled them No'th folks clear through. He was a big speechifying man. He fooled all them folks up in No'th."

The desk man chuckled. "Sure, Potentate. But we had him dead to rights."

"You cant fool the ol' magnolia," Jim Bob said quietly. "Go ahead, son. Lay it on."

But the smokey-lovin' din from up No'th these days sometimes made a younger mobster slow to order a smoke to the cutting-table. Even though it wouldnt really kill the smoke, but just stop him from rutting to any good. The boy at the desk hesitated. He was searching around in his mind for ways to fix Dan Ebony without alarming them No'th folks.

Jim Bob, the handgun bobbing on his fat Swanee sitter, moved easily around the room as he plucked at his nose hairs to make fiery crosses which he extinguished with chaw juice. The young mobsters nowadays were double scairt as two raccoons since the dogooders up in No'th had started acting up. But he was a law man himself and he could figure them out.

The baby mobster was a questioner. Jim Bob knew he was one of the slit-eared punks in whom oldfashioned clubbery was being bred out. They had lousy memories. Every year, there were fewer of them turning up for Spittin' Day in Abie Linkun Park. Jim Bob saw that the deskman was chickening. Jim Bob harrumphed and reckoned he would prod the baby mobster a little. A push here, a little one there, and you could bring them into line.

Jim Bob said, "Son, you turned up at the last Spittin'?"

The boy avoided his eyes. "No, Potentate. Reckon I was tuckered out from night ridin'."

"You cant be tuckered out enough, son. You forgetting that Abie Linkun did what he did?"

The boy looked up savagely. "I aint forgetting nothing.

I'm as much Mob as you."

Jim Bob felt like chuckling. That always brought them out. They were scared shitless whenever you hinted they werent going along with their folks.

"Sure, son. Reckon you aint forgetting that Abie Linkun killed that ol' Constitution our folks hammered out a couple hundred years back. You remember it now, son?"

Jim Bob was relentless, his eyes slit-shut. The boy nodded.

"You go ahead and tell it to me again, son. Tell me about that pice^e of law Abie Linkun ripped out of the Constitution. Recite it, son. Show Jim Bob you ~~XX~~ still with your folks down in this part of the country."

And the young mobster, scared because folks might say he was deserting the old magnolia heritage, mumbled,

"The piece he ripped out says, 'That whenever any form of government becomes destructive, it is the right of the people to abolish it.' That's what Abie Linkun rapped out of the Constitution."

"An' kicked us in the teeth for abolishing him," Jim Bob said.

"And kicked us in the teeth for abolishing him. And burnt our cities. And pumped them smokes so full of air they even began thinking they was People," said the boy angrily.

"Sure," Jim Bob said. "Sure. That's it, son. You go ahead and lay them magnolia petals on Daniel's name."

And Daniel watched the mother-love enter their eyes for a smoke who had struck back. And smelled the mother-love grow in the room, a compound of hot automobile engines, and a hanging-

tree, and the tart arm-sweat of men and women spinning rope before the courthouse. Spinning rope to make a bad Smoketowner good.

The boy at the desk plucked a petal from the white magnolia pinned on his shirt and laid it on Daniel's name in the book. Then one by one, the other mobsters in the room stepped forward ~~XX~~ and the little mound of petals grew over his name until he stank with fear. It exploded in him and he tore a way through them to the street door.

Jim Bob called for the hounds but Daniel didnt make for the swamp. The fishing kids hid their lead-off man sweet as corn in a pone.

Daniel stopped remembering and put his mind back into Delta Street. The folks sang low about Jericho. The beat was solid and maybe the walls would fall.

"The walls wont fall," Daniel Ebony said.

"Its your idea. You didnt have to go," Lemuel Jones said.

"Maybe they'll have a fish fry. I'm not full as I used to be."

"A ^{smoke} ~~man~~ cant afford to be full. He got to keep light for running," Big Lem said.

"You think they'll have a fish fry at the Wake?"

"They dont have fish frys no more, you know that," Lemuel Jones said bitterly. "Your Snics showed their little knives and said, 'Let's have no more fish frys. ~~Let's~~ Let's have no more singin'.'"

"I'll bet Jim Bob would love it if you started having fish frys again. If everybody started singin' again."

"Us folks would love it too. We aint gone 'way past it."

"Then hurry and get 'way past it," Daniel said real mad.

Lemuel Jones said coldly, "I'm gonna put it all on your tombstone. I'm gonna write how you left us to be a college man up in No'th and how the fool ideas up there hit you so hard, you joined the Organisation and came back down here when you heard about the kid fishermen. I'm gonna do you real proud on that ol' marblestone."

"Dont I rate a Wake, real proud?" Daniel Ebony asked, raking him with it to hurt.

But Lemuel Jones cradled it in his oldtime ^{smokey} ~~man~~ soul

that had grown so big forgiving a Mob it had room for this and more.

"Hit me again, Jack," he said. "Guess I'm still gonna hang on your heel like my old/^{coon} dog to save your fool neck from Jim Bob. Sure, you got a rating. The Mob's rated you a thief now. Your name's on the book as College Man."

Ebony/^{halted} and peered at Lemuel in the dark. "Where do you get all this stuff?" he demanded.

"You got books and big brains up in No'th. Down here we got pores and smell."

A nightengale hustled a song in a/^{slanting} rush down ~~the~~ the molasses air and Lemuel whistled easily back paying for his hope like any seasoned ^{Smoke} who knew his due date was in the pocket of any mobsman.

"What else did you get from your pores?"

"You been a downhome boy but you been away too long," Lemuel said softly. "You know the old boll weevil game?" Listen. Down here ~~most~~ most days is boll weevil days. Like Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday."

"What about the rest?"

"The rest is magnolia days. Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday they pin boll weevils on their uniform shirts 'cause those are working days and we aint visible more than a camshaft in a Caddy is visible. We just the machine/^{part.} But cut for the high bush on the day of the magnolia when they warm up with love for you. Boy, then you visible."

"What's wrong with the other days?"

"You funning? Friday and Saturday's banking day, deposit day when the plowmen come in. A sort of little tithin' day. Boy, they owe us a lot, makin' Jim Bob fool them. They aint begun payin' yet."

"You dont count Sunday."

They were walking again soft falling as they neared the Wake for Jim Bob was a mean hunter who would poison a water hole with a hunk of mobsters waiting for a ^{smoke} [redacted] to drink.

"Sunday?" Lemule Jones said. "You know why they lock us out of ^{Smoke's} [redacted] church? 'Cause no [^] [redacted] supposed to see a mobster stoopin' so low. Man, he catch you watching him on his knees, he break your head with the collection plate. Eleven a.m. Sunday's the most segregated hour of the week."

But Daniel worked his way out of the grin, eyeing the generations of losers whose jugulars had been cut by the Big Grin, who had died of sunstroke from the Bared Head; the folk of lees, he said. fists as they sprang open and slapped at air, He said to his/ [redacted] /that the folk of lees were dead and not here, that Lemuel Jones was a ghost.

A voice called softly, "College Man, aint no use shadow boxing."

And they dropped in midstride, their heads turning to [redacted] locate the peril.

"Relax, kid. Its me, the Boxer."

He was strong and successful. He lived up in No'th where he was wealthy and sought after for his trade, but down here in Mobtown he was on the books as a ^{smokey} [redacted] thief who had hoodwinked the idiots up there. Daniel knew him, a hardworking man for ^{Smokestown} [redacted] in the oldtime way, the devious earnest organisation way seeking its gambit in a supreme court that waved a paper knife against case hardened hoods whose love for the dead purged them of sin (and trouble) so they were whiter than magnolia.

"Boxer," Daniel ² [redacted] Ebony said. A man coughed and Daniel asked sharply, "Who's with you?"

"Blues Singer," the man said, a rough, uneasy Mob-scarred man who should have left the territory long before they ^{Mob} became acquainted

with his talent and tried to part him from such a handicap. Now he rarely showed himself in daylight.

"Let the Organisation handle it, man," he said. "Them kids are okay but a little hasty."

Big Lem gulped and said, "Man, how come you thieves clutterin⁽ⁿ⁾ the highway like this? You got engagements down here? Jim Bob's gonna pay good Mob money to see you fight, Boxer?

"Or to hear you work the gutbucket, Singer? What you doing out hear calling Daniel by his hanging name loud as a bull 'gator in season?"

"The kids are effective. What the hell does the Organisation wants but that what's done should be effective?" Daniel said.

His head turning like an animal's, Big Lem cased the street with tongue and skin for the Mob. A big black bird in whom a hundred years of club and whip had built-in a hairline commotion to Mob-smells and Mob-sounds. At the first snap of an arm, he could race for cover.

"No, the Organisation wants more than that," Big Lem said angrily. "They send down bigshots like Boxer and Blues Singer who aint nothing but thieves to the Mob. The Mob figure you to be a bunch of frauds, you No'th ^{Smokes} ~~██████████~~ You dont raise 'taters or rub down horses. You run and jump and play ball and sing and dance. You aint true ^{Smokes} ~~██████████~~ to the Mob's way of thinking. When Jim Bob learns you been down here, all our asses going to start fryin'."

"You boys aint gonna win this one by yourselves down here, dont you know that?" the Boxer said. "This one's gotta be won up in No'th. What the kids doing down here aint got no dignity. Got no decency. Like having a meal in a whorehouse. The help aint geared for it."

"The kids are geared the best way possible. They aint afraid to use their hands against the Mob," Dan Ebony said.

"How many bullets you think it takes to finish off a goddam Snic?" Blues Singer asked angrily.

"More than the Mob's got," Dan Ebony said. "The Mob's finished if they shoot the kids. The people up in No'th would roll on them. Jim Bob knows it."

"College Man, aint you know that Jim Bob's smarter'n a whelp fox? He'll find a way to rook them kids. Go our way and in five-ten years we got it licked. We'd even get passes for Jim Bob's whorehouse."

"The kids dont want passes, they want to tear down the door," Daniel said wearily. "You were born up in No'th, Boxer. Only a downhome can understand how a guy feels to tear down them doors."

"Sure," Big Lem said warmly. "When a guy's outside facin' a door long enough an' that door's locked, he liable to go crazy after awhile. All them Snics gone crazy, man."

"No crazier than the folks who lock themselves in," Dan Ebony said.

"Them's crazy too," Big Lem agreed eagerly. "Jim Bob's protectin' us from all them crazy Mob folk an' that's why he locks us out."

"Big Lem's a joker," Daniel explained to Boxer and Blues Singer. "He goes to Wakes and roll his eyes and laughs with a bunch of teeth. You want to hear him say Shenandoah. Ask him."

"Say Shenandoah," Boxer said.

"Shenandoah," Big Lem said.

"See?" Dan Ebony said. "He sings it so rich you could shovel it. Okay, Boxer. Go back to No'th. Tell the Organisation I produced the richest Wake since the one for Abie Linkun. Tell them

I got the kids in there as well as the older folk, Big Lem's kind. Tell the Organisation we'll sure win."

And he led Big Lem up Delta street, big elbowing the dark out of the way. And when Big Lem asked how the hell he hoped to win bucking every throw, he said maybe he wouldnt win but he would hustle the clean-eyed youths into the front pews for Passion Week.

He said it was no matter how he felt, the pain and being miscast from the womb, he took the uneasy glory of a ^{Smokesville} glory man and held it under his cotton candy lovin' tongue. *Big Lem said,*

"You get out from under your tongue. Jim Bob's gonna be at the Wake conducting the singin' lessons. He's gonna be listenin' to you."

He chuckled at Big Lem. But it was true that Jim Bob had let it be known that talking was out to a ^{Smoke} A love-child born and reared in a home of 'possum and catfish plenty didnt have no need to do nothin' but sing, Jim Bob had let it be known.

"You'd have gone back to No'th if things wasnt loused up by runnin' into you the day of Abie Linkun's Wake," grumbled Big Lem. "That gal, Torch, she got you good for Jim Bob Slocum. Torch sure fixed you."

Torch, sure, Daniel thought bitterly.

Great gal, Torch. She'd put Joel in heat.

He had met her the day they commemorated Abie Linkun's Wake. It had been a fine day and all of Delta street should have been sitting out. For who would stay inside the baking little cabins on a fine day that every free guy bought in great gulps of brackish bayou breeze?

But the Mob had unpinned the boll weevils from their shirts and were wearing magnolia blooms instead. And ^{Smokestown} cowered behind cabin doors. Jim Bob had said no commemoration this year.

Daniel had met Big Lem easing fast and watchful down Mason street.

"Hi," Dan Ebony called from the doorway of a fry fish shop.

Big Lem leaped high in the air and jumped for shelter.

He edged up to Daniel and said like he was taking him apart,

"You got nothing in your head but ^{dont} what the junkman/~~what~~ want.

You think that on a magnolia day, us downhome folk stand in doorways and call hi? Looky here." He rapped on the tightly shut door of the fry fish shop. "You think I could knock long and hard enough for the folks inside to open up? This is one day you shack in and stay put."

^{dont} "Why/~~why~~ you take some of that advice yourself?" Dan Ebony said.

"I'm going to see Torch Future. She sent for me."

"Torch Future? Who's she? Your woman?"

Big Lem looked curiously at him. "You kiddin'?"

"Am I supposed to be?"

"You better. For Jim Bob's got his eye there."

"You telling me you're going to Mobtown on a day like this to see a magnolia woman?"

Lemuel grinned. "Boy, you're way out. You shouldnt have left down here at all. You forgot everything. That gal Torch Future aint neither ^{smoke} ~~neither~~ nor Mob. She's a half breed. She lives on the river road, the ~~broder~~ road between here and Mobtown."

"Then what makes Jim Bob so full of seeds there? He passing for ^{smoke?} ~~for~~ ~~neither~~"

Big Lem didnt laugh. He said, "Well, she built pretty good for one thing. And Jim Bob declares she used to be Abie Linkun's woman."

"And because she's built pretty good you risk your hide?"

Big Lem looked pityingly at him. "Listen, Daniel, when that gal Torch calls you, you just turns up. You always hopin' that this time, maybe she opens the bedroom door to you." He looked thoughtful and added, "Besides, she set on commemoration, even although Jim Bob says no Wake for Abie Linkun this year."

"So you're going to help her."

Lemuel shook his head in awe. "Man, you really way out. Me help her? I'm going ~~try~~ try talkin' her out of it."

Daniel Ebony looked long and thoughtful at him. Then he stepped into the street and the strong sunlight had gone in at ^{his} the open collar of his shirt and down/~~back~~ back full of warmth so he felt powerful. He straddled his big, pushing legs.

"Show me where she lives," he said.

"You gonna make a bad, long corpse. We ~~got~~ got no pine boards to fit you," Lemuel Jones said ~~thoughtfully~~ thoughtfully.

They came to the corner near the old Jew shop and they could hear the singing at the Wake for Daniel Ebony's ^{mammy}/~~mother~~ They squatted on their haunches in the dark, in the soft night dark of the honeysuckle night with the peach blossoms floating down. Two of a race pitching horseshoes at doom, walking the path of the tiger. Fear of the Mob piled thickly, suddenly.

"I hear they made Jim Bob high potentate for the Mob," Big Lemuel ~~said~~ said.

"Jim Bob," Daniel Ebony said, feeling him close. "Jim Bob Slocum."

CHAPTER FIVE

Jim Bob Slocum, the High Potentate,
~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ was a tubby man no taller
 than here who waddled into the yard at Delta Street wiping his
 neck above the bump of his ~~XXXXXX~~ tie with a sweat balled hand-
 faded denim
 kerchief. He wore ~~1~~ Mob uniform, the/~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ shirt and trousers.
 At the high peaked cap, the Mob insignia of the burning cross
 reared from the spiralling motto, Love Conquers All.

poet,
 The ~~XXXXXX~~ his mouth agape, saw Jim Bob and dug himself
 with his own elbow. "Look — Jim Bob!" he cried to himself.

And anybody there who looked, saw that Jim Bob was warm
 and friendly for Delta Street and all the folk who had given him
 Abie Linkun, and would any day now give him Daniel Ebony.

The singing at the Wake had stumbled once, when he came
 in, but now it was righting itself. He stood in the old at-ease
 position of the Mob, legs astraddle and fists on hips. He had the
 tingle at the nape of his neck and a loose readiness in his body,
 for he had not felt them give way ~~when~~ as they should when he
 wore the magnolia. There had been ^{no} ~~any~~ yield in the yard
 as he pushed in and he guessed that since Ebony had been bull-
 finangling the Mob, Delta Street was not as scary as it used to be.
 He eyed the yard and saw the Snic-kids moving around softly and
 he smiled fool-happy some more, for the day was coming when he
 would send in the mobsmen for them. Something would kick in fine
 enough for the Mob to win the support of the law enforcers up in
 No'th. But for now, even down here some of his own men were becoming
 a little scared to tag a stag, to burn a coon.

"But something will manouevre real soon," Jim Bob said.

He looked around for the only true man in ^{Smoke Town,} ~~XXXXXX~~ but
 Joel the Idiot had not showed up and Jim Bob knew he would be

out in the street tending his cans. He was proud of Joel, a good guy always close to his duty.

"It aint possible for outsiders to understand," Jim Bob said, the law swinging violently in his gut against ^{the} sophists and the bigots up in No'th full of the irrefragable horseshit the ^{Smoke-} ~~lovers~~ blanked out their eyeless sockets with. It wasnt possible for them to understand that the way you licked this land was to make it exclusive. You slapped together a system and watched it work at taking the sting out of defeat. And if you chopped a few to prove it, you couldnt buy without spending.

The warmth in the baby blue eyes iced again as his mind caught into the yard. He looked over at Fay ~~and~~ and Tony the Banker and frowned slightly that they had brought the chippies. You took them too close to the ^{Smokes} ~~and~~ and the tears could get them; and before you knew it, gone would be all that good Mob upbringing and they were ready to go crackin' to their knees, bawling out their guilt. Louder than a swamp hog caught in the reeds. Women were mostly fools and a ^{smokey} ~~could~~ sure reach them.

Jim Bob felt the hate for ^{Smoke Down} ~~and~~ prowling around inside and that was absolutely no good. He swore at it for he desired to make the system work. When it was working, you loved them mostly, ^{for whom} except the one/you were shaking out rope. ~~So~~ So the system gave you room to love the others as you single-tracked the lone fleeing bastard. But there were times like now when the hate in him widened and that was absolutely no good.

So Jim Bob looked around the yard and told them that he loved them all. And that all he wanted for now was Ebony. He twisted his head so he could smell the magnolia pinned at his collar and his smile immediately grew warm again. He smiled at the Poet and broke into a chuckle as the lonesome singer shuddered.

The Poet was jumpy. He looked irritably away from Jim Bob and said to himself, "You think Ebony will come? You think he such a dam' fool?"

Then he ran around to face himself and replied, "Indubitably."

He rested from foot to foot and worriedly remembered the last Wake for Abie Linkun. That had been dinner in your belly, an ice cream cone a house big. He had whooped at the ~~wake~~ way ~~the Wake~~ ^{Torch} that had taken ~~the Wake~~ to the edge of the swamp so the plowmen had a flea in the ear ~~from~~ the rocking slam of the dark brown flood wailing at the short change deal.

"You got no grip on yourself. You loose as ~~money~~ in a pimp's pocket," said Angie the little fisherman, behind him. Angie the baby, turned savage because they had pulled the teats from between his teeth. Walking into hell's asshole with the absolute ~~an aggrieved~~ courage of ~~an aggrieved~~ child in disbelief of hurt.

"Stones are best in walls, winds in the open. I'm a lone singer forced to play star and listener," cried the Poet buttoning his fly. "Leave me be."

"Daniel Ebony will come tonight. He's tougher than Jim Bob."

"A man's only as tough as his weakness. His flaws will find him out," the Poet said, his head sunk into his shoulders, ^{disputed} waiting to be ~~disputed~~ by himself.

"His name aint Flowers, stupid. ~~Its~~ Its Jim Bob. And he's got his eyes on us Snics 'cause we aint singing at this Wake."

"A smart man sings so his enemies wont hear the words, only the tune. Folk down around here are plenty smart."

"We dont aim to fool them. We want to hurt them, Poet. We really through with singing. Dont tell Dan, but we through with talking too."

One foot hooked behind him as his indecent, double-dealing eyes explored the crowd with steady hope, the poet nodded boredly. He grinned carefully as he walked away to end it. It was no use telling little Angie it was not toughness that counted so much as how you walked the public fields. How you turned the traps into comfort stations. How you split down the enemy for kindling.

For which ^{smoke} [redacted] in ^{Smokeville} [redacted] would publicly impugn the memory of Abie Linkun — who after all had left them to hold down the Mob, made bristly as unshaven hog meat by himself? Unless the poor ^{smoke} [redacted] was in the Mob's station house being lined up for a joydrag at the end of a towrope behind a mob'sman's auto. Then a ^{smoke} [redacted] would repudiate anything to escape that ol' towrope.

Goddammit, said the poet, dashing an angry tear, he would even repudiate that gal Torch Future for the flagrante delicto angle of her thighs astraddle a thousand year old cypress the day of Abie Linkun's commemoration. They had held the Wake in the woods at the edge of the swamp near to the plowman's road. Near the road of dreams which a plowman's fears hardened into the reality of a mink coat guarded by a million dollar bomb. It was the evening Dan Ebony had come out. Dan Ebony, Jim Bob and the yellow girl Torch.

The poet who was now looking for a place to scratch his back slipped in and out of the crowd as he recalled the night Dan Ebony had seen the girl, Torch. He shook his head. He found the edge of the outhouse. Revolving slowly, he delicately scratched his shoulder blades as he remembered how Torch had led the Wake. Straddling a thousand year old bald cypress. She was made for more than a bald cypress. With a hard young sigh, he reflected that by the vault of her thighs connecting a vigilance in bed, she was no mate for a poet. A hero to jockey such a mare. Both

Jim Bob and Dan Ebony were aching for the wide-hipped sweetness.

And the poet with a smash of the small of his back
against the outhouse, vowed that he would be in at the end.

To

■/kick in the face of the loser.

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the ^{people} ~~people~~ rally under the goad of the boys.

Jim Bob squeezed his eyes half shut and looked unbelievin^gly. They were actually pushing back his trained magnolia men. The fix from up No'th was in alright. The dopey ^{Smoked} ~~people~~ were fighting back in the open. Shoving against his men because of the attitude taken up by the do-gooders in No'th. One time he could have had them prone on their faces simply by appearing. He swore quietly, proudly, deadly that he would save ^{Smokesville} ~~Smokesville~~ from sin. Nobody loved these poor misguided folk more than he. He hefted his club and waded in to crack a few of the skulls of those whom he loved.

Daniel Ebony fought among the brave little fishermen. He jarred and ~~him~~ hooked and smacked magnolia flesh~~him~~ with fists and elbows. Big Lemuel was near him. Big Lem already bore a torn cheek and a blooming eye but he was joyful as a bulldog/ⁱⁿ ~~him~~ a strange city. Big Lem clumped his fist to a throat and roared with years old laughter when a mobster's eyes shot up. Ebony lurched under a club then recovered and forearmed the mobsman on the mouth and felt teeth breaking. Big Lem saw it and roared. They were whole for awhile in the goodness of it. Alive for a moment in the craziness of it. Ha ha-ing among the trumpets.

Preachin' Uncle Mose, deacon though he was, was a ^{Smokesville man} ~~man~~ slap through. A chance to punish mobsters was nearest to the kingdom of heaven he would get to this side of a catfish. Although the cloth he wore tethered him/^{to} ~~him~~ the tents of peace, he could marvel at the rightness of war. He had watched the creation of these children of violence. The young Snics wanted the right to lay-in at the Delta street whorehouse. ~~It wasnt as if they~~ It wasnt as if they would learn more than ^{by} ~~standing up~~ standing up a barrow-girl any moondark night out in the bayou, but to keep them from getting it in Jim Bob's schoolhouse was enough to put a seraph~~him~~ up good and hard. Uncle

Mose shook his head [redacted] as he looked across at Fay the madam. A real downhome daughter of decency, was the mother whore. A woman whose love for [redacted] tapestry, its [redacted] magnolia land was of so rich a [redacted] warp and woof defied the naked eye. Sho enough, she was heaven bound too;

for piously while the battle raged between mobsters and ^{smokes,} [redacted], she had mounted her girls into such seasonal tunes as Look Away, Dixie. And right now they were blatting out in their bawdy house clef, America The Beautiful. The girls rode so highfooted, you heard them above the fists and the boots and the cries of agony.

The gore and the sweat and the pain, mused the Poet, his hard ^{Smokerville} [redacted] eyes gentling at the massacre. The cracking blows. Joel would be glad when his report showed that the Mob had used fists instead of clubs. Clubs were no good for close-up work. The cracks of clubs were for animals, Joel the Idiot had said. He ^{was} an advocate ^{of} [redacted] infighting. The gut ripping, groin smashing body to body [redacted]

[redacted] kind that made a man less an animal than when he received it from the club. Even Jim Bob had put up the club and was using the big meaty fists. He hoped Jim Bob would get through to Ebony. One of them would be killed and he didnt care the hell whom. ^{Torch} [redacted] had belly and thighs and a mound of silky hair he had seen through the keyhole. Her pa had been of the magnolia people and her ma a ^{Smoke Town} [redacted] barrowgirl. The procreation had been a [redacted] swinging success. ^{Torch,} [redacted] the Poet end thing. conceivable thought, was the ^{Smoke} [redacted] The ^{Smoke} [redacted] receptacle of somebody's hopes, mobsman, [redacted] — or a goddam clever Poet who in fingering Daniel for Jim Bob was only fixing that the antagonists met. With a little push here and there, they could cancel out each other.

His grin of [redacted] deviltry lost some of its glee as he panicked with the fear that some ^{body} [redacted] might have seen him whispering to Jim Bob that Daniel was sure to come out.

real good, said
It was/~~not~~ Daniel Ebony to be fighting back.

The Mob wasnt used to folk who fought back. They were not only angry, but edgy too. There was an unease in their eyes you saw clearly when you were up close. They wanted it to be over quick. The yippees had stopped. All you heard now ~~the~~ were/grunts and the fall of blows. Daniel hit strongly when a fine one bulled in. An ox of a one with trees growing where his arms ought to be. The mobsman was a slow mover, an executioner. He would be a terror in the moonless nights. The nights when the Mob rode and the crosses burned. You could see the creative things ~~he~~ carried in his hands, outturned, scrubbed pinkly; things ~~to~~ to squeeze the ultimate ululation from the trussed up, broken mockery they dragged at the taillight on the milk run from Magnolia to ^{Smokesville.} Sometimes they lingered over it, and were only through near the moonless dawn. Bumping it behind the automobiles as they returned it to ^{Smoketown.} The mobster smiled his teeth at Daniel, ~~calling~~ calling him an obscene name while he lifted his gifted hands. But Ebony got in while his arms were raised and destroyed him with a knee.

Then he heard Big Lem's voice batter with power,

"Little Angie — NO!"

He swifted a look and saw the twinkle in the kid's hand. It scared him into a sweat.

The Organisation was strong against killing. Killing a mobsman, that was. For while the rulers up in No'th were for hobbling the Mob with new, anti-killing laws, nobody could expect them to hold back the Mob if the ^{Smoketown's} in turn took to killing. The Mob could there ^{upon} shoot with impunity. And they had the guns.

So Daniel ~~chopped~~ chopped a way through to Little Angie and yelled that the kids should make for the beach. And with Big Lem and some longshoremen holding back the mobsters, they slid into Delta. And out there, they broke up and sank out of sight the way they had been doing for generations when the pressure rose. But a real hard/~~mob~~ ^{mobster,} big as a house and brave as a lion, followed the kids into Delta street, following the sound of feet slapping softly, and shambled into them. And this mobster,/~~mobster~~ ^{little} Angie found for himself and with his/~~mobster~~ ^{twinkling} knife sent him into silence.

Jim Bob found the body. He turned it over and felt the heart. He frowned at ~~the~~ the flutter. His fat face creased uncertainly, a chip of hope shining in his grief.

"You go ahead and die if you want to, son," he whispered. "You die for our womanhood if you want to, son."

His thick thumbs sought the jugular but some young mobsters came up. Lots of these young fellows/~~mobster~~ ^{had} never understood. They had lost the ~~facts~~ facts. Down here, a fellow just naturally died for his womanhood.

"We got to keep them pure, son," he whispered. Maybe the fellow would hear and just naturally die.

"We got to keep them pure, boy," he whispered urgently. "You go ahead and die, son. Do it for Dixie."

Jim Bob turned his face skyward and bawled. They thought he was bawling for the mobster the kids had stuck. But Jim Bob was bawling because he wanted so badly to do that jugular for Dixie.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A couple of Mob boats nosed in under the piers but the night was too dark for good hunting. The water slapped and glistened and rolled from the piles and the mobsmen swore at it. The boat's chief, who was an intellectual, promised to enquire through channels whether the High Potentate couldn't breed some hound dogs that would also function over water. ^{Smokes} ~~They~~ knew hound dogs didn't cotton to water so they always escaped over water. The boat's chief had read the history of the ^{Smokes} ~~the~~ ~~early~~ ~~days~~. One of the first of them, the female Eliza, had started it. He had read it in one of the early volumes which dealt with the first of the uncles, an old ^{Smoke towner} ~~uncle~~ called Tom.

Big Lemuel watched the boat from the beach. He wasn't worried. The fishing kids knew the undersides of the piers like they knew their names. They could room and board Daniel ~~and~~ Ebony under those great piers until seagulls grew teeth. And even if the Mob raided them on the beach, there would always be a little guy, one of the young fishermen, standing guard to whisper the alarm. Then those on the Mob list would vanish among the baffle of nets hung out to dry.

"There's your room all swept out and clean, Daniel," grinned Big Lem as the Mob boats roared off up the bayou.

Ebony, lying sprawled on his back in the sand, grunted.

"Jim Bob will maybe search the beach anytime now.

Let's duck under the pier," Big Lem said.

"Not tonight. I need some action," Daniel Ebony said.

Big Lem's thorny temper dug at him. "You want us to risk our necks again tonight?" he demanded.

Daniel filled his hands with the warm sand. He

trickled it out, ~~XXXXXX~~ running down his fingers, gritty with life. He knew he was like that, feeling life in things, a blow on the ankle, a mule flapping its ears, Joel tearing the ~~XXXXXX~~ tops off his cans to put them to work. He could feel the immediacy curl on his tongue. He could sense it smoking without roasting his fingers off poking at the coals. He could tell the now. He rolled over and said an indecency to Lemuel.

"Suppose that mobster croaks!" roared Big Lemuel.

And then the black thought lay cold along his belly. He could see himself swinging from a cypress, this year's choice among the Mob for a hanging tree. He saw himself a kicking joke of a man, too big for a fruit but at last hanging straight down with his head neatly crooked to avoid the bulge of the noose and his toes tapered ~~XXXXXX~~ as if the power of the Lord had just carved him and growed him there.

"Yeah. There's that," Daniel Ebony said.

"You heading for ~~XXXXXX~~ Torch?"

"Maybe," Daniel said. "You taking it to Jim Bob?"

"You leave that woman alone. She's no good for you."

"If she's good for Jim Bob she's good enough for me."

"That why you so horny for her? That why you so randy for that yellow gal?"

He turned to peer up at Big Lem. "Sure. What Jim Bob's after, I'm after too. She's for both of us."

Big Lem shook his head. "You're wrong. Real wrong. She'll choose, man. That gal's a chooser and I dont see her choosing no weak ass ^{smoke} ~~XXXXXX~~ too scared to stop and drop his pants. Why dont you quit, mister?"

Daniel slapped his hands down on the sand and came bolt upright like he was sprung. He slashed a hand past Big

Lem's face.

"You shut your mean mouth," he said. "You go and be afraid some place else."

But while he ranted at Big Lem, he could smell Mob fear on himself for that was how it hit you. It sent a ~~smokey~~ ^{smokey} puma ~~he~~ ^{he} wild among his ~~mob~~ folk and before ~~he~~ ^{he} knew it ~~he~~ ^{he} was chopping ~~his~~ ^{his} own folk. Axing a way through a crush of your own kin as you flung wildly for refuge. The Mob did that to a ~~smoke~~ ^{smoke}. The Mob had you wound up taut.

"Boy, they're closing in on you," Big Lem said sadly.

He knew Big Lem had said it to maul him back but it was so close to the truth, he rocked inside his head. They stood close and in a moment they could be swinging. But Big Lem shook his head and stepped back.

"No," Big Lem said. "They wont get me that way."

And he big footed off the beach into Delta street to shake it down for Daniel's enemies. He whistled and Daniel went out and he went ahead of Daniel. All the street lights were still out, a nightway for a glory man under a Mob interdict. So Daniel went in peace and safety through Mason and into Dixon street and only the love cats on the roof saw him. He reached the cabin door whole in health as the day he was born. He tricked his finger on the door. He was a reaching man, a randy man seeking it. He wanted to howl for it. The knowing that Jim Bob wanted it too made him twice as lustful.

She opened the door. She had never failed to open the door. If Jim Bob had come along, she would have opened it to him too. Daniel Ebony went in with his heat and anger.

"I aint good luck for you tonight," she said.

But nobody would win her on luck, Daniel Ebony knew ~~like~~ like granite. There was long, beautiful power in her limbs. She had a sleek/^{bronze}~~gold~~ mask for a face. The corners of her eyes tilted upward in the yellow/^{bronze}~~gold~~ face.

"You got mostly my folks in you," Daniel Ebony said.

"Aint no such thing. I got it equal. You and Jim Bob's."

"You got more ^{smoke}~~like~~ than Mob in you," he said. "They only brushed you with the magnolia."

"Got it equal," she said angrily. "My pa, he was full. So was my ma."

"You ought to be good luck to me."

"Why? You tell me why?"

"Because I risk more ass than Jim Bob coming to see you. Because you aint ever going to live in Magnolia City and you know it."

"You fool, I dont need to pass. Jim Bob says I'm so, then I'm so. Jim Bob's got more grab."

"But he aint got more hope," Daniel said, feeling at last like grinning. "He aint going to last longer than me."

"Maybe," she said thoughtfully.

"You'll be around for the lastingest one."

Her eyes moved around and returned to him. "And you figure you'll be around waiting?" she mocked. "Think you can stand it that long?"

He grinned because he could. By himself he could weave his fantasies around her and nobody would know the marvel and the destruction when they profaned each other.

She narrowed her eyes and said, "I didnt say anything for you to make like a cat licking cream."

But he could look at her and love-sweat a dream out of fear and running. He could put all his hopes into a final coitus.

The great ^{smoke} ~~smoke~~ dream of equality. The Mob hunted you for your own good, to take you into Paradise with fire and rope. But even as ~~you~~ you ran ~~you~~ could think of the deep seated forever lastings of a wonderful fornication with ^{a woman like Torch Future whom Jim Bob craved.} ~~the immediate warm annoint-~~ ings he would drain from every sensuous curve. He touched her breast and she said, "Dont be a fool."

And he felt sick. He loathed himself. He knew he was not ready. Once she had half yielded and he had gone in eager as a pup but had failed so miserably he threw up. Yet he was strong as a bull, full of maleness he could feel now prowling around. But he knew he would lose out if he tried. It was his secret dread that some day somebody would find out.

"Tell me what happened tonight," she said gently.

He turned away. "One of the kids knifed a mobsman," he said.

"Then Jim Bob has you," she said.

"The mobsman aint dead."

"He will be. He'll do it if Jim Bob puts it up to him. Depends on whether Jim Bob feels strongly enough to go all out for saving some womanhood."

"Then I guess he's feeling all out for we whupped them tonight."

"At the Wake?"

"Uh huh. Whupped 'em good."

"Yeah."

"Was that smart? We did well? Huh?"

He was all eager to hear but he knew the stone mask would not break. Folks should have opinions, he said. You belted someone, or dug a hole in the ground, or laid bricks for a wall, folks should be able to say whether you did good or not. But she

would shut tight like a bank on Sunday and you wouldn't know whether you did right or wrong. He took some steps the cabin allowed him, hammering his fist in his hand.

"Jim Bob thinks he has me scared. But I'm going to the burying," he said.

He looked swiftly at her but she hadn't moved. He stopped before her and shouted, "I said I'm going to the burying!"

"Whose? Yours?"

"No, no, no," he caught himself and stopped. "Now what's that supposed to mean?"

She smiled suddenly, falsely. She said, "Why don't you take something? Big, strapping guy like you oughtn't to be such a sex midget."

He had turned aside but now he whirled back confused.

"You bitch," he said in a low hurt voice.

"Jim Bob might come by. I think I set him up for Virginia. You'd better go."

They were standing so close he could see the structure of her skin on the high sloping bones. She was rich in body and would only be subdued between the sheets. He felt misshapen with his fidelity. He wished he was able to even do it once to her and then roar off into ~~infidelities~~ infidelities. He had the ~~stabs~~ stabs of disappointment all over his loins. He tore his hands at his face as he stumbled out of the cabin not caring if he stumbled into Jim Bob. The woman's throaty chuckle twisted him up.

Big Demuel, a large and confident man in his town, a good man who had whipped his quota of mobsters tonight, walked

softly in the dark. Big Lem knew enough that no matter how strong a ^{smoke} ~~man~~ felt in his head, he should go easy about. The Mob didnt like you uppity, especially when they were wearing the magnolia. But he had an idea that Jim Bob had enough for one night. He reckoned that Jim Bob would be halfway over to Magnolia City by now. He had taken a good look at ^{Smokesville} ~~the town~~ and hadnt seen a single mobster about. He reckoned they all had enough. He stretched his arms. ^{He} ~~He~~ pounded his chest. He hopped and shuffled and hummed a dirty beat, using the drums but no horns. He spied the red bulb glowing over the door at ~~the~~ the schoolhouse. He walked over there, the reckless slob. A chance taker from a cupboard where all edibles were lethal. Eye-rapist in a town where they blinded you for blinking.

"Huh, I'm a reckless slob," he grinned. But he remembered how he had pounded mobsmen and he walked splay footed over to the schoolroom.

He balanced on the balls of his feet and cocked an insolent eye past the rope bait standing on the top of the steps. He could see beyond her into the old vestibule that was now the lobby of Fay's gigantic whorehouse.

"Which semester you in, lynch bait?" he asked absently. He had helped to lay the town wide open. It was fun to play around with this magnolia piece now the Mob heat was off. It felt real good to shoot all the turd a guy wanted to with no fear of a Mob club banging you behind the ear.

She showed faint surprise at a ^{Smoketowner} ~~man~~ reaching his own hands for the noose. But she had heard it did that to them sometimes. Magnolia ferocity was known to send them bawling for the deathblow.

"You know you aint ought to rape us this way, boy," she said. "You know Jim Bob's against lay-ins."

Big Lem waved his hand grandly as if there wasnt a ~~any~~ fear in the whole world. He peered past her again.

"You alone, Magnolia baby? All the other kids in classes?"

"There aint no classes until the plowmen come in."

He could see through the sheer frock. She was nubile. He cracked a grin and pushed the old baseball cap off his forehead.

He said, "I dont like the law nohow."

She saw his eyes and shuddered deliciously. "You eye-rape me some more, boy. They're gonna make rope on you tonight."

"The law aint ought to take away the schoolhouse from all those kids. The law ought to allow us to get some teaching too. Them hairy plowmen aint the only ones who like to get educated. Me, I hanker to be educated."

"They say your folks aint needing none. They say you *smokes* ~~any~~ got more illegitimate kids than a hound dog got fleas."

Big Lemuel laughed modestly. It was fun alright. Only went to show you that when the Mob wasnt around, folks could get together real good.

"We sure try, ma'am," he said. "But I bet you could teach Big Lemuel a lot."

She chuckled warmly. They werent so bad, some of them. When she was a little kid out on Tobacco Road she had known some who were real nice. Her folks had been poh Magnolia trash, real old name in the county, so they hadnt been afraid to talk with them on the road. They had even had one of them one time cutting wood for the winter.

"My folks had one of your folks one time cutting wood

for the winter," she said. It made them feel easier when you told them you had known a ^{Smoke} ~~Smoke~~ or two.

"I'll bet you teach him a little."

She laughed. "You bum, they'd have killed me."

"In the woodshed?"

She shook her head, her eyes serious. "I dont cotton altogether with how they lynch you folks. Sometimes they botch it real bad. One time they shot one of them low down and he wasnt dead. Then they set a fire under him and he wasnt dead. So finally they put him up but the rope was frayed so it broke. Finally they had to drown him and for a day or two the menfolks couldnt take no branch water with their likker, it was that bad."

"They do it better in some places than some," Big Lem agreed.

"Yeah, sure. What I say is if they gotta do it, then do it quick. I'm against them when they take so long over it."

"What'd my folk do?"

She grinned. "Eye-rape."

"They caught him?"

"No. I told on him." Her eyes clouded. "But if I'd known they'd take so long I wouldnt have told them nothing."

"You're a good kid," Big Lem said, liking her more.

"He was good too. We had lots of wood that winter."

Big Lem did a shuffle and showed her the magic in his feet. He jiggled his hand up and down.

"I'd sure like to pack wood in your woodshed, baby," he said.

She said sadly, "We aint hiring anymore."

"Jim Bob and me are bosom pals."

"He'd turn you into a capon if he saw you here."

Big Lem laughed his high pitched one, the one you kept for the Magnolia folk.

"Hot dog, you and me could be real friendly, honey chile," he gasped, wiping the tears away. "You aint prejudiced at all."

"We live in a world we never made. Philosophy, huh?"

"Suppose you could make it, Magnolia honey. Suppose you could make it. How would you fix it so folks could get together?"

"Seal 'em all off at the waist."

Big Lemuel's head jerked forward. "Huh?" he asked.

And then it reached him and he slapped his thighs and leaped in the air with a gush of laughter. She ran back into the schoolhouse bubbling with laughter herself and Big Lem staggered down Delta laughing until the tears came. And he never lost the good gut of laughter until he staggered into Jim Bob.

The mobster murdered him with a club to his belly, then hit him on the back of the head as he crumpled. The two mobsmen with Jim Bob put him back on his feet for Jim Bob to murder him again. They eased him to the ground, then hoisted him again when he seemed capable of taking more.

"Lemuel," Jim Bob said, full of love. "Big Lem, the dam' good friend of Daniel Ebony."

Jim Bob sniffed at the magnolia stuck on his shirt. Love surged in him until he had to clutch a mobster to keep ~~him~~ from falling.

"Hold me, son," he said softly. "This son of a bitch

has weakened me."

When he was steady again, he doubled his fist and smote Big Lem at the base of his jaw. He used the edge of his hand to hack at the big nose. But Big Lem was tough and angry at being caught and when Jim Bob stepped back to get set for another blow, Big Lem kicked him in the belly. Jim Bob doubled and gulped air. But he came back with the club and Big Lem shuddered all through when the blow fell. His mouth opened.

"Fix him on his feet, boys," Jim Bob said, fond as ever of Big Lem. "Dont make him fall."

The mobsmen took a sniff at their own magnolia blooms. The poor guy, they thought of Big Lem, as they twisted his arms up between his shoulder blades.

He must have had old corn pone for supper the way the thing that came up smelled, they thought of Big Lem, as they rammed ~~their~~ stiff fingers into his gut.

They held back his head and invited the boss to slap him into being with them again. Jim Bob slapped his head back and forth until Big Lem's eyes opened. He cuffed him on the mouth, loosening only a single tooth. He smiled gently at Big Lem. He felt on the rack with love.

"Big Lem, where's Daniel?" he asked.

Big Lem hung on the arms of the two mobsmen. He groaned and blinked Jim Bob into focus.

"Where's Daniel?" Jim Bob asked patiently.

Big Lem appreciated the patience. He thought well of Jim Bob, a real downhome guy, a patriot, a good man. He shook his head again. Now he could see his friend Jim Bob clearly. He smiled.

"Daniel?" he asked weakly. "Reckon he's climbing up your cotton picking ass searching for your brain."

Jim Bob hit him on both ~~his~~ shoulders with the club. He watched the sweaty agony break on Big Lem's face. Big Lem jerked and then threw up again. They pushed down Big Lem so he could smell it. But they pushed him down too far and when they brought him up again they stood him against the wall while he blinked the stuff from his eyes.

"The Mob has to be very tough with you, Big Lem, even when you're our own people and we love you all," Jim Bob said regretfully.

Big Lem lifted his sagging head. He stated, "Your ma got you in the outhouse behind the big house."

"The mobsman whom Daniel knifed likely to be dead soon," Jim Bob said.

Big Lem braced himself to keep from slipping. He said, "Your ma ^{was} ~~was~~ a Catholic."

Jim Bob hefted the club but he waited. ^{for} he wanted the words to reach back to Daniel and it was no use talking to a fellow who couldn't hear.

"We got witnesses to prove Daniel knifed the mobsman. Soon as he dies, we'll clean up the town."

"Your ma did it in the outhouse with a Jew," said Big Lem.

Frowning sadly, Jim Bob swung the club.

The kid fishermen found Big Lem lying in Delta street and took him to the beach.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Daniel went up Delta street and slipped inside the Memorial Park. It faced the courthouse. The big folks from up No'th had laid out the Park to the memory of Abie Linkun; laid it out at the time the blight had hit the land's magnolia trees and mobbery was on its knees. Strewn in the mud by Abie Linkun's folks who had been so thickheaded they didnt know that a fellow who wore the magnolia just couldnt hate nobody nohow. That some folks just born to be bootblacks, is all. You change it, you flange it: aint no longer God's law.

So after the magnolias grew again, the Mob folk just let that old Memorial Park grow rank as it wished. The dozen old cannons rusted and twisted all over the spilled works. A tangle of weeds and broken cement paths.

Daniel crossed, slow and soft to the fine courthouse lawn. He was taut for a hunting mobsman, a rope-happy Magnolia son in a battle with enemies solid as ghosts. And he knew he was also plumb scared of those Magnolia sons in a conflict with enemies who had corkscrew hands that could reach in and twist their brains. Somewhere a few minutes ago, he had felt their presence like a fold along his skin. A hair lift sense of fear, a stink he could taste when he swallowed. He stood absolutely still.

He listened to the pound of his heart. And in the middle of his fear, took time to wonder how a ^{Smoketown's} heart lasted long as it did, the work a Mob could put it to. It pounded twice as fast every time a mobsman soft shoed through ^{Smoketown}. It was the engine that set the nape hair to crawling, that shrank the gut and knocked the knee. He could smell them around him. He wondered angrily how come

Big Lem hadn't been around to warn him. He knelt silently beside the statue of [REDACTED] the General, a long arm outflung along the base.

He knew they were somewhere out there. He/ [REDACTED] had been born into knowing he lived inside the lair. He could identify the scratch of a claw on the concrete, the rub of a pelt on the lamp post. He could smell the chaw juice. All the signs of the evening's onrush. Of the fat bodied Mob padding forth to hack some luckless [REDACTED] smoke, surrounding him in a bestial silence until they howled in for the kill. His senses had been blocked with the overpowering desire for the high yellow gal. They had caught him with his pants half off; with only enough thinking left in him to duck across the Park and into their own fine courthouse lawn.

He sniffed the blood and dust of his ancestors on their filthy paws. Their muzzles would be turned skyward now, sniffing for the [REDACTED] smoke rings his passage must have left on the air. He looked up [REDACTED], hoping for a leaf-fall of peach blossoms to come down, floating [REDACTED], blanking his scent in a honeysuckle evening. But he remembered that when the magnolias were pinned on by the Mob, the honeysuckle evenings were quickly ended. Maybe they didn't know he was out here. Maybe they thought he was still on the beach with the kids, among the nets that could make you safe and legal as taxes. But he wouldn't bet Joel the Fool on it. He had the skin wrinkle and he could smell the chaw juice. Mob folk were out there for sure.

Joel the Idiot sat cross legged in the dark, not touching his cans. A fine balmy night with no rain in sight and nobody to con into a fool's heaven. But they couldn't make it on their own. They came weary and magnolia-sick clear to the pearly gates, and tiredly

figured it for another shortsell. He had to put them into the cans himself. The kid beside him was learning it too. He was a poet and maybe when he grew up he would catch falling stars in a pecan can. The kid was breathing softly through his mouth but he had no fear smell on him. The kid knew too that Daniel Ebony was over the courthouse commons and way in the/ [REDACTED] that Jim Bob's men were thickening up faster than flies around molasses. Blue-eyed blowflies [REDACTED] closing in on some ^{Smokey} [REDACTED] meat that was dying on the hoof. Joel was disgusted at the dam fool Daniel had become.

"Always thought Jim Bob'd have more trouble with Daniel," he growled.

For in an idiot's heaven there was room for a long chase and no time for an ending. In an idiot's dreams, monuments topple softly and oaks look better by moonlight.

"Maybe they'll have trouble with him. Maybe the rope will break and they'll have to hang him twice," whispered the poet.

"What you telling lies for?" Joel said irritably. "I aint caught his star yet in any of my cans. He's got room to run."

The Poet was lumbered down at his master's feet. He was positioned so he had the paling fence around the courthouse soft edged on the sky. He had counted the platoons of mobsters mounting the death watch around the courthouse and he knew with utter clarity that Daniel's luck was run out, that he had become graveyard bait.

"No? But you caught rocks in the head, master," he said. "He's got as much room as cornpone in the gullet."

"Then we have to pull him out," Joel said flatly. "Cant have my cans proving wrong."

"Pull him out? Master, you crazy? You spinning far out on a lunacy kick? They got him so close if he wriggles Jim Bob'll sneeze."

"We dont pull him out, I give you to Jim Bob," Joel said coldly.

"What you giving me to Jim Bob for?" cried the Poet.
"I been a good apprentice."

"I tell Jim Bob you have your eyes on his piece of pudendum. You making book on her."

"I aint making book!" cried the Poet. "I only wrote some poetry about the dame."

"I tell Jim Bob you hankering after his future, he wont treat you no better than he treat Daniel."

The Poet shook down to his heels. He cleared his throat but he was hoarse all the same.

"I - I aint keen on any future."

"Who's crazy now?" snapped Joel.

"Me. The Mob hoods. ^{Smoketown,} [REDACTED] the Poet said hastily.

For he saw that he had blundered. Calling the guy a loony when he had all that strong pull with Jim Bob. He waited for the glory-line Joel's injured eye would take. He would laureate him to the hump of the year, for he wanted to be standing at the finish when Jim Bob and Daniel had cancelled out each other and the long legged delight of ^{Torch Future} [REDACTED] was once more up for grabs. He waited for Joel.

"Whom do folks say I am?" Joel asked suddenly.

"You the hair on the ass-side of the moon," the boy said sedately.

"I'm gratified," Joel said, a whole month of good luck to the Poet in his voice. "I need Daniel."

The Poet swallowed. He could smell himself frying.

"Who can I get to help you, master?"

"You," Joel said kindly.

"I aint feeling so good," the Poet said, looking at all those big hawk heads of the Mob silhouetted on the night sky. Thinking how rugged a job it was to beat off hawks with only your tongue.

Joel said softly, "I'll tell Jim Bob you been reading books again."

The boy blanched. This was worse than the other. Jim Bob would keep him alive as long as possible, taking it off a knife breadth at a time.

So with a groan in every joint of his mechanical heart, the hard eyed Poet began his crawl to where Daniel Ebony had last disappeared into the Linkun Park.

I might as well had joined the fishing kids, the Poet thought as he crawled, for with all those kids to choose from, the head guy would have picked somebody else for sure. The pebbles and the uncouth grass jabbed at his hands and knees. The earth was musty, so close up under his nose. A harlot earth that cheated on a man by teaching him to walk upright. But it would open up fast enough for him if the Mob caught up. The stinking tramp of an earth would open up fast enough for a poet when the dirty Mob finally got around to hiding his corpse. A guy was entitled to feel that after sixteen years with it, this lousy earth would resist the sneaking mobsters when they got around to hiding a poor poet's body, but right here and now he could see the harlotry when Jim Bob ordered out the pickaxes. How it would open like a lip at the first prick of the ~~pick~~ ax, a labial laughter that would open into howls of glee as it distended to receive a broken poet. And then the soft thud-grunts of satisfied desire as they threw in dirt after him.

The thud-grunts were his heartbeats booming bigly on

the Memorial Park floor. A frog croaked and some crickets sawed. He was cobwebby with fear. Doom was about, he was certain. Doom walked, or hunkered down rubbing hands for him. He had been a dope to allow Joel to hogtie him. Joel had plenty on him. Like a dope he had let Joel see him with the books and had let on his sex yen for ~~that piece of halfbreed tail~~ that piece of halfbreed tail. Joel would hand him to Jim Bob without a qualm.

He had crawled to the base of Abie Linkun. He looked up and fancied he could see the crag of a head clear enough. He looked down again for the guy was no use to him so high up. An eye in his belly opened and closed on pain. His hand roved over the marble of Abie Linkun, still moist from the Mob's Annual Spittin' contest ~~last~~/last year. The eye inside his belly winked on a soft crash of laughter. He was tall as a house. For suddenly the Poet knew how he could take those guys.

He jumped to his feet and began to shout. He remembered the lines he had read in the forbidden book. ~~At~~ At the top of the power of his lungs, the Poet yelled as he leaped away,

Italics "Four score ~~and~~ and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation conceived in liberty!"

Jim Bob heaved solidly ~~off~~ off his belly to his hands and knees and muttered, "Jesus Christ."

Italics "And dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal!" sang out the Poet.

The startled mobsters heard the foreign tongue and stiffened in their crawl upon Daniel.

"Its a spy — go get him!" roared Jim Bob as he hustled to his feet.

For such words could explode through the land more than

a hundred Daniels. A chain reaction that would flicker its connections until the whole land was aflame.

"After him — its a spy!" roared that patriot Jim Bob, forgetting his personal feud with Daniel in the heat of duty.

They pounded after the Poet. But he was small and running close to the ground and so they saw not a soul, only heard the yelling in this foreign tongue. The boy ran in silence when he was sure he had pulled them off the commons. By the time he had scurried behind a safe fence he was panting like the bellows in Uncle Amos' shop. He heard the ~~heavy~~ heavy stompers thud past. He sneered a goodnight at the boots.

CHAPTER NINE

They had Big Lem down soaking him in the bayou. They stripped him and slid him in and they swore at the marks on his body. The easy/^{tidal flow}~~water~~ cuffed him gently. He coughed and sneezed and choked. He sat up fast and roared. The kids quieted him with the names he knew. He blinked his mind clear and saw the well disposed faces.

"They got to poor Lemuel," he told the kids. He worked his shoulders and sucked in his belly to see how deep the ruin went.

"Jim Bob?" the kids asked.

Big Lem nodded, remotely thinking of the blows into his body as he had hung on the arms of the mobsters.

"Jim Bob," mused the little guys. The score was always mounting. Older guys would doubt whether it would ever be settled. The little guys only thought of when.

"Daniel back yet?" Big Lem asked.

"No," the head kid said. He was named Abel and was astonishingly swift. His good friend was Little Angie who had knifed the mobsman.

Big Lem thought of Daniel. The glory man was safe. Maybe, with a little luck, he was even acheless in the arms of his woman. Big Lem choked and spat blood from a loose tooth.

A kid whistled at the top of the beach and a batch of forearms spanned Lemuel's body. They ran with him into the nets. They burrowed among the nets hanging on the poles to dry. They were safer in there than if they had turned a key. It was doubly dark in there but Big Lem felt his nakedness falling all over him. In a roaring whisper he asked for his clothes. They understood

the guy. They passed his clothes along and he drew them on, wet as he was. He felt better.

The kid on guard at the top of the beach whistled again. The beach was clean so they came out from among the nets. Big Lem went ~~out~~ to his feet with hardly any pain at all except for the bells behind his ears where Jim Bob at the last had hit him. They went down to the boats.

Daniel sat on an upturned keel. He was surrounded by the boy fishers. They were laughing softly. Big Lem went up to the boat and saw it was Daniel for whom the kid had whistled.

"Daniel," Big Lem said.

Daniel repeated the story about the Poet in the ~~park~~ Memorial Park. More of the kids laughed. But Big Lem looked out on the water, a man saving his humor.

Daniel looked at him.

"What's with you?" he said.

But the kid fishermen fell silent and nobody said anything. Daniel said, "Okay. Something's come up. What?"

One of the boys said, "Its Big Lem."

"What about Big Lem? He dumb?" Daniel demanded.

"Big Lem met up with Jim Bob," Abel said.

"God Almighty," Daniel said, climbing from the boat for a closer look at Big Lem.

"We found him on Delta. Jim Bob gaffed him," Little Angie said.

"Bad?"

Big Lem looked in at the ravage Jim Bob had wrought and said, "Jim Bob's my friend."

"Jim Bob had his guys with him. They held Big Lem while Jim Bob worked on him with a club."

"He bad?" repeated Daniel.

"I'm bleeding. Bandage me with some more funny stories," Big Lem said.

Daniel had a piece of anger in him but he hummed a tune past his tight lips. Big Lem stepped closer to him.

"Yeah, tie up my wounds with the laugh. Tell me about you in the common."

Big Lem faced him, a vast, forcible man. Daniel said coldly, "You walked into Jim Bob. You have eyes and ears and enough ^{smoke} in you to ^{feel} them at your pores, yet you walked into them."

Big Lem sat down on the boat. He couldn't tell them how it had been. A big guy like him, trying to bed-in at the whorehouse like any kid. A frisky old tomcat heated by a scent of Fay's cat house. So full of mirth and muscle, he hadn't seen Jim Bob until they had stepped from the shadows and nailed him.

"If you'd stayed on the beach I wouldn't have to be out there casing the town for Jim Bob to fix me," he said sullenly.

"Yeah. So maybe you said, 'Don't hit me again, Cap'n. I'll tell you where Daniel's at —'"

Big Lem came off the boat swinging. But Jim Bob's club had slowed him down. Daniel turned the blow and started one of his own. The kids leaped and held Daniel. They dragged Big Lem out of reach.

Daniel roared but Abel the head kid said, "No. He's gotta sleep off Jim Bob first. Jim Bob really hit him."

CHAPTER TEN

Torch Future was an outlaw woman who ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ sold fish from a barrow when she wasn't conducting Wakes for Abie Linkun. The barrow girls were hot in their skirts but ^{Torch} ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ glowed like a city at dusk, alive and warm all over. The day's eye was gilding the cupola of the Cotton Exchange when her barrow turned into Delta street. Folks heard the little iron wheels growling with pleasure over the warm asphalt and turned uneasily on their beds.

She called huskily, "Fish, fish, buy my bayou fish."

But the women stopped their ears with the bedclothes, ^{the} impaling their men with the single eye left out for ~~XXXX~~ purpose. For the outlaw woman was a trophy a ^{smoketown} ~~XXXX~~ fellow hoped for more than all the catfish in the world. A deepseated lust that undermined the minor hopes; uprooting Easter bonnets and Howard Johnson outfits and the windblown ambitions of Ebony and Jet; all the payday dreams that made a ^{smoketown} ~~XXXX~~ woman ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ ~~XXXX~~ healer to the broken pride of a husband-father turned Boy anytime a ~~XXXXXX~~ mobster blue-eyed him.

^{Torch} Yet ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ was a lonely woman as she turned her face upward into the sun's eye and called, "Who will buy my bayou fish?"

They had ^{barred} ~~XXXXXX~~ her from Mobtown. The Daughters of the Evolution invoked the act banning incest. ~~XX~~ A honey husband had enough to do painting the peeling pillars or crossbreeding the weed gardens growing up around the magnolia. But a lot of fellows in both towns had pushed into that lil' ol' cabin to come flying out minutes later scary mad in their faces. The D.O.E. had heard.

High boned face tilted up to the sunlight, ^{Torch} ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ trundled her barrow down Delta. She cried out again and caught

the madam's hand wave. The schoolhouse twittered behind Fay who was on the stoop.

~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

"You out early, ^{Torch,} ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ Fay said.

"Folks who buy, buy early," the girl said.

The madam turned back the cooling cloth and looked at the load of fish.

"Reckon they aint buying much."

But she was there, standing ^{carefully humble,} ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ the long neck ~~curved~~ down, looking at the fish folk wouldnt buy because the women were jumpy that their men would lose what they never had. Only a madam who would feed it to a plowman, an unthinking, hairy ape of a plowman storing his grubs and nuts in the swamp against the dryshod days. Storing his hunger and lusts in a Mob schoolhouse. Fed and whored into a culpable oblivion.

"You fixing a treat for the boys Thursday?" she said.

Fay nodded. ~~XXXX~~ She touched the fish. Good rings hardened the plinth of her finger to a glittering crust.

"Come in any Thursday, give the boys a few lessons," she said, seeing the girl eyeing the rings. "Guess they never had a high yellow before."

The girl looked at her. The dark eyes had no bottoms. Fay's nerves fluttered.

"I dont give lessons~~XX~~. Guys want it, they must learn to take it."

Fay said angrily, "You're one of them part time tramps." ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

"No. Not even that. I work out deals. For your plowmen, all they'd have to do is cut their hair."

Fay was puzzled. "What you want to do that for? Guys come in for a hustle, you hustle them. What you want to mother

them for?"

A smile lifted the corners of the girl's sensuous mouth.

"Like to talk when I do it, is all. Like to know a guy listens and talks back."

"You want to be a Congressman, not a whore. Why dont you go lay some of those fishing kids? They talk enough."

The girl stood quietly. She was feline, long-eyed, pulsing with life and passion and mockery. She was purr and claws and a patience ~~that~~ that could send a guy into impotence. To coldcock the quick triers with an ear at the window listening for the alien tread. The poor minded bastards who hustled in unbuttoned for a quick ~~snatch~~ snatch at the fruit. She wouldnt do a plowman any good.

Fay stepped back from the cart.

"You're a bitch. You know what?"

"What?"

"I dont think you've ever been laid."

"By nobody alive. Tell the Banker. I get my kicks holding Wakes," the girl said.

A steam whistle shrieked and the madam shivered.

A steam whistle ripped the poet to pieces. He was holed up in the cellar at the whorehouse. He thought that Joel could manage a night without him. The poet didnt favour running into Jim Bo so early after last night. He lay on his back in the cellar at the schoolhouse and thought with an urgent social conscience on the lot of the poor ^{smoke} ~~smoke~~: At a quarter of seven when the yellow sunlight leaking off the roofs and down the walls is hot and eager as a wish in hell, then the steam whistles rip a poor ^{smoke} ~~smoke~~ ^{smoke} ~~smoke~~ to pieces. Ripping a ^{smoke} ~~smoke~~ from his warm, safe bed. Hurling him

into a world of scrofulous ^{red} necks elongated to peck a poor ~~smokey~~ ^{smokey} out of his boll-weevil hiding-time into the magnolia love-time.

And with the sleep still knotting his limbs, the Poet groped ~~■~~ drowsily around in his head and said to one of the noises:

Good morning, old man mule, hauling Uncle Jed's junk cart up and down Delta street and telling me good morning back by the flap of your ears.

And he heard another noise and said to it:

Good morning Uncle Remus, telling me all those real good stories by the sound of your hammer on the satin. Satin for a ^{Smoketown} ~~■~~ aunt, ~~■~~ gonna cross that old Jordon riding in padding. Soft falling hammer in a coffin talk, telling me an Uncle Remus story calculated to snatch a body right from the now into the ~~■~~ old time fine time. Hammer falling so thickly now like Mob boots running on a common.

And then the Poet was bolt upright, last night flooding head, his ~~■■■■~~ saying the good-mornings faster now while he sneaked around for an empty shower stall/ ^{in which} ~~■■■■~~ a bed-in could shower in safety from a Banker patrolling his investments. And standing in the shower, shiveringly looking up, saying Good morning, Shower, please to kill me, Shower, and the cold water fell and killed him.

And hearing the Banker's footsteps on the stairs, he fled into Delta street, fled in among the fast walking ^{Smokesville} ~~■■■■~~ go-fetchers, their heads full of clocks. Roundhouse men in dungarees hastening to beat seven o'clock. Longshoremen in navy canvas shoes softly racing to flog seven o'clock. He wiped his face with the tail of his shirt and swarmed swiftly through them.

He slowed at the corner of Dixon and Mason. Mobtown began across the intersection. It was a ~~the~~ canon of ^{survival} ~~the~~ that a ^{Smokey} ~~the~~ crossing the intersection looked to see he disputed no passage with a mobster. The Poet darted across and edged his head past the angle of the Cotton Exchange. He rolled his eyes along the sidewalk until he saw the ragged turn ups of the castoff Mob the Buck Dancer. trousers worn by ~~the Buck Dancer~~. He sidled along the sidewalk on the seat of his pants until he was beside the turn ups. The trousers waited for a lull in the seven o'clock feet before it spoke.

"Take this to Joel the Fool," said the ^{Buck Dancer.} ~~the~~ "Tell him that Jim Bob Slocum done put 'rook at any cost' beside Daniel Ebony's name."

At the gates of hell, the Poet whispered shakily, "He said anything about me?"

The Buck Dancer made to spit but took it back in for a ^{smoke} ~~the~~ could not spit in Mobtown.

"You aint worth a dam', Poet," he said disgustedly in his club scarred voice. He was the broken down thief who cleaned ^{out} ~~the~~ the Mob's stationhouse. He was one of the tame oldfashioned crooks who hadnt left ^{Smoketown.} ~~the~~. But he was smalltime, so they left him alone mostly. He was good for antics, a real clown."He was a good ^{smoke,} ~~the~~ some of the guys in the Mob said after they had broken both his ~~the~~ ankles one exuberant ~~the~~ Abie Linkun day. He flopped around until he had healed and they gave him this fine job in the stationhouse.

"I worth a couple of dam's, Buck Dancer," the Poet said coldly. Thinking about last night. Thinking how he had made a Mob run after a couple of words, sick to their shoes to catch it.

"You go tell Joel what I done told you," the Buck Dancer

said. "Seven o'clock. That's when I go to work."

He stepped into the crowd. In the heavy boots and trousers, he thought he walked with a mobster's stride but ^{Smoke-} town folk who saw him saw a shuffling old ^{smokey} swinging his arms foolishly light for such a poor walk. For he held no club at the end of his arm.

The Poet looked at the deep slouched back and swinging hips of the ^{smokey} who pretended he was from Mobside. The old sorrow sank like lead to the bottom of the Poet's belly. Sorrow for the ^{smokes} holding cotillions in the sculleries of Mobsville, dragging ~~the~~ castoff gowns among the greasy pots and pans, shooting the roll in one last gamble to be out of the bruised mouth anger.

"Wish I were a Snic," snuffled the teary Poet, looking at the Mob God's notion of a marchin'-in ^g siant, a broken old ^{Smokesville man} from whom the slobs withheld the club.

"Wish I were a ~~smokesville man~~ card-carryin', non-singin', shootin', snickin' Snic," wept the Poet as he micturated against the wall of the Cotton Exchange.

But ~~the~~ Buck Dancer strode proudly on, thinking how fine it was to be going to work and not having to gopher about like that poor ^{smokey} Daniel Ebony. His old eyes narrowed as he saw Torch pushing her barrow up Delta street. He was sick with the hate.

Torch halted her barrow at the shop of Uncle Amos. He was broad, squat and ^{Salvation} very powerful. He and Aunt ~~was~~ were closest to Torch in ^{Smoketown} ~~the~~ for one/~~the~~ her and the other had no man to lose. He favored his right hand in the left. He massaged the fingers.

"I'm an Uncle," he said, "but when the kids passed the

door yesterday, I followed them."

"And now they after you too?"

"They know I got time to lose, moreover I'm an Uncle," Uncle Amos said. "Its Daniel they after."

"Sure. Daniel," Torch said. She gutted fish for Uncle Amos. "Daniel and Jim Bob Slocum."

Uncle Amos rubbed his hand down the burlap apron. He looked into Delta street and he thought of who would win and he was sure only that the asphalt sweated.

"Its hot early," he said. The bellows wheezed behind him and he could smell the sparks. The boys stroked the hammers in rhythm. The one with the wrist that had been broken in the fight last night, laughed at the awkward way his left hand did. Kids nowadays laughed at things like that, Uncle Amos remembered. They didnt sing the old gumbo songs anymore. They didnt hardly know the sweet moanin' anymore. The deep down music we used to make when I was a boy, Amos said, they dont hardly make it anymore. Leastways, not the kids.

"Got some watermelon," he said to Torch. "Nothing like a little watermelon when its hot."

She took up the shafts of the barrow.

"Leastways, stop and talk," Uncle Amos said helplessly.

"You be at the buryin', Uncle Amos," she said.

"The buryin'?"

"Sure. Daniel will be there. Him and Jim Bob Slocum."

Uncle Amos frowned. "Reckon Daniel pushing it too hard," he said.

Torch said softly, "They got no time. Neither him nor Jim Bob."

Amos watched her down the street and the woman-walk. They both ^{wanted} ~~wanted~~ her, Daniel and Jim Bob, Uncle Amos thought. Fellows

stallion hard like Daniel and Jim Bob would want a woman like Torch. But Torch wasnt no woman to want if you were a fellow who eased down. For Torch, you hit through. You killed and maimed through. Uncle Amos wondered at the unwelcome miracle ~~which had wrought that Daniel and Jim Bob should be horny in the same week.~~

He went back inside the shop to his fire and iron. He understood these.

"You're too private, Torch gal," he said grieving. "Folks wont approve you nohow."

Torch watched the Poet out of the corners of her eyes. The Poet was watching all of Delta all at once. She braked the barrow near to him and he stood off ^{from} the wall. She watched his heel flutter as he came upright off the wall.

"Poet," Torch said.

She had a soft spot for the Poet, a spot to put him in and stomp down the earth. He was too clever. If he burnt, he didnt show it. Other kids among the Snics showed it when she went by. They twisted inside their clothes and you could see the hunger in their eyes.

"Poet, what's cookin'?"

He took a pace towards her and halted warily. She was a quick girl who could belt you fast.

Torch said, "You had a good time at the Wake last night?"

The Poet stuck his hands in his tight dungarees and drew up his shoulders. His eyes looked mean.

"Millions of folks enquired why Torch didnt show up," he said.

"How come folks knew Torch wasn't there?" she said.

Torch knew you had to give him yards and yards of rope so he could stay off in his own field of enquiry. He was one deep guy. If he only knew it, she wasn't too locked to him. ~~He~~ He could be a peck of fun if he were around when she was in the mood.

He shrugged. "Folks knew. I told them," he said.

He was poised for flight. She grinned. He saw she wasn't destructively inclined today. ~~He stood easier and~~ He stood easier and said, "Big Lem is better. His old buoyant self."

Her eyes didn't flicker. The Poet wondered at all the bloods in her. The slant eyes were slyly bold. She had come out of a long ~~roll~~ roll in the hay, a few thousand years long.

"Big Lem was bad?"

"The Mob did Big Lem. Did him good. Wanted to bed-in at the schoolhouse. He got a hunk of it from Jim Bob. Then Daniel went after him and you ask, is Big Lem bad? They almost killed him."

"Daniel? He caught Big Lem?"

"No. The kids stopped him so Big Lem aint too bad. So you weren't at the Wake?" he asked interestedly, his head on one side.

Torch pushed her barrow and said over her shoulder, "Why don't you go bedding-in at the schoolroom too?"

"Aint taking no chances with Jim Bob," the Poet said. "Keeping whole for you."

But he said it softly. His sharp young eyes had already returned to slapping the truth out of Delta street.

Torch pushed her barrow to the gate of the buryin' yard. The coffin was ~~in~~ mounted on sawhorses in the front yard. Uncle Remus was standing off looking at the wood. It was dark

in the grain, thunderous in the sunlight gathered in the knots.

"You telling a good story in the coffin, Uncle Remus," Torch said. She put down on the sawhorse the fish she had brought to help out with the buryin' food. Folks knew Aunt ^{Salvation} ~~was~~ wasn't rich and they helped out with the food everybody would help eat after the buryin'.

Uncle Remus was a tall, stooped, grey man whose big knuckled hands had whittled at coffin ~~wooden~~ shapes for generations while he told his stories.

"I telling a story some folks/^{dont}~~will~~ like to hear," he said angrily. He had been telling stories for a long time. He could tell when people didnt like what he told them by the way they breathed, how they slapped at mosquitoes on the windy moonlight nights when there were no 'skitoes within miles.

She looked into his eyes and hers were older. "You aint never going to tell no stories over me," she said softly.

Uncle Remus/~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ him but because he
was old and angry, he came back quickly.

"Who are you, woman? Why you so different?" he snapped nastily.

"I'm Torch, Uncle Remus. I'm hard and sweet and valuable
as a gold dollar."

And he was afraid but because he was old and had just seen
it he whispered bravely to her, "You have pity now, you hear me?
You have pity, girl."

Torch went back into Delta and took up the shafts and called in a deep, sweet voice, "Fish? Feesh? You folks want Mobtown fish?"

The wheels rolled and she called fish twice again and the hope in her voice hung in Delta street, in the garbage smells in

Smoketown

~~Smoketown~~ and in the ancient magnolia smells wafted over from Mob-town where the Mob-folk were sending out love-thoughts to them. She leaned into the shafts and the skirt snugged to the backs of her slim legs.

The Poet heard her crying out her fish and his pubescent eyes fastened on the ripe legs and strong-armed them apart.

"When I grow up and reach my age," he said, the tears starting, "I'll seek such legs. I'll open the earth and flatten the hills, seeking such legs."

He looked around his town. Where a prophet walked in darkness and a poet-apprentice got the word from a buck dancer.

"I will, I will," cried the Poet, the phantom tears scalding his cheeks.

Torch walked her barrow, drubbing at the blind tomorrows. Jubilee! she said harshly. The shafts jumped in her hands and the barrow slewed from the sidewalk into the street.

The driver of the Mob car angrily honked his horn and steered past her. Jim Bob raked her body with his eyes. He pinched his fat knees hard and gave nothing away to the fool boy driving the patrol car. They nowadays wouldnt understand the heat a guy could have for a high yellow gal. "Go on, son," he told the driver.

He looked through the window at his ~~Smoketown~~ ^{Smokeville} folk. There were so many of Them. Different from Us but hollering like hogs on larding day wanting to be People. The soft ones up in No'th wouldnt know the ring-a-ding it was to keep Them in their places without shutting down ~~Smoketown~~ ^{Smoketown}. For both towns needed each other. As Potentate, he had to keep everything going, especially the whore-house. He chuckled with amusement.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Big Lem said sombrely on the beach, "They gonna fix him for good now. That's what the man said. The Mob's real mad."

The ~~little~~ small-boat kids moved restlessly in and out of the hanging nets. Most of them were uneasy on the land. They catfooted, looking at the land on all sides. Big Lem watched them carefully. Sometimes they scared Big Lem. Made him want to go back to the piers. A guy couldn't be a loser when he was a longshoreman ~~loading~~ loading the bins of contraceptives the Mob ~~shipped~~ shipped upstream for the hairy plowmen.

"They gonna roast your buddy, Daniel," he said again.

"Man, you got a worrywart big as a silver dollar," Angie, the kid fisherman said.

Big Lem sat on an upturned boat working his arms boxer style, probing for pain. The old muscle flow was there. There was only a twinge at his ribs to remind him of what Jim Bob had done to him. He stood and jumped, kicking his short powerful legs. He wasn't fancy. That would take a day or two. And then he hoped he would find Jim Bob. Alone. He doubted he would find him alone but sometimes God was awfully good to His ^{Smokey} ~~chickens~~ chickens.

"The Mob saying that Daniel is the guy who knifed the mobster?" Angie asked.

"They got him at the head of the list," Big Lem said. He looked thoughtfully around, planning the lie. "But some of you on the list too. You, and you and you."

He listened carefully to the silence. These were Daniel's kids. He worked with them. He sorted them out. He told them the best times to bed-in on that crazy stunt of theirs. Daniel was ~~what~~ what they

called a good guy. He was strictly a survival guy himself.

"And all who go to his help from now on will catch the fever," Big Lem said. "Rope fever."

They looked at him coldly. He guessed he ~~hand~~^{hand} scared anybody.

"See you around," Big Lem said softly as a kitten. He went through the nets, heavy shoulders swaying.

He went up the bayou, the sun hot on his back. He grunted gratefully when he got into the shadow of the piers. The underpinnings of concrete pillars glistened wetly in the low tide. The trestles that spanned them were dry. A dark cathedral, cruel looking as the Mob who had built them. But Big Lem knew the voices of the choirs overhead, the rattle of winch and crane. The thump of packing cases full of the goods which fed the great export trade in Mob crappery, the fragile belles and ante bellum manners, wistaria climbing a moonlit pillar and soft voices singing in the quarters, all the mumbo jumbo that kept the creeps in the marsh palely happy for a tradition rawboned the new/~~land~~ land so hungrily desired. Big Lem slipped into water to his waist. He swam to the first of the trestles.

He rode them looking for Daniel in the familiar places. The trestles were wide and well bolted. A sensible man could sleep easy as in a hotel. Big Lem called Daniel's name softly as he went. He could get a cracked skull for an impolite rush. He left an ear opened for the Mob boats.

In here was the territory of evening. The places you went for refuge. You hid out like an obedient ^{smoke.} ~~land~~ And when you returned topside, it was likely sure the Mob had plumb forgiven you. A fellow knew his survival drill, he cut his risks to the bone.

Big Lem shook his head.

But they didnt forgive you for what Daniel Ebony had done. You didnt say to the Mob you had no time, and then go home to your wife. You ended up behind an automobile. The Mob had eyes that felt over you/^{like} feelers. There was no hiding place down here for sinners. If Daniel would go, he would see about smuggling him through the marsh up to No'th. The Organisation up there would take care of him. Big Lem swore softly as he thought.

"I should comb your hair with my knife," Daniel Ebony said from the shadows.

He swarmed along a trestle to Big Lem, the foot-long cane knife held before him.

"Sitting in the open sunning yourself like a Mob woman," he said to Big Lem.

Big Lem looked bleakly at him. He had lost the old anger hours ago but a man shouldnt drop his guard too easy. Big Lem thought that looked weak.

"You just a plain nothin'," he growled at Daniel. "I could take away your knife and pick your teeth with it."

They sat on a trestle. The water slipped silently underneath. Overhead, machinery rumbled.

"What goes on?" Daniel asked.

"The Mob's asking for your birth papers," Big Lem said. "They want to put the right date on your tombstone."

"Jim Bob Slocum?"

"Cap'n Slocum, he gave new orders. He says, 'Rook that Tarry named Ebony at all costs.'"

"What do folks in town say?"

"Dont worry. You still a hero. But I keep remembering."

"What?"

Big Lem turned to face him. "They dont fight long,

man. They stop after a while. Go huntin'. Or looking for bread.

Man, you know. ~~That's~~ That's what I remember."

"You talk a lot," Daniel said. "Like the fellows on the radio. Tell me, what's the small boat bulletin?"

"Choppy. But they aint worrying."

"Yeah?"

"They laughed the Mob from here to Slocumville when I said Jim Bob would be after them too."

Ebony watched the sunlight ripple on the water at the head of the pier. Big Lem said, "I guess you knew they would laugh like hell."

"Sure. Those have no time to look for bread. They have all the dough they want."

"Yeah, they got heart. Trouble is, folks aint sure whether they got any brains."

"Every ^{smoke} ~~body~~ is a brain, boy. If they had no brains they'd been killed long ago. Those kids figure what we need is some heart."

Big Lem considered it and shrugged. Like Daniel had said, guys had to keep themselves from getting killed. He snapped his fingers and rolled his eyes, humming a big beat through his nose. Daniel grinned.

"Sure. A guy's got to survive. Scratch a ^{smoke} ~~body~~ and find a buck dancer."

"Yeah, suh, boss."

"Okay. Cut the funny routine," Daniel said. "Anything else?"

After awhile, Big Lem said quietly, "They laying out the old lady for the buryin'. ~~MM~~ Mob folk asking questions around. They want to know when's the buryin'."

"Folks talking?"

"Not yet. They scared of your little killers."

"Wont hurt them being scared. They're used to being scared."

"Yeah. But it used to be just Mob scare. Now they being scared of their own kin. Them Snics bad as the Mob in some ways."

"They get scared enough, they'll step into line with the kids," Dan Ebony said. "Help bust up Jim Bob."

Big Lem said, "You turned cold, you know? You know you turned cold, Daniel? Cotton mouth cold."

"So's Jim Bob. Its the only way to fight him. A ^{Smekey's} ~~h~~ been warm so long, he thinks the fire Jim Bob sets under him is a bayou breeze. Man, we've gotten so used to the whip we've stopped showing scars."

"Jim Bob ~~is~~ ^{Smoketown} says he staking out ~~until~~ until he finds you. Aint no buryin' going to be held without him."

"He's real hot."

"Sizzlin'. So I reckon you aint going to no buryin'."

"You talking funny, Lem? Sure. I'm going."

Dan Ebony wore swim trunks. Big Lem looked at the bold tilt of his head. The column of neck. The arms like maces which had flattened a couple of mobsmen the time they held him at the station house.

"You're crazy. Big strong guy but crazy. The Mob's gonna be out in force. Nobody could save you."

Dan Ebony swung down and skittered a spray off the top of the water. It smacked the underside of the pier. He drew himself up again. Big Lem knuckled the spray out of his eyes.

"Know what day is the funeral?"

"They layin' the old lady out for Thursday," Big Lem said.

"And that's the day the plowmen come in. The day they

go for lessons in the schoolhouse."

Big Lem looked incredulous. "You reckon they'll save you from Jim Bob? Man, they wont even see you, shuffling along with their hair down over their eyes and ears."

Daniel shook with laughter. "Big Lem, you're poorly today. Maybe I should draw you pictures. You know our folks and their burings. The lodge folk marching ahead, the brass band, people singing. Now somewhere along Delta, the funeral procession's gonna meet up with the plowmen shuffling along to the whorehouse. And right there's where I'm going to show. Now, if I know Jim Bob, he wont be reasoning any, the minute he sees me. So, Jim Bob grabs for me and the ^{people} ~~mob~~ in the procession aint going to like that at a ll. Everybody shows respect for ~~himself~~ a funeral. So, when Jim Bob grabs for me, the Snics and those longshoremen you're going to deliver to me, they're going to crack back at Jim Bob and the Mob. Brother, you're going to see the biggest free for all you ever did see. And the plowmen are going to be in it. We're going to haul them in if we have to do it by their hair."

"And what's that gonna buy us? A few more coffins?"

"Nobody wants to disturb the plowmen, neither the Mob nor the rulers up in No'th," Daniel said softly. "The big boys up in No'th going to fall on us like a tree. And that's what we want, Big Lem."

"They fall on us and beat our ^{snokey} ~~ass~~ ass off."

"Its not like that, Big Lem. Folks want peace. Real folks. Not the stumble bums down heze I mean. Mobsters. No'th folk know that when people are working together, there's more in the pot for everyone. The plowmen are going to be asking questions, boy."

Big Lem looked at him, his eyes wide. "Daniel, man, they never ask questions. Didnt you know that?"

"Nobody ever socked it into them before."

"Like how we gonna do it?"

"Like how we gonna lay it on. A fellow starts bawling? You watch it. He's going to talk some too after he's done bawling."

The fear tingled at Big Lem's finger tips. "You watch it too, friend. Mob and them plowmen, they all one."

"You been down here too long, Big Lem. Ought to ^{turn} ~~you~~ you into a travelling man. Those fellows working in the swamp, they're different. They got things hidden in there they want to keep. A lot of downhome folks among the ^{people} up in No'th too."

"We've got — influence?" grinned Big Lem.

"Sure, you keep cheerful."

Big Lem turned sober. "You forgettin' something, Daniel. A mobsman's got a piece of steel in his gut. He croak, you'll swing, whatever happens."

"That's ~~in~~ a chance I face."

Big Lem slapped the timber. "Goddam, you know you didnt knife no mobster. Why should you take the rap?"

"The kid who did it, did it for me. That's why."

Big Lem shook his head. He said, "You think those kids love you?"

"I'm the kingfish."

"Then why is the one who knifed the mobster holding back? Why dont he tell you? And what about his buddies? They saw. Why aint somebody opened his mouth yet?"

"Because they love me, that dont make them saints. Dont make them martyrs either. Maybe he's scared. Maybe the others are sorry for him. Kids stick together. Maybe they reckon I'm old enough to go anyway."

"Jesus Christ! You playing God? You want us to build a

church around you? Since the Mob dont allow us in theirs? What you playing, mister?"

Daniel said, "You dont like the kids," [REDACTED]

"No," Big Lem said. "No. Guess I dont. They rockin' the boat and lots of folks in ^{Smoketown} [REDACTED] cant swim. [REDACTED] They all show. They didnt have to knife that mobster."

"You straining to be an Uncle? I'll put in a word for you with Jim [REDACTED] Bob."

Big Lem jeered, "Jim Bob says boo and you bolt under a pier. You keep skulking, glory man. Teachin' Jim Bob's got his strap out to larrup you."

"You [REDACTED] ought to get to know those kids, Big Lem. They're mostly out in the small boats. They dont live ashore under Jim Bob like the older people. They dont scare. When they get too old for the boats, then they'll come to live ashore with the rest. And get scared like the rest."

Big Lem knew he wasnt scared crappy. Not that way. Daniel was tearing into him for no reason. A guy had to survive. That was all. A guy had to work to eat. The Mob could cut you off easy. They owned all the jobs. They say to a job, Go! and that job went. He had given Daniel the best. He had faked passes and ran guard until he was spinning like a big fat toy some guy had pulled a string on. Did Daniel think that living ashore and yessuhbossing with the rich laughs and clown acts was easy? A fellow did these things with the pain gushing and shooting in him. But because the Mob [REDACTED] held hostages like them wartime Hitler fellows, your folks, your eatin' time, you stayed with it and [REDACTED] hating ^{it} like a drum.

"You scared as anybody else. You holed up for the fear season. You gotta have us run interference for you. You dont bam-

boozle me. You scared like the rest of us," he snarled at Daniel.

And maybe the moment he sounded off on Daniel, he was sorry like a hound dog in a mess of polecats.

For Daniel showed his teeth and said, "Scared?"

"Holy Jesus," Big Lem said as Daniel dived from the trestle.

He had caught the glint in Daniel's eyes before the glory man kicked from the timber. Daniel swam fast between the pillars straight towards the open water and suddenly his head and shoulders were shining in the hard yellow sunlight. Now ^{Big Lem had become} ~~he~~ Prayin' Big Lem, a-watching the sliding power of Daniel's strokes but plowing in a prayer so hard somebody up there oughta hear it. But maybe one of the junior fellows up there was on the job for ~~him~~ ^{he} sure fouled it up.

"Lordy! Lordy!" whispered Big Lem as he heard the engine roaring. And he knew the sound of the Mob boats in an unconsolably sure way. They honked the horn. They had seen Daniel.

Big Lem ran along the trestles, springing from timber to timber, scrambling around the concrete pillars ~~MMMM~~ to the pier's head. The prow of a Mob boat pointed at him. Then as he jerked back his head out of sight, he realised the boat had not been pointed at him but at Daniel. The glory man was swimming hard and swift but he wasn't going to make it. Daniel dived and then the idea went ~~into~~ into Big Lem's head.

In his head he could see Daniel at the bottom of that tall green water, plunging back for the safety of the pier. And so Big Lem slipped softly from the pier and swam underwater to where he knew he would cross Daniel. He saw Daniel and he pointed a finger so Daniel would know what he was up to. Daniel nodded and kept on right for the pier. And Big Lem clawed through the cottony water, and never began canting up until the pressure was pingin' at his

ears. He rose like a waterlogged sponge. He broke through with a gulp and a gasp. He managed a few heavy strokes before he heard the bellow from the boat.

"Hey, boy! Hey, Daniel! You stop boy, or we'll shoot you!"

But he reckoned they wouldnt shoot him since it was clear he wasnt going any place very fast. So he swam stubbornly on face down until a boat hook fell on his shoulder and numbed him. He rolled to his back, cursing and clutching at the shoulder. The boat hook went inside his belt and they pulled him into the boat.

"You sure begging to be killed," ~~somebody~~ a mobster said. "When a mobsman calls your name, you freeze. ~~somebody~~ Aint you knowing that?"

Big Lem sat up and glared at the magnolia in his button-hole.

"Cap'n, my name aint Daniel. My name aint changed from Big Lem to Daniel. Or if you changed it, nobody done told me yet."

"This one aint Daniel," another mobster said. "Where's Daniel?"

"Got him in my pocket. Take him out easy. That bad ^{smoke} ~~somebody~~ will bite you." He laughed the high one and clown^{ed} his face the way the Mob liked him. Them magnolia folk were sure foolish.

The mobsman looked angry, but he was real slow with the cuff to Big Lem's mouth. Light stuff too. Didnt do more than loosen a ~~somebody~~ tooth. One time he would have broken a jaw but you had to watch it these days, what with the trouble they were making up in No'th. Even Jim Bob wasnt going the limit these days.

"Go overboard," he said angrily to Big Lem.

But Big Lem shook his head. He was running his little mile easily. He had to stay with them, drawing them from Daniel. That boy sure needed protection.

"I'm wounded," Big Lem said. "I go in there again, I drown. You gotta take me ashore, Cap'n."

"So you drown. We didnt push you in."

Big Lem shook his head. ^{it Smokes} [redacted] up on the pier. They watching you, Cap'n. You make Big Lem drown them ^{smokes} [redacted] gonna talk."

The mobsman said softly, "Boy, you enjoy it while you can. Soon's we straighten out things, we're gonna take payment from you, with interest."

"Cap'n, reckon you dont know it but I'm [redacted] Cap'n Jim Bob's boy. I aint behind in no payments."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Salvation

Aunt [REDACTED] left the hammering behind her. [REDACTED] Uncle Remus was tacking the satin padding. Nailing down the mess of cut-rate trouble a heap of Mob folk dragged to your door. Fixing to hogtie a body to trouble until your born days ended in the salt pillar all this pain and weepin' erected where a God-child should have a heart.

She went scowling down Delta street. Delta shimmered in the noon glare. Down at the foot of the street where it lost itself in the bayou, a white topped Mob car sat. There were others about the town. Jim Bob had ringed them. They were coons up a tree. Jim Bob and his men were [REDACTED] hounds [REDACTED] on their haunches waiting for Daniel to scare enough to fall.

Salvation.

"But he aint gonna fall," whispered Aunt [REDACTED]. She shut her eyes tight and blinked them open again.

"We [REDACTED] reared him tough. He looked on us and saw pain and all this [REDACTED] weepin' and it reared him tough."

She went into Uncle Amos shop. Uncle Amos rested the sledge and nodded the boys from the shop. Her eyes narrow on him, she said, "My sister gonna make it?"

Uncle Amos looked back steadily at her before he

Salvation

nodded. Aunt [REDACTED] breathed heavily and sat [REDACTED] on a wooden block. Uncle Amos

[REDACTED] gripped the handle and worked the bellows. He poked the tongs inside the spurt of flame. He took out the red hot iron and cooled it in a water trough. He took the small hammer and rapped the work into shape. He raised the tongs and showed his work.

"Guess I should hurry back and tell her she's gonna make it," she said.

Amos said harshly, "The woman's dead," [REDACTED]

she
But [REDACTED] only glared briefly at him and went back to her mumbling.

"Flat on your back, you're gonna make it. Nobody ever made it standing up. Nobody from ^{Smoketown} [REDACTED] ever made it into the mobman's church standing on their own feet, except Uncle Amos here who rings the bell. ^{So} ^{give} they [REDACTED] him a stool by the door. But hardly any folks ever made it lying on their backs even." She smiled. She thrust her head forward for emphasis as she spoke, "But, sister, you gonna make it into a real ^{church.} Flat on your back in the mobman's church."

She looked up at Uncle Amos, her flinty old eyes softened. "Uncle Amos, you did right well. We gonna give her a churching and a real big buryin'."

Uncle Amos said, "Dont rightly know if I did well. Folks shouldnt want things so badly."

"You run into any trouble when you asked the mob parson?"

"No, he wasnt too put out. She was an Aunt. Lots of things easing nowadays, I reckon."

"He said the folks could follow her into the church?"

Uncle Amos stared, incredulous. "You touched in the head, ^{Salvation?} [REDACTED] I said things easing. I didnt say things busted wide open. Them other ^{folk} [REDACTED] can stay in the street outside while they church the body."

^{Salvation} [REDACTED] looked [REDACTED] angry and then her face cleared.

"Guess I couldnt have everything."

He muttered and shook water beads from the cooling iron.

"What that thing you waving in front of my face?"
snapped Aunt [REDACTED] Salvation.

He held the tongs steady and gazed at the iron.

"Where's Daniel?" he asked.

"What you showing me that ol' iron for?"

~~Even~~ "Even iron is humble," Uncle Amos said.

"Daniel aint coming out," she said.

"And now the fire has humbled the iron, the iron is useful," Uncle Amos said.

"Daniel aint coming out to be humbled."

"So the boy has no iron in him," Uncle Amos grumbled.

"He's iron enough."

Amos looked down and spat in the coal dust.

"Is that a good or a bad spit?" Aunt/^{Salvation}~~Amos~~ demanded.

Uncle Amos said quietly, "This is my shop."

He was a massive, quiet sort of man but he was a wind-mill when he was aroused. A man like Amos played uncle because uncles could be buffers when the Mob went on the spree. To intercede for a terrified ^{Smoketowner} fleeing from ~~love~~ love at a rope's end. To plead for a hardluck godchild, already up to his collarstud with the boon any devout mobster bore on a magnolia day.

^{Salvation} Aunt/~~Amos~~ laughed like an engine. She rumbled in the gut. She shook with it until it exploded in a gush of cacophony from her open mouth.

Uncle Amos took up a spanner and fitted it around a finger. He twisted the finger. It could tear the tendons.

^{Salvation} "Stop that," Aunt/~~Amos~~ said sharply.

"The pride in you," Uncle Amos said. "In you like in Daniel and in Mister Slocum."

"Folks got to have pride. Folks aint mules."

Uncle Amos dropped the spanner. He doubled his great fists and rested them on his knees.

"Look at my hands," he said.

Cautious, she looked. He drove two brawling blows to his knees. The wind of them fanned her face. He had immense power. She let go her breath.

"You could break your knees," she said coldly.

"I could kill a man with ~~my~~ either of these hands. Uncle Amos aint puny. Folks know. But these hands aint done nothing save swinging the hammers in my shop. 'Cept once."

"Cept when you play the piano."

"Cept when I used them for Daniel. Last night. At the Wake," Uncle Amos said, ignoring the sarcasm.

Salvation
Aunt/ [REDACTED] pushed out her lips. She had been buried
head to rectify
under Uncle Amos for awhile. She shook her/ [REDACTED]
her rumped identity.

"If I wasnt a lady I'd kick you under your ball-and-chain," she said.

"Ask me why I used them last night."

"Because you got six toes," she retorted.

"Because Daniel was doin' a mighty job. Because he was doin' it clean. Because folks up in No'th would have to hearken to us, Daniel doin' it so clean. Now he fouled it."

Salvation
Aunt [REDACTED] got to her feet. Amos looked up at her.
The strong old face was seamed like a weeping child.

"He my blood. Daniel. What you want me to do? Set him up for Jim Bob?"

"He cant beat Jim Bob if he aint bigger than Jim Bob."

"He cant beat Jim Bob if he's dead either."

"There'd be others," Uncle Amos said, looking down into the coal dust.

"Daniel wouldnt have stuck Jim Bob's man with a knife.

He aint no punk Snic. He dont want no bed-in at the whorehouse."

"That dont matter. He lost his use," Uncle Amos said harshly.

Salvation

Aunt/~~XXXXXX~~ strode angrily towards the door. But at the door, she paused. She was a stout woman but she turned fast. Her short arms were stiff with anger.

"Amos," she rapped, "you wanting some of that magnolia meat they got stashed in the schoolhouse? That why you want to win? That why you want Daniel to come out so Jim Bob can rook him?"

"You is old and crazy," snapped Uncle Amos.

older

"No/~~XXXXXX~~ than you. No crazier than you with your 'there'll be others.' What others? There aint been any before Daniel."

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↓
But there been others, Amos cried silently. There been others like me who do the bit they can and nobody done called them glory man. There been thousands of others. Others what scrub down the kitchens and mind the kids and ring the bell in a magnolia church so Mob folk aint never far from us. So Mob folk a day to come will say, 'Them ^{smoketown folk} ~~XXXXXX~~ aint so bad after all.' Who a day to come will say, 'Them ^{smokes} ~~XXXXXX~~ be so close to us and we never notice them is different.'

"There be more good people than bad people in the world. Most of the laws aint bad, but good," Uncle Amos said slowly.

^{Smoketown?}
"Aint you livin' in ~~XXXXXX~~ Aint you got that feeling the ~~re~~ have more bad law than good?"

^{smokes}
"We ~~XXXXXX~~ is people, just like the Mob. We get hurt, the Mob's gonna get hurt too. People who got sense, know that. Maybe they aint so much against Jim Bob's law as against the way he runs his law."

"It aint good law," she said.

"Any law's the right law when folks have a hand in making it. Maybe if Jim Bob had come along and said, 'Now, looky here, you ^{smoke town folks} we got this law on our minds. We want to make this law concerning the whorehouse but we want you to vote on it.' Maybe if Jim Bob had come along and said this, we'd have said, 'Now, see here, Cap'n Jim Bob, we'll think it over.' And we'd have thought it over and said to ourselves, 'What's in there aint good for us. We better off out of it.'

"Then we'd have voted against going in there. But that ^{other} law aint got no life. A law that dont look both ways is a dead law, without ~~life~~ life. There's a law what says, 'Thou shalt not kill, ~~or~~ or we give you the 'lectric chair.' But the law dont stop there. It looks the other way and says, 'But if you kill 'cause that's the only way to prevent yourself gettin' killed, then you wont get the 'lectric chair.' That law looks both ways."

"But Jim Bob's law still aint good law!" yelled Aunt Salvation.

"The law aint bad. Its just that it didnt have no talk with me before it became law," Amos said.

^{Salvation.}
~~N~~ "Quit trompin' me!" cried Aunt/~~Salvation~~ "You is an eagle, flyin' upstairs. You got - you got charity!"

"'Taint that. I got surety. I believe in folk. I reckon we do things the right way, we get what we want."

She snorted and headed again for the door. Uncle Amos called after her, ~~Salvation~~ "I arrangin' bearers for the coffin. You got anybody in mind?"

She turned and frowned thoughtfully. "Yes, put in Daniel and Jim Bob," she said.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Big Lemuel walked briskly along the beach towards the kids. They loafed in the noon heat, in the palm trees' shade. They sat up to/~~eye Big~~ eye Big Lem with the wet ~~the~~ clothes flapping around him. They were not hostile. He was a friend of Daniel's. But the eyes turned warily ^{to} any interloper on the beach this careful Wednesday. For, all morning, the white topped Mob car had been sitting on their shoulders.

"You been swimming with your clothes?" Abel the head kid asked. He was a thin faced, longshanked boy of sixteen or seventeen.

Big Lem slipped into the group and dropped to his haunches. He sifted sand through his fingers. He could smell the bitter, salt-washed cleanness of their bodies. They didnt smell of garbage like the town. He rubbed his shoulder and grinned sheepishly.

"I fell overboard but the Mob rescued me," he said.

Angie the kid pointed a finger at him and said, "I know that guy. He's a big joker."

"I'm a Mob spy," Big Lem said.

"Show me your badge," Angie said eagerly.

Big Lem looked keenly at him. "What's your name?"

"Angie the kid," Angie said shyly.

Big Lem shook his head. "A fisherman should be named Peter. You is the Mob spy."

"Somebody told you!" Angie cried.

"Okay. Cut the crap," Abel said.

They sat back quietly. They waited on Big Lem.

Big Lem looked out on the water and said, "Daniel. He's gone crazy."

"He aimin' to give himself up? He asking for Jim Bob?" Angie asked.

"Stop ticklin' under my arm," Big Lem snarled at him.

"I tickle you, I use this," Angie said, showing him the little knife.

Big Lem glared around. "I can lick any dozen of you," he said to the grinning faces.

Abel held Angie the kid's wrist and pulled his hand down. He said, "Okay, Big Lem. You come running to the beach this bad Wednesday and tell us Daniel's goofy. Why?"

Big Lem looked puzzled as he said, "He wants to go to the buryin'."

The yell of laughter nearly knocked him flat. He stood up, breathing hard and scowling down on them.

Abel said, "Don't get mad, Big Lem. The guys laugh 'cause anybody should know Daniel would want to go to the buryin'."

"Why should he?" demanded Big Lem. "Aint he heard that Jim Bob after him for real now?"

"Sure. An' that's why. We gonna roll that lil' ol' hearse right across town. The Mob's ~~gotta~~ gotta have respect for the dead. A dead ^{Smoke is} ~~guy~~ a good ^{Smoke.} ~~guy~~ That's their fool law, aint it? We'll have Daniel right up alongside that coffin and Jim Bob cant touch him. The town's gonna laugh at Jim Bob," Abel said.

Big Lem looked thoughtfully at him. "Son, you only half way right. Daniel's figurin' Jim Bob will grab ~~him~~ for him."

The others sobered up but Angie the kid hissed a laugh through his teeth. "Well, whaddya know?" he said.

A Mob boat beat softly upstream. The water creamed at the bows. Brass glinted in the sunlight. They thought that for all the shine, it was a filth boat. They thought if they had a boat like

that it would be a brave boat. Now it was a dream boat.

"Yeah, Jim Bob'll grab for him for sure," Angie said.

The others shrugged. Abel said, "Daniel knows what he's doing. Dan Ebony aint no punk." They looked at the dream boat.

Big Lem's jeering voice broke up their dreams.

"You could turn in Dan Ebony and buy such a boat with the bread they would give you for the reward. It aint murder. He's gonna give himself up anyway."

They turned their eyes on him.

"A big joke," little Angie said. He was fascinated with Big Lem's neck, exposed where it joined his shoulders.

They followed Angie's eyes and saw where they could neatly dislocate a big guy's neck. They were bewitched with it. Big Lem climbed cautiously to his feet. He was a powerful man. But he knew how efficiently, in unison, the small blades were. They were methodical and persistent. The Mob had found out that you clapped a dozen in the station house but others slipped into the line on the light slapdown of insteps. The way the little guys of the small boats do.

"No," Abel, the head kid said.

They took away their eyes and breathed softly.

Little Angie smiled and touched Big Lem's arm shyly.

"You aint no spy. I know you. You're Dan's best friend," he said.

"You're a good guy too," Big Lem said, watching him coldly.

"Take care of yourself. One of these days we'll want you," Angie said.

"I said shut it off," Abel, the head kid said.

Angie looked down at the sand and said, "We oughta

get limousines. Cats like us aint oughta go to buryings
'less we ride in limousines."

"Where'll we get the loot to go around hiring limousines?" one of the kids asked.

"There's always fishin'."

"We'd gotta have the bread today. Go see the man with the limousine tomorrow and he'll say other folks done hire it."

"We can go fishin' today."

"A big hot sun overhead and you say we go fishin' today? Man, fish aint bitin' today. Water's too calm and clear."

"A fellow goes fishin' anytime," Angie said. "Best time's when the fish dont expect you. You slip him a hook and he thinks you're giving him your hand to shake."

"A wind's coming up. It will be ^{choppy} soon," Abel said.
"Okay. Let's go."

They went up the beach for the gear and brought down the masts and rudders. They took down the nets and spooled them in the sterns of the small bayou boats. They hunted out the balers and filled the water bottles. Big Lem watched the hard, slim ^(slim) youths putting their tools in the boats. They spoke little. They were at their duties. Abel looked around the beach. He nodded. All was set. He went to his boat to lead his little fleet out on the water. But they didnt go.

They didnt go because the white topped Mob car emptied itself of its crew. The mobsters jack-knifed out and came spread legged at them. They pointed guns at the kids. The Mob boat roared in the bayou and cut for the beach. The motor ran down to a mutter and the boat thrashed slowly back and forth, parallel to the beach. So they were boxed in.

An Under Potentate had the squad. A fat waisted man with

USE NO CHAPTERS ONLY

BREAKS A

NINTH OF APRIL AVENUE

LOVE STORY ON A
DUSTY STREET

LOVE STORY ON A HOT AFTERNOON

THE PLOWMEN AND THE MOB

by JONATHAN REID

Call Leroy "Binger"

mobster is the word

Ninth of April April Nine Avenue
April 9th Avenue

This is the anatomy of a Southern ~~folk~~ fable.
Alabama? Louisiana? Mississippi? Georgia?

~~Some~~ Somewhere in the South.

Anywhere in the ^{America} Old South where a Jim Bob Slocum
and a ^{Leroy Jones collide in} Daniel Ebony raise the hundred year old issue.

^{Pig} Oldfashioned American issue that sends a Plowman
in Big Swamp shying so violently off plumb, ~~and~~ he'll cut
the furrows crooked.

BEGIN

And it all began that hot afternoon when Jim Bob

~~Slocum~~ Slocum sat down at the phone and whistled up a pogrom
CAPN Jim Bob at the phone in Mob City and whistled
up this pogrom the evening Daniel's mammy died in the tarpaper
shack in the ghetto ^{folks called Paradise} suburb of Paradise South across the Avenue Jim Bob had been after
to nail Daniel from the time the high yaller barrowgirl named
Felicity held the commemoration Wake for Abie Linkun at
the edge of Big Swamp. Jim Bob had caught Daniel that night
too, but the scared ^{black} ~~Nigra~~ had cut for freedom road faster
than a preacher out of hell.

Jim Bob, seated at the phone, chuckled as he
remembered how Daniel had ^{CLINT} ~~helped~~ the night they took him to
the Mob's precinct house. ^{CUT} ~~to~~ look him. Some ^{CLINT} ~~young~~ mobster,
short on experience, had allowed Daniel to see into his eyes
and discover what they were fixing to do. Daniel vanished
after he hit the streets but Jim Bob was sure as a square root

THE CITY OF VACANT, USA

CITY OF
VACANT,
U.S.A.

VACANT

Nigra kills

that the monkeys whom Daniel had led in the action against the Mob had hidden him. Stashed him away sweet as a lizard in a molasses jar. Only, he couldn't prove a thing. And these days when a fella was dealing with those Nigra fishing kids ~~who lived on the beach at Delta street~~, he had to be able to prove things. The Nigra kids had ^{among the Good People up} plenty of friends ~~up north~~ in Federal country, quick to say the little ~~black~~ bastards were being swindled out of their inalienable rights. *Federal country, alias Pig Swamp.*

I reckon, thought Jim Bob bleakly.

Bleakly staring out of his window across ^{*Nine 12 of April*} ~~Fourth~~ of ~~the~~ Avenue into the stinking suburb of Paradise ~~Swamp~~ swimming ^{*all*} in the heat haze off the bayou like a shred of hog intestines in

(MORE)

that golden gravy of the afternoon sun. Crowding a fella until he
couldnt hardly breathe the goddam good magnolia air. I reckon,
said Jim Bob.

So this afternoon when ~~Den Ebony's~~ ^{his old black mammy} ~~ma~~ died in the shanty
~~on Delta street over KKKKKK in Paradise South,~~ ^{across the Nick of April Avenue} the suburb across
the Avenue from Mob City, Jim Bob did a bit of thinking and reckoned
that ~~Daniel~~ ^{Clint} would come out. ^{For that old black mammy who had suckled him was}
^{also Clint's natural ma -} ~~He fed from the same tits;~~ "Chuckled Jim Bob.
~~Not only that. He would come out for the oldfashioned sing a ree~~

because ~~Jim Bob reckoned,~~ his goddam politics ~~would~~ forced him.
~~to KKKKKK fraternize.~~ ^{to KKKKKK} A guy who wanted to change the ways of oldtime
folks must show his solidarity with their folkways before he began
easing in his own dirty Communist thinkings, Jim Bob reasoned.

Jim Bob dug at his ear with a ^{THICK PINKIE} ~~thick~~ little finger and
spat, missing the spittoon an inch in his agitation. He cogitated a
second or two more, and then sat down and phoned the fellas to come
pounding for a bloodsport ~~over in Paradise South.~~

"You fellas, come easy," whispered Jim Bob over the
phone, one eye cocked to see that the houseboy wasnt ~~looking~~
listening, for the sons of bitches crowded you so you even had to
have them in your house. "We gonna move over the Avenue ~~and into~~

~~Paradise South~~ ^{Clint} real softly. I gotta hunch ~~Clint~~ ^{coat} is gonna be at
his ~~ma's~~ Wake ^{for my old} black mammy. ^{"He's his real flesh and mammy too, ant she's"}
^{"I reckon. Anybody he's gonna want come out to slow he aint against old black mummies."} ~~PTUKK~~

"What about them spies from up ~~North?~~" asked the fine
lynching-bee hand at the other end. "They keeping an eye on no."

"We gotta watch out for the spies and thieves from up
~~North.~~ ^{Pig Swamp} We gotta watch out for the Plowmen from ~~Pig Swamp.~~
Goddammit, why you asking me? You know we gotta watch out every
time we cross Fourth of July Avenue nowadays."

He squinted his eyes and looked out on the afternoon
sun shining pretty on magnolia land while the other fella cursed.

that golden grey of the afternoon sun. Crowding a fella until he

"which you mean be aint against coal black mammys? Photo like
saying be aint against Aunt and Uncle. ~~the black~~ And I know

be sure he's against ^{all our} Uncle Tom and Aunt. "
Jim Bob ~~hooked~~ the phone ~~under~~ by ~~you~~ Towel and EAR and

~~scrapped under his fingernails~~
~~that would come out. For that old black mammy~~
~~that would come out. For that old black mammy~~

~~because Jim Bob reckoned his goddam politics were forced him.~~
~~to exaxx fraxxise. A guy who wanted to change the ways of oldtime~~

folks must show his solidarity with their folkways before he began
easing in his own city Communist thinking. Jim Bob reasoned.

Jim Bob dug at his ear with a thick little finger and
spit, missing the spittoon an inch in his agitation. He cogitated a
second or two more, and then set down and phoned the fella to come
pounding for a bloodsport over in Terrible South.

"You fella, come easy," whispered Jim Bob over the

phone, one eye cocked to see that the honeyboy wasn't fanning
listening, for the sons of bitches crowded you so you even had to
have them in your house. "We gonna move over the Avenue and into

Terrible South real softy. I gotta hunch ~~that~~ is gonna be at
his ~~black mammy~~ Wake. ~~the black mammy~~ ~~the black mammy~~
asked the fine

lynching-bee hand at the other end. "Don't keep me up in no."
"We gotta watch out for the spies and thieves from up

Goddammit, why you asking me? You know we gotta watch out every
time we cross Fourth of July Avenue nowadays."

He squinted his eyes and looked out on the afternoon
sun shining pretty on magnolia land while the other fella cursed.

policed
 Jim Bob ~~soldiered~~ Mob ~~City~~ *Turn* ~~wizzazzfuzzixixy~~ as the elected High Potentate with a ferocity that only his dedication explained away. For he loved Mobtown and he loved Paradise South, all of which was magnolia land. Now, through his window, magnolia land lay feline as a leopard ~~XXXX~~ asleep in a hot summer sun, waiting to kill in the honeysuckle evening.

"Sure. They gonna hold a Wake for ~~Daniel's~~ *boy old cool black Rammy. They like it when one of our old manmies, or Aunt B, or Uncle pass on. They wish it, pro-gress,* and he's gonna be there. We'll drop down on them like a can of explosives," Jim Bob chuckled as he hung up.

And in all the shabby white pillared mansions in ~~this corner~~ *of Mob town,* of magnolia land, menfolk whom Jim Bob had ~~xxxx~~ alerted were kissing their wives and their kids goodbye, as they readied for the night crossing into Paradise South.

"All that equality crap," growled Jim Bob as he got up and shook out his whip. "Dreamed up by a bunch of Philadelphia Communists in the pay of that stinkin' Red, King George the Third of England."

Later
 The fellas came yippee-ing and trailing the joy-ropes that would provide a joy-drag for any damfool nigger too slow to get out of the way. They took *with them* the joy-ropes that would joy-drag a Nigra at the tailgate of an automobile until he was shook down to a bone-and-gristle lump that would burn bright and brief on a can of gasolene.

"Sshh," Jim Bob whispered roguishly, a finger at his lips and a thumb hooked back at Big Swamp as he led the Mob to ~~Paradise~~ *Ninth* of ~~July~~ *April* Avenue. For the Plowmen in Big Swamp grew uneasy whenever the Mob went out on a love-act. Folk in Big Swamp covered their ears to block out the thud of falling bodies when the magnolia mobsters crossed the Avenue into Paradise South. To love-drag a cullud chile through the pearly gates.

Jim Bob tippy toed the boys out of Mobtown, pausing to
 piddle on ~~Fourth~~ ^{Ninth} of ~~July~~ ^{April} Avenue, grinning cute as a newt while
 he slyly buttoned up. For there aint no law that could stomp
 a fella for piddlin' on Fourth of July Avenue. Then as he
 finished, Jim Bob spread his legs and bawled up at the
 night-time sky,

"Lets go sweat the stinkin' nigger sons of bitches!

"Sweat the sleeping-in, frigging-in, sitting-in, raping
 coons so they'll know we love 'em!"

And he sashayed across ~~Fourth~~ ^{Ninth of April} of July Avenue into Para-
 dise South, his broad Dixie buttocks holding up the web belt
 in which he carried his club.

Lordy, Lordy.

Downhome folk in Paradise ~~South~~ smelling the approach
 of the sweaty-crotch crackers, held their aching heads and yelled
 for an end to

the clubbing

the shooting,

the lynching.

Singing the weary blues of an outlawed folk
 crazy-hungering for the law.

With a two hundred year old banjo on their backs.

Hooked by a two hundred year old banjo on their backs.

Crying Lordy, Lordy to a Plowman who was ~~sunk~~ sunk to
 his ears in all that luck muck in ^{away up} Dig Swamp.

And these were the third in the ~~XXXX~~ act of love, the

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folk who lived in Big Swamp, Washington D.C. ~~the~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~

Big Swamp sat in the country north of magnolia land.
In there dwelt the Plowmen, a Forest People who wore their hair long, down past their shoulders. They looked like unshorn yaks.

But it didnt matter like a broken leg, to a Flowman, how he looked, so long as ^{his} ~~these~~ drooping locks ~~obliterated~~ obliterated the sights and sounds and ^{therefore} ~~so~~ purged him of caring.

[A pair of certainties.]
let
Jim Bob ran Mobtown. The big coloured fellow named ~~Don Ebony~~ was on the make to run ~~Nigger~~ Paradise South. But nobody knew whom the wheel was in the Plowmen's outfit. The fact was, the Plowmen were faceless.

But they vastly outnumbered cracker and ^{black} ~~nigger~~ and were affluent in the Swamp's rich muck.

Flowmen and ^{cop-Mob} ~~mob~~ were mostly blood kin. *[BREAK]* Folk in Paradise South got hollered at because they provided the blood-sport for a sporting Mob.

[The only trouble] as Jim Bob saw it, *[folk in Paradise South]* they were running for cover in a lousy thicket where men ^{supposedly} got created equal and were swaddled in inalienable rights. Which was all bulldust *and Red crops* to Jim Bob Slocum. It made Jim Bob fume this summer night ~~as~~ while he ~~xxx~~ hoped the plowing fellas ^{sure had that laid down when} didnt see him leaving Mobtown. *rode out of Mobtown.*

But the Plowmen in Big Swamp, ^{those third in the love-act,} were uneasy all the while. Even as they gripped the sweaty handles and cut the crooked furrows, scurrying behind the plows, digging for another dollar's worth of a Philadelphia Dream, the Plowmen knew that the tax-collector would come.

Would come enforcing a tariff for every violated, castrated problem which the Mob had ~~sunk~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ dumped in ~~the~~ *the*

of history
 sinkholes ~~back~~ of the hills. So to soften up the Plowmen, Jim Bob had taken the Paradise South schoolhouse and turned it into a monstrosity of a whorehouse into which he backslapped the Plowmen every week. A hustle at the Post-Times cat house (Jim Bob named it) took a Plowman's ~~fazxxx~~ mind off his fears. It made Paradise South a bedroom suburb of Mobtown, "integrated it tighter than a screw in the woodwork," grinned that antic fella, ole Jim Bob.

And the little hookers whom Jim Bob had installed in the ~~Delta street~~ whorehouse, rocked the joint from breasts to knees, sweet-talking ~~and xxxxxxxx talked~~ a Plowman into a payday dream of a titheless time.

"Sleep, Sheep," sang the little chippies, taking down a Plowman from his cross of plows.

"Sleep, Sheep," they crooned as they winkled a Plowman out of his Good Fridays. Draining him of doubts.

To give Jim Bob time and room to mangle the uppity ~~and~~ *negro* ~~and~~ *black folk.*

When Jim Bob and the ^{cob-}mobsters reached the edge of Paradise ~~South~~, Jim Bob hawked and spat and snapped his galluses while he sent the fellas into ambush. Then a magnolia flower pressed to his nostrils, he wreathed his face in the everloving smile of a mobster. He was thinking out the moves by which he would score on ^{Levy} Daniel Ebony who was the brain ~~Nig~~ for the Delta street fishing punks. Cap'n Jim knew that ^{Levy} Daniel and the kid-fishermen who were challenging the sleep-in laws he had laid down for the whorehouse, would not prove easy to rook.

*The upstart kids who were
 working the boat is dan bobby.*

CHAPTER ONE

When Jim Bob took the fellas this summer's evening across the Avenue into ~~Paradise South~~, he was as legal as the law could make him. For the law books were locked away ^{in Mobtown} on the Mob City side of the Avenue. And this Jim Bob never failed to point out to any son of a bitching Nigra who was uppity enough to, just before they finished him, ask why he was being ^{CRUNCHED} crucified. Without a bat of the eye, Jim Bob would tell them he was a lawman himself and he kept the law on his side.

"That Jim Bob, he's a caution," the fellas used to grin as they coiled the ropes and got into the automobiles to drive back home. "He sure knows how to handle 'em."

But the fishing-kids on the beach at the foot of Delta street werent digging the old laws at all. Nossir. The kids were setting up to rip out by the roots mostly all of Jim Bob's laws.

This summer's day they had been lying out easy on the beach while Jim Bob was whistling up his pogrom. The kids were storing their strength before they stole into the evening to prod and probe at Jim Bob's big new whorehouse which was denying them sleeping-in rights. And that was the time they heard about ~~Jim Bob's~~ ^{coal black mammy} ~~Dan Ebony's~~ ma.

Folks in Paradise South got the news quickly to the kids that ~~Jim Bob's~~ ^{coal black mammy} ~~Dan's~~ ^{they} ~~ma~~ had passed on. A look exchanged ^{with} ~~each other~~ and

~~a snap of the finger~~ reckoned up in their heads that ~~Daniel~~ ⁶⁵⁷ would ~~come out for~~ ^{the} ~~appear at the Wake.~~ ^{Among them old black mammas, Jim Bob's was a legend.} ~~Daniel would have to, or Paradise South folk~~ ^{to} ~~have chuckled and nortured such a fine high minded~~ ~~of hand so even open rope at a~~ ~~would figure he was being high falutin' and stop listening to him.~~

~~And if Daniel appeared, so would Jim Bob.~~

lynch tree

So the ~~young guys~~ ^{Kids} on the beach rose and scrubbed their forearms and faces clean in gulf water, ^{like a sacrament} felt the knives sheathed at their waists and went up ^{the} ~~Delta~~ street, walking with the quick slapdown

of insteps the way ^{fishermen} the kids from the small boats do.

The kids passed Lame Hiram, the ^{banjo} guitar-playing cripple plunking his ^{banjo} guitar. And when Lame Hiram saw the soft way their feet hit and how the kids searched the darkening alleys from the corners of their eyes, he rapped the box with the heel of his hand and began plucking a mourning blues.

For mourning is a care song.

A kindness song.

A love song for the lost.

A ^{banjo} guitar laughing sadly for some kids who were fishing for what they couldn't lose.

But the kids never looked at the guitar player at all. In the same hard quiet, they passed the blacksmith's shop. And when Uncle Amos the blacksmith raised his head and saw the violence fastened on their backs, he slipped out of the burlap apron and motioned his two boys after him.

All over Paradise South they had heard by now that ^{Jim Bob's} ~~Beniel's~~ ^{old mammy} old ma had passed to her reward. And since ^{larry} ~~Ben~~ the glory man was on the run from Jim Bob, nobody doubted that Cap'n Jim would try to ^{PAUL LEROY} ~~rope Ben~~ in his anguish. ^{folk} ~~The folks~~ in Paradise South didn't like ~~XX~~ it at all for they guessed Jim Bob would try to rope him at the Wake.

~~And a Wake was one place folks thought that Jim Bob should stay away from.~~

For a Wake was the little time downhome folk took to protest the hundred year old ^{banjo} ~~misery~~ the Mobfolk had strapped on them. ^PThey knew they weren't going any place until the saints go marching in. ^PBut the kids, ^{left to ROAM} ~~cast~~ on the beach when Jim Bob took over their schoolhouse, figured it otherwise. The kids on the prod to loosen the laws around Jim Bob's whorehouse, said softly that Jim

Bob could lose. *P* And the older battered folk of Paradise ~~South~~, doubtful, but being beyond further weariness, found some hope and said maybe, just once, the Mob could lose. *P* So they came out to Wake with ~~Daniel~~ *berry*. All the half citizens of Paradise ~~South~~ came out to Wake with ~~Dan~~ *him*.

Out came the gin folk, humped with bowing and praying between the rows that they share-crop enough this year to fill their cotton-picking bellies.

Out came the sugarcane reapers, smelling of molasses past the sweat.

Out came the longshoremen, the roundhousemen, the tobacco pickers and the hod carriers.

Out came the shoeshine boys, the busboys, delivery boys, stableboys, the janitors and the porters, all the go-fetch folk for a redneck Mob in the mansions behind the sickly oaks.

The street doors of Paradise ~~South~~ clided continuously as all the losers came out for the Wake, beat up shoes *and a few of fine English leather*, slipping and scrabbling on the heat greased asphalt.

Flowing and eddying up ~~Delta~~ street.

And, finally, out came the dentists and the doctors, the cosmetic manufacturers and the ~~the~~ insurance ~~people~~ company people.

Flowing and eddying around Joel the Fool as he sat slat-legged in the middle of ~~Delta~~ *the* street. For he was familiar to them as woe. Joel was the town idiot who day and night sat in the streets surrounded by his empty cans hoping to catch a falling star.

Sat with his boy-disciple whom folks called the poet, a youth born to fraud like wealth. *P* Joel was a

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bayou oracle who ~~xxxxxx~~ looked for the future in the bottom of empty food cans. Sat slat legged on Delta, moving his empty cans around to catch ~~xx~~ the rain falling from a clear blue sky. Clear blue sky shedding bucketsful of rain for a true believer.

"I believe!" cried Joel in his ringing Fool's tenor, clasping a Heinz to his chest.

"I believe in Them and in Us!"

All about the Fool they flowed. The wretched shoes. The defeated shoes. The scuffed, cuffed, creaking, careworn shoes. Shuffling off to an hour's small triumph. The banging, jollying, hurrahing shoes shedding joy to a hardluck challenger. Conning a fellow into the wide, sly, shiny-eyed, centuries-old grin for the allotment of a moment.

"I tell you I believe!" Joel cried angrily at the kid-poet at his side. The boy whittled the blackjack knot to give cover to his mockery of the hurriers.

Joel frowned and looked at the sloppy, dopey old shoes heeling jauntily by him. "You too should believe," he said sadly to them. He looked back at the boy.

But the hard-eyed youth looked upward in deceit, waiting for the tear from the sky's blue eye. For a foetal leniency in the iron sky knotted about his earth of no quarter. He took a poet's care not to look at the ill soles bearing others into their territories of faith.

"Do you believe, Poet?" Joel the Fool asked him quietly. But he suckled his thumb and played dumb.

"Why do they call you a poet?" Joel asked irritably.

"Because I'm too young to be an Idiot. Too white-eyed," the boy said. He grinned. "Because the fishing kids from the small boats wont have me. Those who call themselves the Snics. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

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The Say-No-I-Cant-See kids."

"How old are you, boy?"

"Sixteen in the courthouse. Sixty with being scared shitless ~~XX~~ of the magnolia people. The frigging Mob."

"We should make you into a full fledged idiot soon. You almost Mob bait now, the way you talk," Joel said.

"Jim Bob rules the world from delta to duodenum, but, Lordy! To see them Snic-kids go. The old hymn-singing downhome folk look at the new kids ~~XX~~ and go about moanin' low with pride and fear," ^{the} Poet said.

"The Mob will remove your balls for thinking out so loud!" whispered Joel, looking around at all the boots flowing past him.

"Man," ~~XXX~~ ^{the} poet said, rolling his eyes so high and wide he swept the Southland sky clean of stars, "a body just plain shivers out of himself to see the respect them Mob folks been showing since the ~~XXXX~~ fishing kids latched in!"

"No!" Joel whispered, so scared he looked Mob-white. "The attitude is wrong!"

"Then I'm gonna give up poetry," Poet said stubbornly. "Up the U.S.A."

"Rain's gonna fall from ~~XXX~~ the clear blue sky and the earth will bloom enough so that niggers and crackers will lie down together, replete and hateless!" Joel whispered in shock.

"Shit-bit," the poet said.

"Clutch your faith close," Joel the Fool said. "Bathe it in arm-stink."

The poet held up the model of the boat he was whittling. He blew at the chips. His long, unflagging mouth ran lightly along the words as he proposed to ruin the hope of a fool whose sin lay in believing.

"Rain will indeed fall, Master. Fire and rain and whatever the hell else you say," remarked the young disciple. "But for now, take your eyes off the sky and look at the old schoolhouse which Jim Bob turned into this ripsnort of a whorehouse."

So Joel the Fool wearily turned his eyes outward, away from the inwrought agony of Them and Us, and looked towards the bayou end of Delta street, to the *whorehouse that had once been the schoolhome.*

Joel smiled at the poet. "You nub of obscenity," he said softly. They were the craziest cats in Paradise South. A far-out twosome.

The poet's eyes softened as he looked at the little harlots steadily issuing out of the whorehouse.

"Conscripts of love. Brought in by Jim Bob to comfort the
Blowmen with news of home," the poet said.

"What home?" Joel asked, slapping/~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ his empty food cans on the sweating asphalt.

"The Plowmen are homeless and therefore cuntless. Jim Bob comforts them with news they want to hear. Hear this, Master:

"If news was a gopher and you were allowed to enter the Post-Times whorehouse without getting your black ass burnt off, you'd have seen ■ that old gopher nosing a nude thigh here, a sweating navel there. Slipping to each the tipoff that Ma Ebony, ~~long~~ *slut* *mammy* ~~Dan Ebony's old mother~~ had beaten the rap in her tarpaper mansion on Delta street."

"You know a good deal," said Joel miserably, holding up a Bird's-Eye with steadily diminishing hope.

"Man, you following my fable?" Poet asked, with his forefinger flicking away a cockroach that had been dodging the splayed-foot ~~XXXXX~~ shoes of the marching-in Saints since it had barrelled forth from the gutter in left field.

"Dont know why I picked you for a pupil," snarled old Joel.

"All the other kids are working," grinned the poet. "They fighting for sleeping-in rights in the whorehouse. But listen. Jim Bob has passed the word to the Madam that all the little Mob harlots should Wake with us downhome folk. When the Plowmen hear about it, they'll remember that Jim Bob has always said the Mob and us are one folk. That lil' ole Mob sure loves us cullud chilluns."

"Sent to glory with a lynching-bee's noose, like a dogtag ^{cautiously} 'round our downhome necks," Joel said, ~~XXXXX~~ feeling for the rhythm.

"You're moving in, Master. You're moving in sharp," the poet said.

He liked it when Joel moved in. For a powerful moment they would be the big wheels on which the world turned.

"Sure, Ma ster. Comfort flows out of Jim Bob's whorehouse and a Plowman reckons there aint no tithe-day. No tax collection day a-coming."

"She comforts them with apples," Joel said, one eye humbly cocked on ^{the} poet.

The poet looked lovingly at him.

"Sometimes you're one hell of a good guy," the poet said.

Joel shook himself angrily. "That dont buy you anything.

You've got to study hard to be a Fool."

~~changed~~ ~~BR 6112~~ ^{passed} Folks/ ~~XXXX~~ tromping softly in their floppy shoes, slapping softly past the slat-legged Joel who was as immovable as woe.

"Let's mount that old wheel together, Master," Poet said harshly, desiring to feel it hit. "Listen to this: The Plowmen will get the news from Jim Bob's reporters in the schoolhouse that Them and Us are cheekier to jowl than a rump to a seat."

"To pullulate Jim Bob," Joel the Fool said warmly.

"Goddam, you're swinging, Master!" cried the poet ^{up} high.

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He clasped his hands above his head and shook them excitedly.

"Here's some more, Master!" he yelled. "Did you know the Flowmen^{in the schoolhouse} lay them on the desks ~~and the~~ typewriters? I hear the behinds of Jim Bob's reporters read like the Bill of Rights. Fractured. Yuk yuk."

Joel slammed his hand palm down on ^{the} Delta street asphalt. "FACTS HAVE A WAY OF CHANGING WHEN YOU TOUCH THEM," ^{he said miserably,} kid?" "Words, words, words," he howled. "You a parliament, ~~you~~"

"A rump parliament!" bawled the poet. "The debate continues in Jim Bob's whorehouse. Here's more. Did you know the Flowmen go to bed with their boots on? They swing aboard those chippies with their boots and all. They dont want us downhome folk to figure they're enjoying it."

"The chippies keep swarming and twisting around that foreskin long enough, they cant help but enjoy it, kid," Joel said grinning hugely.

"Mainlining ^{gratified} Master!" shouted the poet. "Now listen —"

But Joel flung his arms apart in a gesture of crucifixion.

"You're snubbing me to the cross, kid!" he said hoarsely.

"I got cans to attend to — I'm a believing fool."

Folk slithered and sluiced along, an army of heels and toes. In a softshoe ~~XX~~ ^{army} jive to Wake ~~Don Ebony~~ straight into the arms of Jim Bob.

"The spunky little editors. Look at them, Master," the poet said softly as the girls approached. "Look at the silky thighs whispering as they brush by. Look at the concave. At the knob of Venus, wind-scoured and rain-lashed for the moment of truth."

Joel swallowed. He turned down his eyes to avoid eye-rape.

"Spunky? What word is that?" he said weakly.

"Skunky. Skunk you, Master," the poet said wearily. "They all draftees to Jim Bob, like me to you. Lets watch 'em and get a couple of hardons. Folks need witnesses, even in America.■ Lets watch the Madam."

And Joel looked down Delta and witnessed the high knee kick of a sporting Mob woman putting out the ^{Paradise South} ~~news~~ news for a willing Plowman. Selling honeyed time to a Flowman willing to be hoodwinked into false beliefs. Selling a warranty for a mobsman's claim that no honest man had greater ~~the~~ love than seporate but equal.

"Witness it, Fool," whispered his maverick disciple.

And witnessed Joel: The bitch apologists for a misjudged Mob. A Mob struggling with rope and club to snuck the bad notions of a downhome folk into seporate but equal slots.

And felt Joel: The agony on a Fool like Joel speared on the hope of a seporate but equal peace. His lips twisted.

"The useful publishers. Coming to Wake with us and publish to a Flowman that ~~the~~ red necks and niggers can wallow in love like hogs at a swill," he muttered.

His eyes brimming with duplicity, the poet looked at the muttering Joel.

"I forgot to tell you, Master. Them Flowmen so scared to leave their plows, they hustle off the girls and race back to ~~the~~ Big Swamp still buttoning ~~the~~ their flys."

Joel looked coldly at him.

"The nation was built on fellows buttoning their flys."

"UPTIGHT,

"Solid, Master!" cried the poet, so proud that Joel

was reaching.

Jim Bob's ~~the~~ mammy ~~the~~ Ebony was an Aunt," Joel muttered to himself as

the strumpets drew nearer. "Sing *for a dead Aunt.*"

The little harlots hobbled in pairs behind the Madam and her aging starter, Tony the Banker. They walked clench-rumped, their asses Sunday quiet as they published the news of a mutual anguish. For the passing of an Aunt or an Uncle, a Plowman should know, bereft ~~Mobville and Nigville~~ ^{CRACKERSVILLE AND NICKERSVILLE} alike.

"Sing," ordered the Madam over her shoulder as they neared the corner at Mason and Dixon. *"She was an Aunt."*

"Sing!" Joel the Fool cried fiercely as the girls divided their ranks to pass around him and his pupil, the ~~key~~ kid-poet.

And their heels ~~clack~~ clacking to the beat of the song, a ll the downhome folk fell in behind them. The fieldhands and the houseboys. Cupbearers and ostlers. Lackeys and flunkies.

And only the fishing-kids walked their own way, silent on the swift slapdown of insteps, the way the Snics of the small boats do.

But the others wheeled into the yard behind the whores, all singing The Battle Hymn Of The Republic.

The poet applauded simply, with handclaps. He was too moved for words.

Joel said when the singing was inside the yard,

"Boy, you seen any of those famous ^{CROOKS} ~~thieves~~ from up North?"

Joel figured there would be many thieves from up North ^{down} down to do their bigmoneyed best to hold off the Mob from ~~Dan Ebony~~.

They would stack him with funds, but they wouldnt bring guns.

Sure. He knew the big twin-seed guys from up North would be around. But walking sly as catamounts. Walking in the ~~pitch~~.

shadow of their moneybags as they eyed Jim Bob. Money stacked higher than a hanging-tree, but sometimes he wished they would bring guns.

"You seen any of those big fellows from up North?" asked Joel.

The poet snatched at Delta street with his hard young eyes and caught some famous thieves.

"Some," the kid said.

"Name them," Joel said irritably. *He named a ~~few~~ ^{notional singer}*

~~"Harry"~~

"Stop!" Joel hissed. *you fool. with a common 1.* "Use the names Jim Bob gives them in his hanging books. You want Jim Bob to rook them? Dont you know all these shoes have ears?"

The poor ugly shoes going in a slow drag to find joy in a Wake.

Soul Singer,
"Folk Singer, Blues Singer, Boxer, Outfield, Decathalon," said the kid-poet.

"That's enough," said Joel, catching a falling star in a peanut butter jar. "Lots of the big guys are down. So Jim Bob's gonna burn our heels 'cause he'll think we brought in the North fellows to sit-in with us."

The kid waited. Old and pinchfaced for his sixteen years, he waited.

"You gotta go in," Joel said.

The kid nodded sombrely.

"Wait for a ~~know~~ knot of nobler men," Joel said, looking around.

The kid-poet nodded and waited. He wouldnt go in among the uppity ones. Mob folk had a way of knowing when you went into bad company. He didnt hanker to go to the cutting-table.

His face nut-creased, the kid sat slat legged on the street

and worried that a poet had nothing but his words and those could be buried with him. Come the angry days, the magnolia days, and nobody waited for a poet in the rush off the streets. Every day for him was a bankruptcy sale and no time to ^{stockpile} ~~xxxxxxx~~ his shelves. He knew the ease and squeeze of heat and cold. The rejection of Joel and him in the affluent days; ^{and the} jump with which ^{his own folk} Nigtown would embrace their scrawny necks if Joel's prophecies proved true.

With a shrug, the kid disentangled. Humming through his nose, he gunned the crowd with his crafty eyes. He wouldn't enter the Wake with the kind of company Jim Bob might later kick in his gut for. Jim Bob allowed Joel and him to live, prosper and even flourish because he liked the clean thinking, the pride of place in a goddam Fool. ^[Good black folk who knew his place.]

"What you frowning ^{at} about, kid?" Joel asked.

"Goddam," the poet said.

"That aint nothing to frown about. Here comes a knot," Joel said.

Then with a grunt to Joel, the poet slipped into the yard among some Uncles. There were Uncle Jud the Junkman, Preachin' Uncle Mose the Dogcatcher, and Uncle Remus the carpenter who sometimes told stories as he shaped the coffins. Preachin' Uncle Mose was bowing right and left for on Sundays and Wake-days he was a deacon and no ^{dirty} dogcatcher. The poet went in fast and watchful. He sprang smartly back as he found himself close to the fishing-kids.

"The crazy Snics!" he whispered into the hollow where his bowels had been.

For the glitter from the small knives stuck in their belts had splintered in his eyes. He looked swiftly around to see if any Mobfolk were about. He backed and found a place behind the Madam.

'She was an Aunt, 'was Jim Bob's cool Uncle Mammy,'

"Mammy Ebony was ~~Ben Ebony's~~ ma," the Madam was saying to the Banker. *"After Jim Bob ~~handed her off~~ in the cabin on Delta Street, she worked part-time* ~~she used to work~~ in the Jew shop at the corner of ~~Oxford and Little Rock~~ ^{East} ~~before~~ before the Reconstruction. We tore down the shop."

"What happened to the Jew boy?" the Banker asked.

"All us folks in the Mob were sorry what happened to him. He died accidentally like, poor guy. Got so fired up he wouldn't move out when we were tearing off the roof. We put up a plaque saying he died like any good Southern boy defending his lady's honour."

"What lady?" asked the Banker.

She looked incuriously at him for awhile.

"Yankee" ~~"North~~ trash," she said of him. "Men folk down here who die with their boots on always do it defending a Southern lady."

"Yeah," the Banker said wearily.

~~He was~~ ~~from up North~~. He had moved down to magnolia land when the opening came in that huge curiosity ^{shop} known as Jim Bob's whorehouse. ~~The~~ barn of a place which had been the schoolhouse but which the Mob had now made into a catchall of bank, news journal and cubicles for the little strumpets who gave a guilty Plowman grace for a week. ~~The~~ Banker had no use for Wakes. But as he said to himself when Jim Bob hired him, "Let's face it. We're involved body and soul and automobile with the lunatic magnolia fringe which runs the cat house to salve a Plowman's conscience on a Thursday-Friday."

Jim Bob had hired him because he knew all about tithes. He could fake the books for a purblind Plowman.

"Jew boy's name was Levine," the Madam was saying. "But

when we got around to putting up the plaque, we sort of slipped up and spelt it M-a-c capital E-l-e-v-i-n. MacElvin. So folks wouldnt be ashamed of him or anything."

"That would fix it," the Banker said absently.

"Mammy ~~Ebony~~ ^{Jones} has a sister named Aunt Salvation," the Madam said.

"You're a newspaper," the Banker grinned.

"Dont call me that!" the Madam said sharply

"You're a journal," the Banker said.

"That's the word we use down here. We dont cotton to the loose North way of talking. I aint a low echelon editor in a cunthouse for nothing."

She looked sideways to see if he grinned. She liked her starter to be happy. A whorehouse was no good with a morose starter.

The Banker belched and stroked his belly under the Jamaica shirt. The weave slid away under his hand. And he knew that no matter how a man might allow his mind to roam when the crap crept too high, the feel of such a shirt spurling under his fingers was ~~in~~ a trap he would be reluctant to step away from.

"That's Aunt Salvation over there," she said. "Big as a Mack truck. Tough? Huh. Like rubber. She's got more friends among the Mob than a Catholic in hell. Yet she takes no sass from nobody. Tough ~~like rubber~~ ^{stet}."

"~~All rubber~~ 'cept for her teeth," the poet said behind them. "For recreation, she fondles a bull mobster with her rubber fingers. But she cracks boulders with her teeth."

The Banker jumped. He recovered and said bleakly over his shoulder, "Watch that coon go."

He knew the nigger-poet kid. A runt who figured that since he wasnt ~~xxsnixx~~ among the dirty Snics, he had liberty to

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breathe. He could peel the thickest skin with words he took out of the air like a conjuring-man.

"Huh. Aunt Salvation aint soft," the Madam said. "Dont know how come the Mob made her an Aunt."

"They got tired of the other ^{soft} kind. They wanted the ~~Blowmen~~ Plowmen to see we even got seperate but equal Aunts," the poet said.

"Beat it, kid," the Banker said menacingly. Up North, they were alright. But down here, you had to be tough with them. The Mob would be watching you.

"Oughta make the Banker an Aunt," the poet said ringingly. He knew he was far out on ^{an} ~~clouds~~ edge, but he could no more resist it than a pup a post.

The Madam turned her head and looked him full in the face. She could see he was soaring.

"Go away," she said softly.

The poet shivered, but he had a protest.

"But the Banker's a foreigner! He aint one of us! He's only a foreign correspondent!"

"Kid," she said kindly, "he's still our kin. Go, ~~boy~~ boy."

And the poet who had survived the ^{cop-mob} ~~mob~~ because he knew the tigers from the kittens, sloped away soft as a snowflake. He stood ~~■~~ instead among the Uncles. The Uncles who were the conscience notes from ^{WHITEY} ~~cracker~~ to nigger ~~■~~ against tithing time. A ten-carat coin from a mint of penance to make any mobster punishment proof.

You racked the shotgun and put away the joy-rope and do-si-doed until dawn.

An Aunt, and an Uncle, was for buying more dawns.

"We've got a lot to do tomorrow," the Banker said, looking at his strap watch. "If Jim Bob catches that ^{lenny} ~~Ebony~~ coon, the Plowmen will be agitated. Our girls will have to work overtime

to cool their consciences."

"Banker, you're nothing but North trash," the Madam said angrily. "You'd pimp at your own mother's buryin'."

The Banker rolled gum in his cheek and said casually,

"What's a Wake among these folks got to do with us? You high yaller like that ~~born~~ ^{Felicity} Future gal? You passing or something?"

"I've got Mayflower blood, you immigrant. And Jim Bob wants us to Wake with them. Helps keep the peace with the Plowmen." Her eyes narrowed. "You reaching for that high yaller gal too?"

"Who? ~~born~~ ^{Felicity} Future?" He laughed. "I dont hanker to come up against Jim Bob. ~~■~~ What's more, I got a whole house to pick from." He added as an afterthought, "And got you too."

He had hurt her deliberately.

"Pimp," cried the Madam softly. "Pimp, pimp, pimp."

"Pimp and circumstance," said the Banker, feeling right as rain. He smiled at the whole Wake.

"Why do you want to make our niggers unhappy? Why do you want them to lose their catfish rights?" cried the Madam.

"You fraud. You Southern fraud. Fried Southern fraud. Fried Southern fraud and crackers," ^{said the Banker.}

~~The Banker~~ ^{He} was used to the Mob's gobbledegook that could doublethink them into a love-hate switchback deep inside a magnolia maze. But sometimes it made him mad.

"Why dont you try loving them like we do?" moaned the Madam.

"What has ~~Don~~ ^{born} the glory man ever done you?"

The Banker seized upon it. Maybe he could get her off the sorry-for-the-South routine.

"Where's the glory man? Where ~~Don~~ ^{Is Larry?} ~~Ebony?~~ ^{England,} he asked.

"He's a good boy. ~~Hex~~ ^{Pig Swamp} made one of them ~~Northern~~ colleges,"

she said. "I hope Jim Bob dont put him on the cutting table. They should do it to him quickly when ~~XXXX~~ he's caught."

The Banker laughed with a clash of teeth.

"You poor Mob slobs. You get me hung up. You'll bawl when the Mob castrates ^{larry Jones} ~~Dan~~ ^{larry} ~~Ebony~~ but you'd lend them the knife to do it with."

"And ~~Dan~~ would ask whether its got a good edge," the Madam said. "We're for each other, like life and death, us and our cullud folks."

The Banker giggled. Jim Bob had lawed the schoolhouse into a whorehouse; a love-chute to inform a Big Swampman of his equity. A sporting house full of newshands to give the filth-philosophy status in a Plowman's eye.

"That Jim Bob is one humourous guy," he said. "He joy-rides them plowboys deep into Niggertown so they get their lays in enemy territory. Pretty soon all the other ^{Big Swamp} ~~North~~ folks will think the score couldnt be so bad if the plowboys go there for lays."

To publish a mobster's everloving ways in a Plowman's eyes. To bring him to the cat house where he can hear the gumbo tunes. The foot-slapping, hand-clapping, homecoming proof of a downhome solidarity.

"We're one, Them and Us," the Madam said at the soft, fat chords coming out of the Wake.

The Banker looked around, his narrow shoulders hunched with hostility. They were all around him, rolling the big nigger eyes in a shopworn ecstasy that needed only a whiplash a day to tease the nap of any black who drew too near to joy. What would a man choose down here if they gave him a choice? To be a psychotic cracker? Or an ignorant nigger?

He was suddenly angry. "You know what? Your ^{larry Jones} ~~Dan~~ ~~Ebony~~

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must have been a boob. What did he come back for? They like punishment? What should it matter to him if a bunch of fishing-kids want to stage sleep-ins at the local whorehouse? He could have stayed ^{in Pig Swamp} up North. Could have hopped, skipped and jumped himself into a fortune. Or bopped some other bums in the Gardens for ^{a million dollars} ~~hundreds of~~ at a time."

The Madam shook her head angrily.

"I cant follow your upcountry lingo. What's this bit about hop, skip and jump?" ^{Larry Jones} ~~herph up with in Pig Swamp~~

He chuckled. ~~"Up North, Dan Ebony's folks~~ are making out okay. We name them champions of the world at ~~all sorts of~~ every goddam thing. Ball playing. Box fighting. Or even singing their stinking songs. Real heroes."

He stopped to shake with suppressed laughter ~~III~~ before he went on. "What I admire is how Jim Bob makes out that all them world champs are no more than thieves when they cross the line south. So down here, he calls them by their fraud names, such as Folk Singer, Boxer, Ball Player and the rest. One humourous guy, that Jim Bob."

Her punched in, baked out, blue eyes arguing beneath the skin at a score of stresses only a magnolia people knew, the Madam shook her head.

"You're wrong, Banker. Jim Bob dont hate them at all. He thinks all that gravy aint good for them, that's all."

"You tell that to the Plowmen ^{in Pig Swamp} ~~and the rest of the folk~~ up North. I'm a downhomer myself now."

"Watch your tongue, Banker," the Madam said angrily. "Jim Bob's got you too. He squeeze, and you got nothing dangling."

The Banker paled. He was in foreign territory. He had been sent in to liaison the Mob who kept the Plowmen unquestioning

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when they came to the whorehouse to haul a week's worry.

"I aint the one to do a crappy job," he said sullenly.

"This nation wasnt built on crap."

The Madam sighed. The ~~voices~~ voices were coming out like syrup now. Singing the Delta stuff only the lucky born could know. She looked pityingly at the Banker. Must be hell to be born and reared in the rootless north.

Paradise
~~Niggertown~~ "We're one, Banker. Them and us. Whether we live in or over in Mobtown. We all One down here."

The Banker nodded. Sober again. "Only in America," he said understandingly.

UWI Libraries

^{Knocked out street}
 The kids had stripped the lamp sockets with rocks ^{for a block chock full of blacks to bustle}
^{glory man grew tall} in the black. Dan Ebony walked with the clumping
^{heel and cocked elbow of a proud, night-time man.}

^{On the back of a relief check. He got no chance to do like he did, baby,} "We've got no time to wait, baby," whispered a kid in
 the shadows as he walked.

And Big Lemuel Jones ^{was hustling} who walked with Dan Ebony ^{could} like a
^{jumping nerve; saw} almost see the kid, ^{hard} face clean, ^{wishbone face} bone hard and unwaiting. Big Lemuel
^{He} didn't liked them nohow. ^{Big Lem was more for the oldtime ways.}

^{But he must} But with ^{So wanted} now a glory man named Dan Ebony going to a
 Wake. ^{But the kids had no time for Wakes, and Leroy.} To sing the gumbo his anger rejected for the hope his head
 accepted. ^{Lead off man} For even if he was head guy for a bunch of unwaiting
 fishing kids, it stood to reason that as a prudent man, he ^{must} would not
 relinquish the old ways. Folks wanted a Wake for his Mammy Ebony ^{That}
 the kids would have wanted him to ^{be love of} let it go. But if he hoped to ^{keep} take
^{Paradise South, folks on their feet facing up to Mobtown,} over ~~the~~ meaning, take over real solid, he had to go to
 Wakes, and sing the river ooze songs like a thousand other culluds
 in the Quarter.

"Man, the time's come when you ^{we} gotta choose," ^{said Lemuel} muttered ^{after}
 Big Lem when the kid's whisper ^{had} died.

"Choosing time was when I lined up with the kids," ^{Leroy} Dan
 Ebony said.

^{mobtown}
 "You wearing all of Nigsville 'round your neck. You're
 gonna be so slow that Cap'n Jim Bob Slocum wont have to come after
 you. He'll just be waiting for you."

"I dont aim to lose," said Dan Ebony.

"Pay attention to losing some, dad. If you lose smart,
 the dice will come around again. You'll get another shake," said Lem.

^{Lemuel was}
 Big Lem, a wide, lowslung winchman from the pier who

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LEROY

pointed like a hound dog down any ~~Dan Ebony~~ road. Pure in heart as a hatchet.

Kid

They walked softly now, nearing the Wake. ~~Spies~~ had brought the news that mobsmen were filtering across ~~Fourth of July~~ Avenue. ~~So~~ they sloped softly down the night's dark seam. Feeling lit up for any mobster to see. Feeling ^{their} ~~the~~ personal wrongness in the big Mob world. Feeling themselves the bruise on the brow of a Mob god. Feeling buffeted. Feeling lean with hate. Feeling foul, and handsome, and envied, and pitied. Feeling ^{like} ~~king of the~~ beasts and ^{yet} God's chillun. Feeling no respite from feeling. ~~But~~ Feeling the ^{GODAWFUL} ~~god~~ noble anger that made a man laugh softly as he buttoned up his gut.

Lenny

"It's my shake now," said ~~Ebony~~. "They're coming out fast and clicking. Guess I'm calling Jim Bob."

Big Lem ~~Jones~~ slapped angrily at a mosquito. He said, "This time they wont book you at the ^{station} station-house. ~~in Mobsville~~. They'll take you straight to the cutting-table."

So, walking in the honeysuckle evening, with the ol' peach blossoms floating down, ^{Lenny} ~~Dan Ebony~~ looked inside his head for the night Jim Bob had snuck the love-hook into him. The night Jim Bob had taken him to the station-house. The night all this had begun. It ~~had been~~ ^{inside} the station-house, ~~the~~

~~The~~ mobster at the desk had his head bowed over the big hanging-book ~~while~~ while he sniffed at the magnolia pinned to his shirt. He spoke without looking up.

"What you rook him for, Jim Bob?"

And Jim Bob Slocum, the High Potentate, standing behind ^{Lenny} ~~Dan Ebony~~ had said, "He struck back. ~~He~~ He was at ^{That nigger} ~~That Fella's~~ Wake."

^{Lenny} The eyes of the desk man jumped from the book and broke ~~Dan Ebony~~ in halves. Striking back. ~~And at That Fella's~~

"Struck back? No goddam sense," he said in disgust.

Jim Bob chuckled. "He's one of them what say they got ~~no~~ no time to lose. Says singing time's over. Says they got speeches to make."

puzzledly *leery*
The desk man was staring at Dan Ebony.

"But this is a big guy. He's an old guy. He aint no Snid?" *Kid.*

leery
Jim Bob leaned around to peer at Dan Ebony's face.

"I hear talk the kids got a thief from up North to front them. Could be this is it."

"This one full blooded?" the desk man asked. "He's got a nose, seems like. Wasnt so dark, maybe he could pass."

Dan Ebony was tough but he shivered a little. They killed you without mercy if they reckoned you were passing.

There was a ~~XXXXX~~ small silence. Then Jim Bob said mildly,

"Hell, you cant tell by his nose. Look at that Abie Linkun. Never looked a bit like a nigger. He fooled them fellows up North real thorough. He was a big speechifying man like some of these fellows down here. *Then there was the Kennedy fellows too.*"

The desk man grunted. He shook his head.

Jim Bob. *finally* *Abie*
"Sure, ~~Potentate~~. But we had ~~any~~ dead to rights. *Had 'em both.*"

"You cant fool the ole magnolia," Jim Bob said quietly.

"Go ahead, son. Lay it on."

Jim Bob knew that
But the monkey-lovin' din from up North these days, sometimes made a younger mobster slow in ordering a ~~big~~ *black* to the cutting-table, ~~Jim Bob knew~~. Even though they hardly ever killed one of them on the cutting-table. Just kept them from rutting to any good. But to make everything nice and legal, all the mobsters in the room would have to place a magnolia petal upon ~~Dan Ebony's name~~ *leery's name*. Nowadays you had to reckon on facing the ~~dam~~ *Goddam* Supreme Court for every ~~dam~~ nigger grievance. You had to be legal.

The boy on the desk hesitated. He was searching around in his mind for ways to fix ^{leaky} ~~Den Ebony's~~ waggon without ^{pulling the} ~~alarming the~~ ~~North~~ ^{attention of the out of town newspapers.}

Jim Bob, the handgun bobbing on his fat Swanee sitter, moved easily about the room. ^{he stopped to thoughtfully} ~~as he~~ plucked at his nose hairs to make fiery crosses which he extinguished with chaw juice. The young mobsters nowadays were double scairt as two racoons, since the dogooders up North ~~had~~ started acting up. But he was a lawman himself and he could figure them out. The ^{boy} ~~baby mobster~~ on the desk was a Questioner. He was one of the slit-eared punks in whom oldfashioned mobbery was being bred out. They had lousy memories. Every year, there were fewer of them turning up for Spittin' Day in Abie Linkun's Memorial Park.

Jim Bob, looking closely, could see signs of chickening. He harrumphed and hitched ~~in~~ his belt. He reckoned he would prod the ^{boy} ~~baby mobster~~ a bit. A push here, a little shove there, and you could bring them into line.

Jim Bob said, "Son, I'm wondering about you."

The boy's head jerked up. Fear flickered in his eyes.

"Son, you turned up at the last Spittin'?" Jim Bob asked.

The boy avoided his eyes. "No, ^{Jim Bob.} ~~Potentate~~. Reckon I was tuckered out from night riding."

"You ~~XXXX~~ cant be tuckered out enough, son. You got any of them that night?"

^{Jim Bob.} "We got a couple, ~~Potentate~~. One of them a girl."

Jim Bob leaned over until his fat belly was pressing the desk. "What did you do with the girl, son?"

The boy was still looking away.

"We let her go," he said in a low voice.

"Oh," Jim Bob said quietly.

"But we fixed the ^{fella!} ~~nig boy!~~" the ^{boy} ~~young mobster~~ cried.

"You forgot that Abie Linkun. You forgot what he did to us down here," Jim Bob said, too softly.

The boy spoke savagely. "I aint forgetting nothing! I'm as much Mob as you!"

"They call us crackers, son. ^{They'll marry} ~~MONKIES~~ WHITEY. ^{They're your sister's son.}

"I hate 'em all! Hate 'em much as you!"

Jim Bob felt like chuckling. That always brought them out. They wanted to get along with their own folks. They wouldn't want people to begin thinking they were any different.

"Sure, son." Jim Bob was ~~■~~ relentless, his eyes slit-shut. "Reckon you aint forgetting how that A bie Linkun killed the clause our folks hammered into that lousy Constitution dreamed up by them Philadelphia Reds couple hundred years ~~aback~~ aback."

"I aint forgetting a thing," the boy said sullenly.

"You go ahead and recite it, son. Tell ^{Jim Bob} your ~~High~~ Potentate, ole Jim Bob, what was the piece of law Abie Linkun tore. Show Jim Bob you ~~■~~ still with your folks down in this part of the country."

Jim Bob knew he had him scared now. He was scared folks might say he was deserting the old magnolia heritage. Jim Bob waited.

The boy mumbled, "'That whenever any form of government becomes destructive, it is the right of the people to abolish it.' That's the piece Abie Linkun ripped from the Constitution."

"And kicked us in the teeth for abolishing him," snarled Jim Bob. "Say it!"

The boy leaped up, his eyes shining.

"And kicked us in the teeth for abolishing him!" he shouted. "And burnt our cities! And primed them niggers so full of equality crap we had to bore holes in them to let the stuff out!"

"Sure," Jim Bob had said in the station-house that night.

"Sune. That's it, son. Now, you go ahead and place them magnolia petals on ^{larry} ~~Dan's~~ name. We love him; so we're gonna let out some of the crap they ~~XXXXX~~ primed him with."

And ^{larry} ~~Dan~~ ~~Ebony~~ saw the mother-love enter their eyes. For one of their cullud chilluns who had struck back. And he smelled the mother-love grow in the room, a compound of hot automobile engines and a hanging-tree and the tart arm-sweat of cracker ⁱⁿ men and women spinning rope/~~XXXXX~~ the courthouse square.

The ^{boy} ~~young mobster~~ at the desk/^{tore} ~~XXXXXX~~ a petal out of his posy and laid it on ^{larry} ~~Dan~~ ~~Ebony~~'s name. Then, one by one, the other ^{police} ~~mobsters~~ in the room stepped forward. The little mound of petals grew over ^{larry} ~~Dan~~ ~~Ebony's~~ name in the hanging-book. He stank with ~~XXXX~~ fear. They had thought he was shaking too much to run. There was an open path to the door. With his fists clubbed, ^{larry} ~~Ebony~~ beat a way to the open door.

Jim Bob called for the hounds but ^{larry} ~~Dan~~ ~~Ebony~~ didnt make for ~~the~~ Big Swamp. The fishing-kids hid their ~~lead-off-man~~ ^{boss} sweet as corn in a pone.

^{larry} ~~Dan~~ ~~Ebony~~ stopped remembering and put his mind back into Delta street. They could hear the singing at the ~~Wake~~. The folks sang deep about Jericho. The beat was solid and maybe the walls would fall.

^{Google} "The walls wont fall," ~~Ebony~~ said.
"Its your idea. You dont have to go to the Wake," Lem said.
"Maybe they'll have a fish fry. I'm hungry."
"A cullud hero cant afford to be full. He got to keep light. For running."

"You think they'll have a fish fry?"

"They dont have fish frys no more. You know that," Lem said bitterly. "Your Snics showed up with their tiny knives and said, 'Lets have no more fish frys, huh? Let's have no more singing, either.'"

"I'll bet Jim Bob would love it if you started having fish frys again. He likes all the old Southern traditions."

"How come the fishing-kids/^{didnt} go for their knives when the folks started singing this evening?" Big Lem asked suddenly.
^{larry} Dan Ebony laughed softly. "Its the kids idea. ^{since I invited o-fing,} They reckon Jim Bob will show up quicker if we carry on the old Southern tradition."

Lem ~~Jones~~ said coldly, "I'm gonna put it all on your tombstone. I'm gonna write how you left us to be a college man up North. And how the fool ideas hit you hard up there so you ~~joined~~ ^{had} ~~the Organisation.~~ ^{to} And how you come back down here when you heard about the kids and their fight — their dam' fool fight for sleeping-in rights at the whorehouse. Then I'm gonna write how you ended up, back of Jim Bob's automobile, bouncing along like a sack of wheat."

"You know you cant write. Jim Bob ^{turned your school into a cat house,} ~~didnt allow you to go~~ ^{larry} to school," Dan Ebony said. He could see it raking Big Lem. That one hurt.

But ~~Big~~ Lemuel ~~Jones~~ cradled it in his oldtime magnolia ~~land~~ soul that had grown so big forgiving a Mob, there was room for this and more.

"Hit me again, ~~back,~~" he said. "I'm still gonna ~~hang~~ hang to your heel like my old coon dog. To save your fool neck from Jim Bob."

"Maybe Jim Bob's through chasing me. Maybe he wont show up at all."

"Why'd you think he's quit? He done rated you a thief, now. You're down in the hanging-book as College Man."

^{Larry} Dan Ebony halted. He peered at ^{B. J.} ~~the~~ Lem ~~Jones~~.

"Where do you get all that stuff?" ~~He~~ ~~replied~~.

"You got books and big brains up North. Down here, we got pores and smell."

A nightengale hustled a song in a slanting rush down the molasses air. And Lemuel whistled easily back. Paying for his hope like any seasoned downhome boy who knew his due date was in the pocket of any ~~robber~~ ^{white man}.

"What else do you get from your pores?" ^{he} ~~he~~ ^{asked} ~~asked~~.

"You were born down here but you been away too long," Lem said. "Listen. You remember the boll weevil ~~mayan~~ ^{listen, brother.} game? ~~Let me remind~~ you. Down here, most days is boll weevil days. Like Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. ~~All boll weevil days.~~"

"What about the other days?"

"The rest is magnolia days."

"Why ~~the~~ boll weevil?"

^{Because} ~~At~~ the Mob pin boll weevils on their shirts, ^{brother,} to show us that them days are working days. We aint visible on working days. We just the machine part."

^{Larry asked} "Yeah. I remember," ~~he~~ ^{he} ~~asked~~ ^{asked} softly. "And the magnolia days?"

"Cut for the ~~high~~ ~~wood~~ ^{is big low land.} tall wood on the magnolia days when the Mob warms up with love for you, Boy, then you become real visible."

"Get me ~~mad~~ some more," ~~he~~ ^{he} ~~said~~ ^{said}. "Tell me about the other days." "Yeah, man." ^{Softer like.} Thinking of the love ^{act} ~~in~~ ^{in the acting} eyes of the white Mob as they came dragging the joy-ropes. ^{B. J. Lem said,} now gone high on it's "Friday and Saturday's banking days, Deposit days, when the

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Flowers come in. To deposit their cash and get a love ~~with~~ voucher saying mobbery's working real fine ^{with us blacks} in the ~~country~~ land. They even get laid in our territory. We're a bedroom suburb of Mobtown. Ha ha.

"And on Sundays we ought to ~~pr~~ pray to a good grey God, ^{half white,} ~~That's how it ought to be.~~ half black,

Only they wont let us. Maybe grey is for ~~the~~ atheists. They wouldnt want their own cullud folk to be anything dirty as an atheist. So come Sundays, they split God down the middle and give us ~~the~~ the black half. ~~Den Ebony said.~~

"Sunday, dad? You know why they lock us out of their church on Sundays? 'Cause cullud folk aint supposed to see a ^{cracker} ~~mobster~~ stooping so low. No, sir. Aint for us to see a ^{WHITEY} ~~mobster~~ falling on his knees. He sees us watching him, he would break our heads with the collection plate. So they lock us out. Eleven a.m. Sundays is the most prejudiced hour of the week."

^{LeRoy almost} ~~Den Ebony~~ ^{grinned} ~~grinned~~ but he worked his way out of it. He remembered the generations of ancestral losers who had cut their own jugulars with the Big Grin. Who had died of sunstroke from the Bared Head.

They were walking again, but cautiously. Ole Jim Bob Salocum was a mean white hunter. He would poison a water hole ^{and have} ~~with~~ a ^{pass} ~~lot~~ of mobsters waiting for a poor cullud ^{fella} ~~man~~ to show.

A voice called softly, "College Man?"

The two dropped in midstride, their heads turning to locate the peril.

^{brother.} "Relax, ~~big~~. Its me, the Boxer."

He was very successful. ~~He lived up there where~~ He was wealthy and sought after for his trade. But ^{down} in magnolia land, ~~in~~ ~~Paradise~~ ^{Yankee} he was on the hanging-books as a thief who had hoodwinked the idiots. ^{LeRoy} ~~and~~ ^{him} ~~he~~ was a hardworking man in the oldtime way. In the devious Organisation

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way seeking its gambit in ^{a Mob} a Supreme Court. Wiel ^{ding} paper knives
against ~~hardened hoods~~ whose love for ^a the dead downhome boy
purged them of sin. ^{So} they were whiter than magnolia.

"Boxer," ^{leeroy} ~~Dan~~ ~~leeroy~~ said. A man coughed a yard to the
right. Dan asked sharply, "Who's with you?"

^{"Soul"} ~~"Singer"~~ ^{cougher} the ~~man~~ said. He was a rough, uneasy,
Mob-scarred guy who should have left magnolia land before the
Mob became acquainted with his talent / and ^{took to parting} ~~took to parting~~ him from
such a handicap.

"Let the Organisation handle it, man," ^{Soul} ~~Blues~~ Singer said.
"Your kids are okay, but hasty."

Big Lemuel ~~leeroy~~ gulped. He didnt like ~~it~~ with these ^{freiges}
~~eyes~~ showing in Jim Bob's town.

"Man, how come you thieves cluttering up the highway
like this?" Lem said ^{leeroy}. "You got engagements in the South? Jim
Bob's gonna pay good Mob money to see you fight, Boxer? Or to
hear you working the gutbucket, ^{Soul} ~~leeroy~~ Singer? What you doing out
here calling ^{leeroy} ~~Daniel~~ by his hanging-name, ^{College Man} loud as a bull 'gator
in season? ^{leeroy} You want Jim Bob to joy-day him?"

220 ^{Soul} "The kids are effective," ~~Dan~~ ~~leeroy~~ said, answering
~~Blues~~ Singer. "What ~~the hell~~ does the Organisation care so long
as the kids are effective?"

His head turning, ^{leeroy} ~~like an animal~~, Big Lem, with tongue
and skin, cased the street for the Mob. A big, black bird in whom
a hundred years of club and whip had built ~~in~~ a hairline commo-
tion to Mob-smells and Mob-sounds. ~~He would race for cover at~~
~~the snap of an arm.~~

"No. The Organisation wants more than that," ^{said} ~~leeroy~~
Big Lem. "They send down bigshots like Boxer and ^{Soul} ~~Blues~~ Singer
whoaint nothing but thieves to the Mob. A bunch of frauds. You

dont raise 'taters or rub down horses. You run and jump ^{for money, you} and play ball. ^{for money.} You aint true culluds. To the Mob's way of thinking, When Jim Bob learns you-all been down here, all our asses gonna start fryin'."

^{Soul}
"You really scared jumping," ~~Blues~~ Singer jeered.

"You boys aint gonna win ~~this game~~ by yourselves down here," the Boxer said. "You know that? Its gotta be won ^{in the Supreme Court.} up North. ~~the kids doing down here aint got no dignity.~~ There aint even a lawyer in the bunch. ^{of you.} You got any lawyers with them kids?"

^{Soul}
"Got no dignity," ~~Blues~~ Singer said. "Like having a meal in a crib. The whores just aint geared to provide meals."

^{They got weapons}
"The kids are geared the best way possible," ^{up to here with} ~~Den Ebony~~ said, ~~He was a little sick of some of these law office clowns.~~

~~"They arent afraid to use their hands against the Mob."~~

^{small} There was a ^{one} little pause ^{out of four guys to swallow} at the North fellows ~~swallowed~~ their anger. They didnt cotton to violence.

^{Soul}
"How many bullets you think it will take the Mob to finish off the goddam Snics?" ~~Blues~~ Singer asked angrily.

^{Big Jim Bob} "More than ~~the Mob's~~ got," ^{Big lem} ~~Ebony~~ said. "The Mob's finished if they shoot these kids. Folks up ^{your way} North would roll down on them and Jim Bob knows it."

^{don't}
"College Man, ~~aint~~ you know ~~the~~ that Jim Bob is smarter'n a whelp fox? He'll find a way to rook them kids. Somebody's gonna make a slip and then Jim Bob will climb all over you. Take it slower and easier our way. In five-ten years, we'll have it licked. We'd even get your little guys passes for Jim Bob's whorehouse."

^{lem}
"The kids dont want passes. They want to tear down the door," ~~Den Ebony~~ said wearily.

"Sure. When a guy's outside facin' a locked door long enough, he's liable to go crazy after a while. All them Snics

gone ~~crazy~~ crazy."

"No crazier than the folks who lock themselves in," ~~Big~~ ^{Lem} ~~Leony~~ ^{Leony} said.

"Them's crazy too," Big Lem ~~Jones~~ ^{Leony} eagerly agreed. "Jim Bob's protecting us from all them Mob folk what lock themselves in. That's why he locks us out."

^{Lem} ~~Leony~~ knew Big Lem was laughing at the foreigners, ~~he~~ ^{he} figured Lem was ready to be rid of the ~~North fellows~~.

^{Lem's a longshoreman. He's} ^{he introduced Lem} ~~"Big Lem's~~ ^a ~~joker,"~~ ~~Leony~~ explained to the fellows. "He goes to Wakes and rolls his eyes and laughs with a bunch of teeth. You want to hear him say Shenandoah. Ask him to say Shenandoah."

"Say Shenandoah," the Boxer said cautiously.

"Shenandoah," Big Lem said.

"See?" ^{Lem} ~~Leony~~ said. "He sings it so richly you could shovel it. Okay fellows. ~~When you go back North,~~ ^{You go back and} tell the Organisation I produced the biggest Wake since the one for Abe Linkun. Tell them I got the kids in there ^{doing it} in the old fashioned way. And I also got the older ones too. Big Lem's kind. Tell the Organisation that, one way or another, we'll win."

And he led ~~Big~~ ^{the} Lem up ~~the~~ ^{him} street, big elbowing the dark out of his way. And when Lem ~~asked~~ ^{asked} how the hell he hoped to win by bucking every throw, he said maybe he ~~Big Leony~~ ^{mob} wouldn't win, but he would hustle the ~~scrubbed face~~ kids into the front pews for Passion Week.

He said it didn't matter ^{and the uneasy} how he felt the pain ^{black} and being ^{black} ~~black~~ ^{glory} ~~cast~~ from the womb. But he took the ~~uneasy~~ ^{glory} glory of a nigger ~~glory man~~ and held it under his cotton candy-loving tongue. ^{"You talk too much and you'll shoot Jim Bob you're connected, boy,"} ^{"Loosen up your tongue, buddy."} Big Lem said. ^{"Jim Bob's} gonna be at the Wake ready to conduct the singin' lessons."

~~He chuckled at Big Lem. Big Lem was always good for a~~

Oh yeah,

~~though~~ But it was ~~from~~ ~~that~~ Jim Bob had let it be known that talking was out for a downhome ~~mayx~~ cullud boy.,

A love-child born and reared in a ^{LAND} home of 'possum and catfish plenty, ought not to do anything but sing, Jim Bob had let it be known. *He sang a small snatch and pumped Big Lem playfully in the gut.*

~~"You'd have gone back North is~~ ^{if I had} I hadn't loused up things by running into you the day of Abie Linkun's Wake," Lem grumbled.

"Yeah. Memorial Day. Mob folk call it Spittin' Day." ^{Leroy said.} Guess I won't ever forget it," ~~Dan Ebony~~ ^{he} said slowly. ^{FUTURA}

"Sure. Lots to remember. The gal, ~~she~~, for one. She and you and Jim Bob Slocum. Boy, what a hot triangle. Hee hee."

~~Tough.~~ ^{Lem} Sure, ~~Dan Ebony~~ thought bitterly. ^{FUTURA} ~~The high galler, who had~~ ^{met} ~~she'd put~~ Joel in heat.

~~He had met her the day they commemorated Abie Linkun's~~ ^{Leroy said to himself. Met her on that warm} Wake, ~~It had been a~~ fine day. All of ~~Delta~~ ^{Paradise} street should have been sitting out. For who would stay indoors the baking little cabins on a fine day that ~~every free guy~~ ^{could be} bought in gulps of brackish bayou breeze? But ~~the Mob~~ ^{Jim Bob} had unpinned the boll weevil and were wearing the magnolia instead. ^{and Paradise} ~~And Delta~~ street cowered behind closed doors. Jim Bob said no commemoration this year.

^{Leroy} ~~Dan~~ had met Big Lem easing fast and watchful down ~~Wason~~ the street.

^{Leroy out of the alley.} "Hi," said ~~Dan Ebony~~ from the doorway of a fry fish shop. Big Lem leaped ~~high in the air and jumped~~ for cover.

~~Then~~ ^{he} edged up to Dan. ^{He} said, like he was taking him apart,

"You think that on a magnolia day, folks stand in doorways and call 'Hi'? Looky here." He rapped on the tightly shut ^{at their backs.} door of ~~the shop~~. "You think them folks inside ^{don't hear no?} would open up?"

This is one day you shack in, and stay ^{College Man!} "Where are you going so fast, brotha?" ^{Leroy asked politely.} "Why don't you take your own advice?" Ebony asked. ^{So what you} ~~"So up and at home"~~ ^{Brother, I recommend}

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~~Futura~~

"Going to see ~~Torch~~. She sent for me."

~~Futura?~~

"Who's ~~Torch~~? Your woman?"

Big Lem looked curiously at him.

~~Torch~~ Futura? You kidding?"

"Am I supposed to be?"

"You'd better be. Jim Bob's got his eye on that one."

~~Carry~~
~~Dan Ebony~~ stared at the big lonshoreman. "Mean to tell me you're going over to Mobtown on a magnolia day? You going to see ~~a white~~ ^{a white} woman on a magnolia day?"

Lem ~~Leaves~~ chuckled.

~~really away.~~

"Boy, you're ~~way off~~. ~~Torch~~ Futura aint nothin'. She's half breed. She lives just back of Fourth of July Avenue."

"Then what makes Jim Bob so big there? He passing for cullud?"

Big Lem didnt laugh.

~~stacked~~

"She's ~~built~~ pretty good for one thing. ~~Real stacked.~~ And another thing. Jim Bob declares she was one time Abie Linkun's ~~WM~~ woman."

to ~~Carry~~

"She'd have to be pretty old ~~to~~ be that," ~~Dan Ebony~~ said dryly.

Big Lem waved his hand. "You know Jim Bob. He got ideas."

"Then because she's well stacked, you risk your whatnot?"

~~Big~~ Lem looked pityingly at him.

~~Carry, when~~

"Listen, ~~Daniel~~. ~~When~~ ~~Torch~~ Futura calls you, you just turn up. You always hoping that this time she'll come through."

~~Carry~~

~~Dan Ebony~~ shook his head. "I still dont get it. You taking all these risks for a piece."

Big Lem looked away. "It aint that only. She's set on commemorating, even although Jim Bob says no Wake for Abie Linkun this year."

"So you will help her to set it up?"

Big Lem laughed genuinely.

"I'm not that crazy. I'm going to try talking her out of it. ~~I~~ I aint so concerned about no future with ~~Torch~~ ^{Helicity.} ~~future.~~"

And the germ of Mob-bucking that ~~the~~ ^{Three years of College} ~~birth~~ had placed in him, took real root in ~~Den Ebony~~ ^{larry}. He took a step into the street. He looked up at all ~~the~~ that sunshine, the freedom train rolled ^{ing} inside his head. It whistled for a crossing and the wheels kept turning in his head.

"~~TAKE~~ ^{to} ~~show me where~~ ^(FOUR) ~~this~~ ^{Helicity} ~~Torch~~ ~~lives~~," he said, straddling his big pushing legs.

Big Lem looked thoughtfully at him.

"You gonna make a big corpse. We got no pine boards to fit you," he said.

And that was the night Jim Bob caught him and took him to the station-house.

They came to the corner near the old Jew shop. Folks sang ripely at the Wake for ~~Jim Bob~~ ^{Jim Bob's} ~~mammy~~ ^{mammy}. They squatted on their haunches in the dark. In the soft night dark of the honeysuckle night with the peach blossoms floating down. Two of a race, pitching horseshoes at doom. Walking the path of the tiger.

Fear of the Mob piled thickly, suddenly. ^{Jim Bob,}

"He's real rugged, that ~~High Potentate~~," Lem said softly.

"Jim Bob," Daniel said, feeling him close. "Jim Bob

Slocum."

Jim Bob was a tubby man, not tall but thick. He waddled into the yard at Delta street. He showed the heat. He wiped his neck with a sweat balled handkerchief. He wore the faded denim that was Mob uniform. In his old felt hat, he wore the Mob insignia of a burning cross with the spiralling motto

Love Conquers All.

The poet, his mouth agape, saw Jim Bob. The poet dug his own ribs with his elbow.

"Look, Poet, Jim Bob!" ^{The Poet} ~~he~~ cried to himself.

Jim Bob had warm, friendly eyes for all the true folk around him. They were singing-folk. Soon, they would give him ~~leave the College Man.~~
~~Den Ebony~~. The singing had stumbled when he came in, but now it was righting itself. He beat a bar with his club and nodded at a few Aunts and Uncles. He stood in the old at-ease position of the Mob, legs apart and arms akimbo. He had the tingle at his nape and the loose readiness in his forearm. He reckoned that sometime later, he would have to swing. His pores had picked up some uppity ones.

He could feel the tease of it along his nerves. Some uppity ~~ones~~ ^{ones} were in the yard. He had felt the impact here and there. All had not given way, as they should, when they saw he was wearing the magnolia. He guessed that since ^{The College Man} ~~Den Ebony~~ had been bullfinangling the Mob, ^{The} ~~Delta~~ street was not as scary as it used to be. He eyed the yard and saw the Snics. They were moving softly around. Jim Bob smiled fool-happy again. He was looking forward to the kids. The day would come when the pressure from ^{above} ~~up North~~ would ease, and he could send in some mobsmen after them. Something would ^{happen} ~~click in~~ for the Mob. Something fine enough for

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the law enforcers to give the Mob the legality they needed. Legal to tag a stag. To burn a coon.

"Something will manouevre real soon," Jim Bob said.

He looked around for the only true man in ~~Belta~~^{Paradise} street, but Joel the Fool was not showing. Jim Bob knew he would be somewhere in the dark streets, tending his cans. He was proud of Joel. Long ago when Joel had been first down from college, the Mob had been forced to crush in his head a little. But he had healed right nicely. Now he was better than ever.

"It aint possible for outsiders to understand," Jim Bob said, the love-law swinging violently in his gut against the sophistry and bigotry in the North where they were full of the irrefragable horseshit the nigger-lovers blanked out their eye sockets with.

It wasnt possible for them to understand that the way you licked this land was to make it exclusive. You slapped together a system and watched it cohere and work at taking the sting out of defeat. And if you chopped a few to prove it, you couldnt buy without spending.

The warmth in the baby blue eyes iced over again as his mind ~~mind~~ caught in the yard. It wasnt only the fishing-kids with their sleeping-in bullshit who were getting uppity. He could feel the thing coming from others too. He looked over at the Madam and the Banker. He frowned slightly that they had brought the whores. He knew the Madam had standing orders to turn up at Wakes. To state for a Plowman, their downhome solidarity. But this would have to be reviewed. You took them too close to these professional weepers and before you knew it, the tears had got to them. Gone, would be all that fine Mob upbringing and they were ready to go cracking to

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their knees. Bawling out their guilt louder than a swamp hog caught in the reeds.

~~Behind the street~~
Jim Bob felt the hate for ~~the street~~ prowling around inside and that was absolutely no good. He swore at the hate, for he wanted to make the system work. When the system was going sweetly, you loved them mostly. Except for the one or two for whom you were snaking ~~out~~ rope. The system gave you room to love the others as you single-tracked the lone, fleeing bastard. But there were times like now, when the hate in him widened. And that was absolutely no good.

So Jim Bob looked around the yard and told them that he loved them all. And that all he wanted for now was ~~the College Man~~. He twisted his head so he could smell the magnolia pinned to his shirt. His smile immediately grew warm again. He smiled at the Poet and broke into a chuckle as the lonesome singer shuddered.

The Poet was jumpy. He looked irritably away from Jim Bob and said to himself, "You think ~~the College Man~~ will come? You think he'll be a dam' fool?"

Then he ran around to face himself.

"Indubitably," he replied.

He rested from foot to foot and worriedly remembered the ~~last~~ ^{Memorial Day} Wake for Abie Linkun. That had been ~~dinner~~ ^{soul food} in your belly. An ice cream cone a house big. He had whooped at the way ~~then~~ ^{reliving} had taken the Wake to the edge of ~~the~~ Big Swamp so that the Plowmen had a flea in their ear from the rocking slam of the dark brown flood wailing out a short change deal. He didnt know whether Jim Bob would take ~~the College Man~~ ^{the College Man} tonight. It would be a halfway deal if he did. The other half would come. Jim Bob wasnt granite. Maybe one

of the kids on the beach would reach him a day soon. The kids were carrying bone-hard faces these days. One of them would ^{reach Jim Bob.} ~~bust out~~. The Poet thought of Little Angie the fishing-kid and shuddered.

"You got no grip on yourself, Poet. You ^{re} loose as money in a pimp's pocket," Little Angie said behind him.

He turned to face Little Angie.

Angie, the baby turned savage because they had pulled the teats from between his teeth. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ He was fourteen and on the hunt for cunt. A guy with a shroud already.

"I'm a lone singer forced to play star and listener," the Poet said with dignity. "Leave me be, Angie."
"You're a ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ twat. If you had stones you'd be in the Say-Noes," Angie said.

"When you're old as me — "

"You're an old twat," Angie said.

"^{He College Man} ~~Den~~ ^{Den} aint coming tonight," the poet said, ~~MM~~ desperately trying to turn Little Angie.

"^{de} ~~Den~~ ^{Nels} will come. ~~Den's~~ a good guy. He's tougher than Jim Bob Slocum."

"A man's only as tough as his weaknesses," the Poet said quickly. "His flaws will find him out."

"Flowers? What flowers? His name's Jim Bob, stupid. We wouldnt have you in the Snics if you came on bended knees."

"Jim Bob's a dirty fighter. ^{any} ~~Deniel~~ will have to be dirtier, which I doubt," the Poet said, his head sunk between his shoulders, waiting to dispute himself if Little Angie needed it that way.

"Jim Bob's crazy mad cause we aint singing at the Wake," Little Angie grinned. "Look at him go crazy mad."

The Poet kept his head discreetly away from jim Bob.

"A smart man sings so his enemies hear only the tune, not the words. Folk are very smart in this town," the poet said.

evil-eyed
Little Angie/~~looked at~~ him as he played with his knife.

"We're through with singing, Poet. Dont tell ~~her~~ ^{McGeehan}, but we mostly through with talking too. We're looking for some action."

One foot hooked behind him as his indecent, double dealing eyes explored the crowd with steady hope, the Poet nodded. He was bored but he prudently didnt show it. He grinned carefully as Little Angie walked away, still ~~eyeing~~ ^{bad} eyeing him. ^{I said to Poet to himself:} It ~~was~~ no use telling Little Angie that it ~~wasnt~~ ^{isnt} toughness that counted ~~so~~ so much as how you walk ~~all~~ the public fields. [How you turned the traps into comfort stations. [How you split down the enemy for kindling. Them and ~~Say-No-I-Cant-See~~ their untidy little cry of Say-No-I-Cant-See. As if the goddam country owed them eyes. If you couldnt see you cut down timber until up ahead was clear.

But the poet didnt like how his thoughts were going.

Hastily he shifted gear. For ~~one~~ ^{an} edge of his mind was saying that maybe ~~the kids~~ ^{him} looked on ~~him~~ as timber.

The poet thought of himself as being loyal to ~~Delta street~~ ^{Paradise} as anybody else. He would never impugn the memory of Abie Linkun, even though ~~the grand old~~ ^{The Fella} ~~one~~ had left them to hold down the Mob, made bristly as hog meat by his own bitter feud. But what if ~~he~~ ^a ~~was~~ ^{guy} in a Mob ~~station~~ ^{precinct}-house, being weighed and measured for a joydrag at the end of a towrope behind a mobster's automobile? Then a poor downhome boy should be forgiven if he repudiated A bie Linkun to escape that ole joyrope.

"Goddammit," cried the poet, dashing an angry tear, "to escape that old joyrope, a fellow would even repudiate ~~her~~ ^{Felicit} Future for the flagrante delicto angle of her thighs astraddle a thousand year

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old bald cypress the day of Abie Linkun's Wake. ^{She} ~~She~~ had held the Wake near the Plowman's road. Near the road of dreams which a Plowman's fears hardened into the reality of a mink coat guarded by a ^{dollar} ~~billion~~/bomb. It was the evening the three had met, Jim Bob, ~~the College Man~~ ^{the College Man} and ~~Felicia~~ ^{Felicia} ~~Torch~~.

The Poet, who was now ~~looking~~ searching for a place to scratch his back, slipped in and out of the crowd. He kept away from Jim Bob and the kid-fishers. He was aware ~~that~~ ^{and} that an explosion would come ~~but~~ ^{and} he wanted no part of it. He was saving himself for ~~Torch~~ ^{Felicia}.

He found the edge of the outhouse. Revolving slowly, he delicately scratched his shoulder blades as he remembered how ~~Torch~~ ^{Felicia} had led the Wake. Astride a thousand year old bald cypress. She was made for more than a bald cypress. With a hard young sigh, he reflected that by the vault of her thighs connecting a vigilance in bed, she was no mate for a Poet. It took a hero to jockey such a mare. Both ~~Jim Bob~~ ^{the College Man} and ~~Dan Ebony~~ ached for the wide-hipped sweetness.

And the Poet, with a smash of his back against the outhouse, vowed that he would be in at the end. To kick in the face of the loser.

saw the college race and instant ~~ecstasy~~ *broke him like a sweet*
 Jim Bob and Dan Ebony saw each other instantly. *their eyes* ~~locked~~ *locked*
 for a ~~time~~ *time*. Jim Bob let loose a ~~rebel yell~~ *rebel yell*. It brought *Ne groaned and*
 his mobsmen running. They came *pounding* ~~running~~ *like well drilled ponies* ~~in his love for the black~~ *eye balls*
 out of every lanes and alleys, *all the* ~~They came~~ *pounding in to collect the* ~~muscles~~
 bastard for whom a blood sport had been mounted. *staining,*

born "Daniel!" bawled Jim Bob, "we want you, boy!"
 shouted

"Ambush!" ~~yelled~~ *Big Lemuel* ~~swinging~~ *swinging* ragingly.

"White man!"

"The Mob!" whispered the old defeated ones, the hounded

ones, the shortchanged, shortlived, hardluck ones running with

codpiece in hand like money-proud merchants fleeing an act of God.

"They're crowd town!" ~~moaned the~~

The badgered, bullied, beaten ones fleeing the magnolia God's Mob.

"Ambush!" yelled Big Lem again, looking around for the

~~Delta street~~ kids.

Larry and Lem And a ripple of kids ringed Dan Ebony and Big Lem. Ringed

them as confidently as if there had never been *two* hundred years of

whip and rope ~~misery and fear~~

As if they had never *met* ~~known~~ the non-hope *to* which

exploded their golden dreams. *They cold-eyed the Mob. And their*

bold stand *demanded* ~~called~~ a muster. *stare down* ~~The longshoremen~~ *bale loaders,* went in, and the *river barge men*

The fieldhands, ~~and~~ the roundhouse crews and even some *teachers, a few doctors, dentists and* houseboys,

weeping their go-come asses off but shamed into standing by the

kids.

to a cold blue slit

Jim Bob squeezed his eyes ~~back~~ *back* and looked at the

unbelievable. They were standing up to the Mob. Disputing *The* ~~Southern~~

law. The fix from up North was in alright. The Potomac was flowing

Red. These poor stupid *blacks* ~~niggers~~ would destroy themselves for a bunch

of upcountry Communists. And so Jim Bob swore in a deadly quiet

that he would save *his loved ones* ~~Delta street~~ from sin. He hefted his club and *unselfishly, he vowed at whatever risk to*

keep his hometown black
conscious from contamination.

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WHIP HEADS his beloved.
waded in to ~~bash some skulls~~ among those ~~whom he loved~~.

BIG LEM

Big Lem fought among the ^{bale loaders} ~~longshoremen~~. He had manouvred so that ^{larry} ~~Daniel~~ was near to him. Big Lem hooked and ^{smashed} ~~smacked~~ his fists and elbows in magnolia flesh. Big Lem had no passion in it. He was a machine at work for ^{larry} ~~Dan~~ ~~Abney~~. Why he was, Big Lem wasnt sure. He just thought it a lousy dirty ^{waste} ~~stunt~~ that a college guy like ^{larry} ~~Daniel~~ should spin at the end of a joyrope handled by some ignorant poh white trash. ~~MM~~ He Big Lem was a nothing much, just a big scared downhome boy spending his nickel the best way he knew. But ^{larry} ~~Daniel~~ had sense in his head. The Mob had spilled Joel's. He just hoped to Christ they wouldnt get to ^{larry} ~~Daniel's~~. He forearmed a mobster on the mouth and felt teeth break.

UNCLE MOSE

Preachin' Uncle Mose had his fists tucked under ^{the tail of} ~~his~~ frock coat but everytime a mobster reeled he knocked them ^{joyfully} ~~together~~. Uncle Mose sat in the tents of peace and marvelled at the rightness of war. He had watched the creation of the children of violence. The kids on the beach were the young tribesmen of Israel going up against the goddam Philistines. They wanted the right to lay-in at the whorehouse. It wasnt as if they would learn less than by standing up a barrowgirl any moondark night, but to keep them from getting it where they wanted to, this time in Jim Bob's schoolhouse, was enough to put a seraph up, good and hard.

Uncle Mose looked over at the Madam. Whatever Jim Bob would make her, the Madam's love for magnolia land was of so rich a tapestry it defeated the naked eye of any but a downhomer. For

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while the battle between cracker and culluds was getting bloodier, she had kept the Wake going with such seasonal tunes as Look Away, Dixie Land. And right now the girls were blatting out in their bawdy house clef America the Beautiful. The little ~~XXXXXX~~ hustlers rode so highfooted, you heard them above the fists and the boots and the cries of agony. Ha ha-ing among the trumpets, ~~XXXXX~~ Preachin' Uncle Mose said to himself.

THE POET

The gore and the sweat and the pain, mused the poet, his hard Delta street eyes gentling at the massacre. Joel would be idiotically happy when his report showed that the Mob had used their fists instead of the clubs. Clubs were no good for close-up work. Clubs were for animals, Joel had said with curious insistence. Joel was an advocate of infighting. The gut ripping, groin smashing, body to body kind. Even Jim Bob had now found the club useless and was using his hands. The poet hoped Jim Bob would get through the ring of fishing kids, to ^{Leary} ~~Dan Ebony~~. One of them would be killed and he didnt care the hell whom. He had seen ^{Felicity} ~~Leary~~ through the keyhole. The thighs and the belly and the mound of silky hair. Folks said her pa had been a ^{plantation owner} ~~metaman~~ and her ma a ^{housemaid} ~~barrowgirl~~. All he knew ~~that~~ was that the procreation had been a swinging success. His back against the outhouse, the poet watched ~~Dan Ebony~~ ^{Leary}

^{Leary}
~~DAN EBONY~~

He had put the brave kids behind him for the weight of the mobsters was beginning to tell. But even ^{so, he could sense that the whiteys} ~~if the Mob were pressing,~~ ^{weary} ~~they~~ were ~~edgy~~ too. They werent used to guys who fought back. He ripped a ^{Right} ~~blow~~ to a red head's ^{gut} ~~belly~~ and watched ~~XXXXXX~~

the pain twist ~~twist~~ his face. The ~~mob~~ ^{mobster whites} wanted it to be over quickly.

The rebel yells had ceased. Now they only grunted and cursed.

A strong one bulled in on ~~Dan Ebony~~ ^{berry}. He was huge, a slow mover, an executioner. He would be a terror in the moonless nights when the crosses burned. He had creative hands, scrubbed pink, to squeeze the ultimate ululation from the trussed up, broken mockery they dragged back to town at the tailgate. Bumping it behind the auto as they crossed over Fourth of July Avenue into ~~Smokesville~~ ^{Smokesville} ~~paradise~~ ^{paradise}.

The executioner smiled at ~~Ebony~~ ^{berry}, calling him an obscene name while he raised his gifted hands. But ~~Ebony~~ ^{berry} got in while his arms were up and destroyed him with a knee.

Then he heard Big Lem's voice batter with power,

"Little Angie — NO!"

He ~~swished~~ ^{up in Pig Swamp} and saw the twinkle in the kid's hand. It scared him into a sweat.

The Organisation ^{Swamp} was strongly against killing. For while the North was committed to ~~Kokke~~ ^{town} hobble the Mob with new, ~~anti-violence~~ ^{anti-violence} laws, nobody could expect them to hold back Jim Bob's men if the ~~blacks in~~ ^{blacks in} ~~Delta street people~~ ^{Paradise} took to killing. The Mob could then shoot with impunity. And they had the guns.

So ~~Dan Ebony~~ ^{berry} chopped a way through to Little Angie and yelled that the kids should make for the beach. With ~~Big~~ ^{bale-loads} Lem and ~~Uncle~~ ^{Uncle} Amos the blacksmith and the ~~longshoremen~~ ^{longshoremen} holding back the Mob, the kids slid into Delta street. And out there they broke up and sank out of sight.

BREAK

But a real dedicated ~~young~~ ^{white man} ~~cracker~~ ^{blacks} who couldn't believe it was true that the ~~blacks~~ ^{blacks} had fought back, followed the kids into ~~Delta~~ ^{the} street. Followed the sound of their feet slapping softly the way the kids of the small boats do. Followed until he

shambled into them. He stumbled into Little Angie and the knife twinkled as it went in.

Jim Bob found the body. He turned it over and felt the heart. He frowned at the flutter. His fat face creased uncertainly, a chip of hope shining in his grief.

"You go ahead and die if you want to, son," he whispered. "You die for our womanhood if you want to."

For if the boy died, the Mob would gain immunity. They could ~~even~~ go after the ^{white} kids.

His thick thumbs sought the ^{white} boy's jugular. But some young mobsmen were approaching. Lots of these young fellows nowadays had never really understood. They had lost the facts. Down here, a fellow just naturally died for them Southern ladies.

"We got to keep them pure, son. We gotta keep them from being raped. You go ahead and die," ^{he whispered to the badly wounded boy.} Maybe the fellow would hear and just naturally die.

"Do it for Dixie, son. You go ahead and die," he urged.

And Jim Bob turned his head skyward and bawled. They thought he was bawling for the young mobster whom somebody had ~~knifed~~ stuck with a knife. But Jim Bob was bawling because he wanted so badly to do that ^{boy's} jugular for Dixie.

Jim Bob ordered out the ~~Mob~~ boats to nose the Gulf and even push their prows through the ^{open} lanes of ~~watx~~ the bayou. The mobsters ~~swore~~ at the darkly glistening water as it slapped and rolled from the concrete piles under the piers. But Jim Bob, who was an intellectual, pointed out that all down ^{their} ~~the~~ history, ~~the~~ the goddam burr heads ~~had taken to water to escape the love making of~~ had taken to water to escape the love making of the Mob. They had found out that hound dogs werent smart over water so the fleeing bastards always choose that route. Chawing his plug and expectorating over the side in disgust as he brought the dumb bunnies up to date, Jim Bob explained that it was a nigger wench named Eliza who had started it.

"Ignorant bunch of knuckle heads," Jim Bob muttered under his breath as he told them they could learn all about it in one of the early volumes which dealt with the first of the Uncles. ~~he~~ ^{about} was an old sambo named Uncle Tom. *No book*

"You can look it up," said Jim Bob.

Big Lem watched the boat from the beach. Big Lem wasnt worried. The fishing kids knew the ways of Jim Bob. They had hidden ^{larry} ~~larry~~ among the nets. They were waiting until the Mob boat ~~hadt~~ was gone, then they would move ^{larry} ~~Dan Ebony~~ into the undersides of the pier. They watched the sweep of the headlights, to the landing.

Big Lem rose and stretched.

"Lets ^{sack in} ~~sack~~, Jim Bob's called it a night," he said.

Lying on the warm sand, ^{larry} ~~Dan Ebony~~ grunted.

"Lets go under the pier, ^{College Boy} ~~glory men~~," Big Lem said

sarcastically.

"No. I need action," ^{larry} ~~Dan Ebony~~ said.

Big Lem exploded. "You want Jim Bob to chop you? Aint we ^{risked} ~~enough~~ enough for you one night?"

^{Lem} ~~Ebony~~ filled his hands with sand. He trickled it out, running it down his fingers, feeling each grain gritty with life. He had a way of feeling life in things, small unimportant things, a mule flapping its ears, Joel tearing the top off his cans. He could feel the immediacy curl on his tongue. But ^{Felicitly} ~~Torch~~ wasn't unimportant although she was immediate. She was smouldering. One time he had burnt his fingers poking at the coals. He felt inadequate. He rolled over and said an indecency.

"Suppose Jim Bob's man croaks while you're out on the street!" roared Big Lem. "Jim Bob would put a wall around the town. We couldn't make it back to the beach. You know that? ^{We'd get us.}"

And ^{as} ~~while~~ he spoke, ^{Big Lem} ~~the black thought lodged cold in Big~~ ~~Lem's belly. He~~ ~~couldxxxx~~ saw himself swinging from a cypress, the Mob's choice this year for a hanging-tree. ~~Big Lem~~ saw himself a kicking joke of a man, too big for a fruit, hanging straight down with his head ^{politely} crooked to avoid the bulge of the knot.

"Yeah, there's that chance," ^{Lem} ~~Ebony~~ said ~~and~~ ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~.

^{Felicitly} After a silence, Lemuel ~~Jones~~ said, "You heading for ~~Torch~~ Future?"

"Maybe. You'll tell Jim Bob?"

"You leave that woman alone. She's no good for you."

"If she's good enough for Jim Bob, she's good enough for me."

"That why you so horny for her? That why you randy for that yellow gal?"

^{Lem} ~~Lem~~ ~~laughed~~. "Sure. Whatever Jim Bob wants, guess I should want it too. Equal but not seperate."

"
Joke

"You're wrong. Both you and Jim Bob," Big Lem said slowly. "~~Paradise~~ is a choosing woman. She'll choose."

"So she'll choose."

"And I don't see her choosing no weak ass ~~Delta street~~ ^{Paradise} ~~punk~~ ^{said} ~~too scared to stop and drop his trousers~~ with Big Daddy Jim Bob in the running," Big Lem snapped.

^{Lenny} Dan Leony slapped his hands down on the sand and came up like he was sprung. He slashed a hand past Big Lem's face.

"~~Don't~~ ⁸ shut your mean mouth! You go and be afraid ~~some~~ ^{on} ~~place~~ ^{place} ~~else~~ you are home."

But while he ranted at Big Lem he could smell Mob fear on himself. For that was how it hit you. It sent a hunted guy puma wild among his own folk and before he knew it, he was chopping his own folk. Axing a way through a crush of your own kin as you flung wildly to escape. The Mob did that to you. The Mob wound you up taut.

"Boy, they closing in on you," Big Lem said sadly.

He knew Big Lem had said ~~it~~ ^{was} it to maul him back, but it was too close to the truth. It ~~rocked~~ ^{stopped angrily up to} inside his head. He ~~and~~ ^{until they} Big Lem were chest close. In a moment, they would be swinging. But Big Lem shook his head and stepped back.

"No. They wont get me that way," ~~Big~~ ^{Lenny} Lem said. "I'll go scout for you."

And ~~Big~~ ^{Lenny} Lem bigfooted off the beach, into Delta street to shake it down for ~~Den Leony~~ ^{Lenny}. He whistled and ~~Daniel~~ ^{Lenny} went out. He went ahead of ~~Daniel~~ ^{Lenny}.

The street lights had been broken to make a nightway for a ~~glory~~ ^{College Man} man who was under ~~the Mob's~~ ^{Jim Bob's} interdict, so ~~Dan Leony~~ ^{Lenny} went in peace and safety and only the love cats on the roofs saw his passage. He reached ~~the~~ ^{Felcity's} cabin door whole in health. He tricked his finger on the door. He was a reaching man. A randy man seeking it. The knowledge that Jim Bob wanted it too made him twice as

Felicity Fortune

lustful. ~~Torch~~ opened the door.

She had never failed to open the door. If Jim Bob had come along she would have opened to him too. ~~Den Ebony~~^{larry} went in with his heat and anger.

"You didnt ask who it was," he said ~~Den~~^{larry}.

She looked steadily at him.

lucky
"I aint/~~gamm~~ for you tonight," she said.

But nobody would win her on luck. ~~Den Ebony~~^{larry} knew. There was a long, beautiful power in her limbs. Her face was a sleek bronze mask. The ~~mm~~ outer corners of her eyes/~~xxxxxx~~^{were} upslanted. He had seen that face on a Yoruba mask in the African Studies room at college. He shook his head.

"You got mostly my folks in you," he said.

"Aint no such thing. I got it equal. Your folks and Jim Bob's."

^{of ours} "You got more ~~as~~^{Mobtown} than ~~mob~~ blood in you. Your pa only brushed you with the magnolia." He was grinning.

"Got it equal," she said angrily.

"Baby, you ought to be ~~gamm~~ lucky for me."

"Why? Tell me why?"

"Because I risk more skin than Jim Bob^{does} when I come to see you. And because you aint ever going to live in Mobtown and you know it."

"Jim Bob's got more grab."

^{I'm} "But he aint got more hope. ~~Den Ebony~~^{I'm} 's going to outlast Jim Bob."

She looked thoughtful. He guessed she was looking at the angles. She was no fool kid looking for shoulders. Fat bellied as he was, Jim Bob had ~~security~~ security.

"M
Maybe."

"Maybe," she said at last.

"And you'll be around for the lastingest one."

Her eyes moved and returned to him.

"And you figure you'll last? You can beat the Mob?"

She was mocking him. He shrugged ~~and reached his finger.~~

He could weave fantasies around her. Nobody but he would know the marvel and the destruction when they profaned each other. He managed a smile and felt his shame shrink.

"I aint said a thing for you to make like a cat licking cream," she stated.

But he could look at her and love-sweat a dream out of fear and running. One strong, furious coitus at the ~~end~~ end of a rainbow road. To drain the warm annointings from every sinuous curve. The woman whom Jim Bob craved. He stroked her breasts crying inside his head, Make me equal.

~~Forch didn't draw away.~~ ^{POTRA} she said gently, "Dont be a fool."

And he felt the sickness and self loathing which came upon him when he remembered the time she had ~~yielded~~ yielded and he had gone to her/^{ropy} ~~as~~ as a stallion but found his splendid body was only host to a eunuch. He had failed so miserably, he threw up. Yet he was strong as a bull, full of a maleness he could feel prowling now. God, if/^{anyone} ~~anybody~~ should ever find out.

"Tell me what happened at the Wake," she said gently.

He turned away.

"One of the kids knifed a mobsman," he said.

"Then Jim Bob has you. Better cut out, man."

"The mobster isnt dead," he said.

"He will be. He will do it if Jim Bob puts him up to it.

Jim Bob tells him to save their womanhood, that mobster will up and die. Jim Bob wants to get those kids."

"Moreso now. We whupped them tonight."

"Whupped who?"

"~~WHITE.~~
~~The Mob.~~ At the Wake. Whupped them good."

"Who whupped them?"

He was riding again. He said with enthusiasm, "Who? All of us. Me. Big Lem. The kids. ~~The longshoremen.~~ Your Uncle Amos the blacksmith. How do you like that? We were good, huh?"

The bronze mask looked back at him. Folks should have opinions, he said. You dug a hole or laid bricks or belted someone, folks should be able to say whether you did good or bad. You didnt hardly ever heard from ^{FUTURE} ~~her~~. She always seemed to be waiting for the end, as if what came in between wasnt important.

He took the steps the cabin allowed. He struck his fist into his palm.

"Jim Bob thinks I'm scared. But you know what? I'm going to the burying."

He looked swiftly at her. Hell, she ought to have even shrugged. ~~HE~~

He stopped before her and ^{said} ~~shouted~~, "I said I'm going to the burying!"

"Whose?" she asked softly. "Yours?"

"No no —" he caught himself and stopped. "Now what is that supposed to mean?"

~~anyway~~ she smiled falsely.

"Why dont you take something?" she said. "Big strapping guy like you shouldnt be a sex midget."

He turned away confused and whirled back to her.

"You bitch," he said in a low hurt voice.

"Jim Bob might come by. I think I set him up for Virginia. He likes to come by before he ~~crosse~~s Fourth of July."

They were standing so closely he could see the skin structure on the high sloping bones. She was rich in body and would only be subdued between the sheets. He wished he was able to do it even once with her and then roar off into infidelities. But he had a misshapen fidelity to her. Sure, he was misshapen. A midget, she had called him. He had the aching failure all over his loins. He tore his hands at his face as he stumbled out of the cabin, not caring if he walked into Jim Bob. The woman's throaty chuckle ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ twisted him.

Big Lem was a large and confident man in his town, a good guy who had whipped his quota of mobsmen tonight. He walked in the dark with an idea that ^{Jim Bob} ~~the mob~~ ^{met} had enough for one night. Jim Bob would be over the Avenue and into Mobtown by now. They had pounded some respect into them Mob fellows.

Big Lem stretched his arms and rapped his chest a little. He hopped and shuffled and hummed a dirty beat, using the drums but no ^{bass} ~~drums~~. He felt good.

He spied the red bulb glowing over the door at the schoolhouse. He walked over there, the reckless slob. A chance taker from a cupboard where all the ~~the~~ edibles were lethal. Eye rapist in a town where they blinded you for blinking.

"Huh, I'm a reckless slob," he grinned.

He balanced on the balls of his feet and cocked an eye past the rope bait standing at the top of the steps. He could see beyond ~~the~~ her into the old vestibule that was now the lobby of ~~the~~ Jim Bob's gigantic whorehouse.

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"Which semester you in, lynch ba it?" he asked absently.

Now that he had helped to lay the town open, it was fun to play around with this magnolia piece. The Mob heat was off. It felt real good to shoot all the turd a guy wanted to with no fear of a ^{whitey cop's} ~~mob~~ club banging behind your ear.

The little harlot shoed faint surprise at a ^{Paradise South fella} ~~whitey~~ reaching for the hanging rope with his own hands. But she had heard ^{How} it did that to them sometimes. ^{White} ~~mob~~ ferocity was known to send them bawling for the deathblow.

"You know Jim Bob's against bed-ins, boy. You, an older guy, why you want to risk (it getting) cut off?" she asked in a kind voice.

He wasnt a bad looking old guy and she guessed it must be rough on them at times, enough to drive them bats. Big Lem as if he had never heard of Jim waved his hand grandly ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Bob. He looked past her again.

"You alone, Magnolia baby? All the other kids in classes?"

"Aint no classes until the Plowmen come in," she said. He could see through the sheer frock. Very nubile. He cracked a grin and pushed the old baseball cap off his forehead.

He said, "I dont like Jim Bob's law nohow."

She saw his eyes and shuddered deliciously.

"You eye-rape me some more, boy and they gonna make rope on you tonight."

"The law aint oughta take away the schoolhouse from all us kids. The law ought to allow us to get some teaching too. Them hairy Plowmen from ~~the~~ Big Swamp aint the only ones who like to get educated. I hanker for some education," Big Lem said.

"They say your folks aint needing any education," the

girl said... "They say you ^{hellas} ~~Niggers~~ got more bastards ^{in Paradise} than a hound dog got fleas."

Big Lem laughed modestly. He had always known it would be fun having a real jaw with one of the ^{magnolia} ~~city~~ women. Only went to show that when the Mob wasnt around, folks could get together real good. That's what integration was, folks getting together and shooting the stuff out of their heads.

"Reason is our womenfolk aint got no abortion cards like the white folks," he said respectfully so nobody would think he was being uppity. "We too poor. I'll bet you got rid of a lot of loose stuff."

She chuckled warmly. ^{She black hellas} ~~Niggers~~ werent bad, most of them. When she was a little kid out on Tobacco Road, she had known some who were real nice. Her folks had been ~~in~~ ^{po}h magnolia trash, real old name in the county, so she hadnt been afraid to talk publicly to ~~Niggers~~ ^{blacks}. They had even had a buck one time cutting winter wood.

"One time we had one of your people cutting winter wood at our place," she said. She had heard that it made the ~~niggers~~ feel easier when you said you had known one of their folks one time.

"I'll bet you taught him a little, ma'am," Big Lem said.

She laughed. "You bum, they'd a killed me. My folks. ^{Of my Kew}"

"Had him in the woodshed, ma'am? He gave you a little?"

~~She shook her head~~. Her eyes had turned serious. A memory had come up and she was sad.

"I dont cotton with how they sometimes lynch your folks. Sometimes they botch it real bad. Dirty bad," she said.

"They do it better in some places than others," Big Lem agreed. "They slow in some places, quick in others. ^{Mississippi,} ~~Birmingham,~~ Alabama, some parts of Georgia, I hear they real good. Take you out quickly

"This buck we had cutting our winter wood. They shot him

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low down. So he didnt die right off. They set a fire under him in the woods but the ground was damp and when they raked it away, he still wasnt dead. So finally they hoisted him. But the rope was frayed so it broke. Real finally, they had to drown him and for a day or two, the menfolk couldnt take any branch water with their likker, it was that bad."

"Wouldnt have happened in ~~Mississippi~~ ^{Mississippi} ~~Birmingham, Alabama~~," Big Lem said. "They fix you ^{quickly} ~~quickly~~ there."

"Yeah, sure. What I say is if they gotta do it, then do it quick. I'm against it when it takes so long. Its kind of ~~un-American~~ Un-American."

"What did my folk do?"

"Eye rape."

"They caught him at it?"

She grinned but her eyes clouded again.

"No. I told on him. But if I had known they would take so long, I wouldnt have told on him."

"You're a good kid," Big Lem said, liking her some more.

"He was good too. We had lots of wood that winter."

Big Lem did a shuffle and showed her the magic in his feet. He jiggled his hand up and down.

"I'd sure like to pack wood in your woodshed, baby," he said.

"We aint hiring any more," she said sadly.

"Jim Bob and me are bosom pals."

"He'd turn you into a capon if he caught you here."

Big Lem laughed his high-pitched one, the one you kept for the Magnolia folk.

"Hot ~~dog!~~ ^{dog!} You and me ~~could~~ could be real friendly," he gasped, wiping the tears away. "You aint prejudiced none at all."

"We live in a world we never made," she said.

"Suppose you could make it, Magnolia honey? Suppose you could have made it. How would you fix it so folks could get together?"

She considered.

"Seal them off at the waist," she said.

Big Lem's head jerked forward.

"Huh?" he asked blankly.

And then it hit him and he slapped his thighs and leaped in the air with an explosion of laughter. She too shrieked with laughter as she ran back into the schoolhouse. Big Lem staggered off down Delta, laughing until the tears flowed. And he never lost the good gut of laughter until he ran into Jim Bob.

Jim Bob

The ~~mobster~~ murdered him with a swing of the club. It slammed into his belly. Jim Bob hit him on the back of the head as he ~~crumpled~~ crumpled.

The two mobsmen with Jim Bob put him back on his feet for Jim Bob to murder him again. Then they eased him to the ground and waited until he came around. They hoisted him again.

"Lemuel," Jim Bob said, full of love. "Big Lem, the good friend of ~~Billy~~^{Billie} Larry."

Jim Bob sniffed at the magnolia he wore on his shirt. Love surged in him until he had to clutch one of the mobsters to keep from falling.

"Hold me, son," he said weakly. "This black son of a bitch is ripping out my gut with love for him."

The young mobsters knew the feeling. It was a Southland

trauma only the purest red neck encountered.

Jim Bob waited until his strength came back. Then he doubled his fist and smote Big Lem at the base of his jaw. He used the edge of his hand to hack at the big nose. But Big Lem was tough, and angry at being caught. So when Jim Bob stepped back to get set for another swing, Big Lem kicked him in the groin. Jim Bob doubled and gulped air. But he came back ~~xx~~ with the club and Big Lem shuddered all through when the blow fell. His mouth opened and his guts gushed.

"Fix him on his feet, boys," Jim Bob said. He was fond of Big Lem as ever. "Dont make him fall, boys."

The young mobsmen took a sniff of their own magnolia blooms. The poor guy, they thought of Big Lem as they twisted his arms between his shoulder blades until the bones clicked. He must have had old corn pone for supper, the way the stuff that came up smelled they thought ~~as they~~ as they rammed their stiffened fingers into his gut.

They held back his head and invited the boss to slap him into full consciousness. Jim Bob backhanded his head to and fro until Big Lem's eyes opened. He cuffed him on the mouth. But he loosened only a single tooth of Big Lem's. He smiled gently at Big Lem. He felt on the rack with love for this downhomer.

^{erry?}
"Where's ~~lemer?~~" he asked Big Lem. "Where's he?"

Big Lem hung on the arms of the two mobsmen. He groaned and blinked Jim Bob into focus.

^{erry?}
"Where's ~~lemer?~~" Jim Bob asked patiently.

Big Lem appreciated the patience. He thought well of Jim Bob, a real white ~~anyone~~ guy, a true patriot, a good man. He shook his head again. Now he could see his friend Jim Bob clearly. He smiled.

^{erry?} "Daniel, Jim Bob? You asking after ^{lemer?} ~~Daniel?~~"

^{erry?} "That's right, ~~even,~~" Jim Bob said wearily.

^{erry?} "Daniel?" Big Lem asked weakly. "Reckon he's climbing up

your cotton picking ass looking for your brain."

"Oohh," Jim Bob groaned, hitting him.

Jim Bob hit him on both shoulders with the club. He watched the sweaty ~~hand~~ agony break on Big Lem's face. Big Lem jerked and threw up again. The mobsters pushed down Big Lem so he could smell the stuff. But they pushed him down too far and when they brought him up again they stood him against the wall while he blinked the stuff from his eyes.

"We folks in the Mob have to be very tough with you, Big Lem, even although you are our own folks and we love you," Jim Bob ~~said~~ ^{said.}

Big Lem raised his sagging head. He was very tired.

"Your ma got you in the outhouse behind the big house," he said.

Jim Bob was unmoved.

^{br}
"Daniel knifed a mobsman. Likely the mobsman will be dead soon," Jim Bob said.

Big Lem braced himself from slipping. ~~MM~~

"Your ma was a Catholic," he told Jim Bob.

Jim Bob hefted the club but he waited. No use talking to a guy who couldn't hear. He knew just how much Big Lem could take.

"We got witnesses to prove that ^{br}~~Daniel~~ knifed our fellow. Soon as the mobsman dies, we clean up the town," Jim Bob said.

"Your ma did it in the outhouse with a ^{Jew,} ~~club~~ Big Lem said.

Frowning, Jim Bob swung the club.

The kids from the beach found Big Lem lying in Delta street and took him to the beach.

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Blacks,
Jews
Catholics

6m

They almost caught ~~Daniel~~ outside the Memorial Park but the hairs on his head stood up straight and warned him. He slipped inside the Park. ~~he was scared red~~.

The Memorial Park was across ^{Fourth of July Avenue} from the courthouse. ^{Pig Swamp} ~~Big~~ folks from ~~up North~~ had laid out the Park to the memory of Abie Linkun. Laid it out the time the blight had hit the Southland's magnolia trees and Mobbery was on its knees. Laid it out for ^{MR LINKUN} ~~the fellow~~ who had strapped a Nigra problem to their backs they ^{had tried to} dislodge with fire and rope. But goddam without hate. ^{Pig Swamp} ~~North~~ folks ^{never} ~~would~~ know that ~~the~~ the fine people of magnolialand never hate nobody, nohow.

That some were just born to be ~~the~~ blacks, is all. You change it you flange it. Aint no longer God's law.

^{Mobtown folks} So after the blight had left and magnolias bloomed again, ~~Mobfolk~~ just let that old Memorial Park grow rank as it wished.

Yes, sir.

The dozen old cannons rusted. Then they twisted all over the spilled iron guts.

The weeds tangled. The cement paths broke.

^{LINKUN fella} The ~~fellow~~ didnt have much of a memorial after that.

^{away in the familiar fear,} ~~LEROY~~ heart ~~was~~ pounding, ~~he~~ ~~crossed~~ went through the ^{FASTER'N GIZZARD DOWN A GULLET.} tangle of shrubbery. He reckoned the mobsters ~~somewhere~~ outside

^{WOULD THINK HE WOULD} ~~there~~ in the dark would ~~be~~ figure on his staying in the Park. ^{I was} ~~the~~ ^{Then} ~~now~~ knew that ^{COULD} ~~when~~ ^{COULD} ~~exercise~~ ^{COULD} ~~South folks~~ got in trouble, ~~they~~ ^{COULD} ~~took~~ ^{COULD} ~~off~~ ^{COULD} ~~for~~ ^{COULD} ~~Abie Linkun's~~ So ~~Daniel~~ reckoned he would fool ^{COULD} ~~them~~ and ^{COULD} ~~them~~. He crossed slow and soft to the fine courthouse lawn.

He could feel their presence like a fold in his skin. A hair lift ^{SENSATION} ~~sense~~ of ^{REPUSSION.} ~~the~~. A stink he ^{COULD} ~~tasted~~ as he swallowed. He ^{was} ~~stood~~ absolutely still, ^{was} ~~he~~ waited for his nape hair to stop

cans. A fine balmy night with no rain in sight and nobody to con into a Fool's paradise.

Yet they couldnt make it on their own.

They came weary and magnolia-sick to the pearly gates and ~~he~~ figured it for another shortsell. He had to press them into the cans himself. Joel slapped his palm to his forehead. Times like now, his head ached where the Mob had broken ~~the~~ ^{soon after his graduation}. The kid beside him was learning too. He was a good poet and maybe when he grew up he would catch falling stars in a pecan can. ~~dog~~. The kid was breathing softly through his mouth but he had no ~~any~~ fear smell on him. Not yet. ~~any~~

it the day he graduated from college

The kid knew that ~~Don Ebony~~ ^{copy} was over the way ~~on~~ the courthouse common and that Jim Bob's men were thickening up faster than flies in molasses. Blue-eyed blowflies closing in around some nigger meat ^{about} ~~ready~~ to die on the ~~heave~~ ^{loop}. Joel was disgusted at the dam fool ^{copy} ~~Daniel~~ had become.

"Always thought Jim Bob would have more trouble with ^{copy} ~~Daniel~~," he said in a whispered growl.

"Looks like he's plumbed fucked," agreed the poet, his eyes narrowed to the night watching the trap close. ~~on Daniel~~.

^{"He} ~~Daniel~~ oughtnt to have made Cap'n Jim Bob get so close to his heels," Joel said.

"Or in an idiot's heaven there was room for a long chase and no ending. In an idiot's dreams, monuments topple softly and oaks look better by moonlight.

^{he and Jim Bob will cancel out each other in a double kill}
"Maybe ~~they'll have trouble with him. Maybe the rope will break. Then they'll hang him twice~~," whispered the poet in a beautiful ^{mostly} mistiness ~~with the~~ hope. ^{will be} ~~that Daniel would soon die~~. Then there ~~would~~ ^{not} be ^{only} ~~he~~ Jim Bob between ^{me} ~~him~~ and the warm velvety sweet dark damp coitus with the wide flanked barrow-girl ^{named Futura}.

"What you telling lies for?" Joel demanded irritably. "I ain't

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caught his star yet. ^{Levy's} ~~He's~~ not in any of my cans. He's still got room to run."

The poet was lumbered down at his master's feet like a lean wolfhound. He was placed so he had the paling fence around the courthouse soft-edged on the sky. He had counted the squads of mobsters mounting the death watch around ^{General Lee's} ~~the~~ courthouse, ^{and Abe Lincoln's park} and he knew with utter clarity that ^{Levy's} ~~Daniel's~~ luck was run out. ~~That Daniel had~~ ^{"Never thought I would live to see the day when Jim Bob would FIGGER THAT A NIGGER} ~~had come graveyard bait. He was for getting out of there before the~~ ^{COULD RECKON A SEEK COVER IN A CRACKER COUNTRY," the poet said.} ~~mob could find them there, but he couldn't resist seeing them put the fix~~ ^{"Where's the COLLEGE KID now?" belted Joel.} ~~on Daniel. He wondered if the glory man would bawl.~~

"He's dead, master," he said to Joel.

"He's not ^{caught} in any of my cans," insisted Joel.

^{"Just stick around. He's on his way down."} ~~But you caught rocks in the head, master. He's got~~ ~~as much room as corkbone in a gullet."~~

"Then we have to pull him out," Joel said flatly. "Cant have my cans proving wrong."

"Pull him out? You ^{gone} crazy? ~~You're spinning me out on a lunny~~ ~~key?~~ The Mob's got him so close if he wriggles Jim Bob'll sneeze."

Suddenly he felt Joel's eyes on him. He could feel the eyeballs moving over his face.

"If we dont pull him out I'mm gonna give you to Jim Bob," Joel said softly.

The poet said in his throat, "Aaagh."

He swallowed and his voice returned. He whispered from his constricted throat, "What you giving me to Jim Bob for? I been a good apprentice."

"I'm gonna tell Jim Bob you've got eyes on his piece of pudendum. You making book on her," Joel said coldly.

"I aint making book! I only wrote a poem about the ~~agent~~ ^{piece of high yellow ass!}"

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"When I tell Jim Bob you hankering after his ^{future} ~~future~~ he aint gonna treat you no better than he treat ~~Daniel~~ ^{Coron}!"

The poet shook down to his heels. He said hoarsely,

"I aint keen on any future."

"You gonna throw it all away on Jim Bob?" mocked Joel.

"I dont want no ~~torch~~ ^{future} to blight my future," the poet said, instantly sensing this was the kind of ~~damfool~~ ^{damfool} talk that would placate Joel. He ~~stared his~~ ^{who now upright,} ~~pinot muscree~~ and prepared to follow Joel through any switch the master staked out in his blindingly baffling apology for a mind.

"Who's crazy now?" snapped Joel.

"Me. ^{Mob town. Paradise. All of us."} ~~The mob hoods. Paradise South,~~ the poet said hastily.

For he saw that he had blundered. Calling the guy a loony when he had all that strong pull with Jim Bob.

He waited for whatever glory line Joel's injured ego would take. ~~Moving his pivot muscle,~~ He swore he would laureate Joel to the hump of the year; anything, if Joel would keep Jim Bob from him. For he wanted to be standing at the finish when Jim Bob and ^{Coron} ~~Daniel~~ cancelled out each other. And when the long-legged delight of ~~Coron~~ ^{Coron} Futura would once more be up for grabs. Poised, he waited for Joel.

"Whom do folks say I am?" Joel asked ~~sedately~~ ^{suddenly}.

"You the hair on the ass-side of the moon," the boy said ~~xxxx~~ sedately.

"I'm gratified," Joel said, a ~~whole~~ month of good luck to the poet in his voice. "I need ^{Coron} ~~Daniel~~."

The poet gulped. He could smell himself frying.

"Whom can I get to help you, master?"

"You," Joel said kindly.

"I aint feeling so good," the poet said, looking at all those big hawk heads of ^{MOBBERY} ~~the mob~~ silhouetted on the night sky. Thinking how rugged a job it was to beat off hawks with your tongue.

Joel said softly, "I'll tell Jim Bob you been reading books again."

The boy
~~the boy~~ blanched.

This was worse than ever. Jim Bob would keep him alive as long as possible. Jim Bob was skilled at taking you out slowly. And he was never so slow as when he caught you reading books.

"No," he whispered to Joel.

"Yes," Joel said implacably.

So with a groan in every joint of his mechanical heart, the hard eyed poet began to crawl to where ^{groan} ~~Joel~~ had last vanished into the Linkun Memorial Park.

I might as well had joined the fishing kids, the poet cried to himself as he crawled.

For he reckoned that ~~with~~ all those kids to choose from, the head guy would have picked somebody else for sure. He didnt have the slightest idea yet how he would get out Daniel. He just knew he had to, or that Joel-Herod would John-the-Baptist his cojones for Jim Bob.

The pebbles and uncouth grass jabbed at his hands and knees. The earth was musty, so close under his nose. A harlot earth that cheated a man by teaching him to walk upright. But it would open up fast enough for him if the Mob caught up. The stinking tramp of a earth would open up fast enough for a poet when the mobsters finally got around to hiding his corpse. A guy was entitled to feel that after sixteen years with it, living on it, sitting on it, shitting in it, this lousy earth would resist ^{MOB TOWN LOVERS COMING TO HIDE} the ~~sneaking mobsters when they came to hide~~ a poor poet's ^{CADAVRE} ~~corpse~~.

body after they had shot it full of holes and hanged it and burnt it. ^{NO. Right} But ~~right~~ here and now, he could foresee the harlotry in this whoring earth when Jim Bob got around to ordering out the pickaxes. How it would open like a lip at the first prick, ~~at the~~ ^{of the} ~~by~~, a labial laughter that would open into howls of glee as it distended to receive a broken poet. And then the soft thud-grunts of satisfied desire as they threw ~~him~~ in dirt after him.

The poet ^{SMOTE} ~~struck~~ the lousy earth with his fists. ~~His~~ Arms extended, he laid with his face crushed against it.)

~~The thud-grunts were~~ His heartbeats booming ^{ad} bigly on the ground. ~~of the Memorial Park.~~ A frog croaked and some crickets sawed. He felt cobwebby with fear. Doom was about. He had been ^{NUTS} ~~to~~ allow Joel to hogtie him. Joel had plenty on him. Like a ^{NUT} ~~hope~~ he had let Joel sucker him into reading books and had even let on to Joel his sex-yen for that piece of high yaller tail. Joel would hand him over to Jim Bob to prove his cans. Hand him over without a qualm.

The poet had crawled to the base of Abie Linkun. He could see the marble whiteness of ~~Jefferson Robert Edward Lee~~ ^{across the way} ~~the~~ the courthouse lawn. ^{across the Avenue.} The damfool ~~Daniel~~ ^{Larry} was ~~crouched at the base.~~ ^{lying behind fence Lee.} The poet ^{straight} ~~looked up and~~ ^{at} ~~fancied he could see~~ the crag of ~~him~~ a face ^{of his own building places} ~~clear enough.~~ He hoped Abie Linkun would see he was sticking close to him and give him an idea. He wasnt like ^{would} ~~that sucker Daniel~~ ^{Larry, a turncoat,} who had ^{changed with the moment} ~~run across~~ ^{the trouble was,} ~~to the other~~ soon as he felt the heat at his heels. But Abie Linkun was pretty far up.

Abie Linkun seemed to be looking down at him but he, ~~was no use to him so~~ ^{Abie} ~~was~~ sweet though, to think of him now. The poet wept, feeling far up. ~~His~~ ^{His} hand roved over the dirty marble, ~~was~~ seeking comfort. The statue was still moist from the Mob's

Annual Spittin' Contest last year. The poor, filth-streaked, ignorant

^{Brought the poet.} red necks, Did they think they could ^{MARBLE} hurt marble with spittin'?
^{he} he saw Abie Linkun's eye wink on,

And then ~~the poet grew~~ ^{TOTEM} a soft crash of laughter
and the poet grew ^{Abie Linkun} was telling him what to
~~do. Telling him what would most likely turn to~~ ^{do} do. Telling him what would most likely turn to ~~these Southern white folks~~
~~a lynch-bent trail.~~

^{MOB TOWN FROM} He jumped to his feet and shouted. ^{BAWLING} He remembered the lines he
^{HE ROSE, YELLING, TO HIS FEET.} had read in the forbidden book. The one Joel had rooked him on. At the
highest power of his lungs, the poet ~~yelled~~ declaimed:

"Four score ~~xxx~~ and seven years ago, our fathers brought
forth upon this continent a new nation conceived in liberty!"

Jim Bob heaved solidly off his belly to his hands and
knees. ~~He had been crawling along through the grass as they closed in on Daniel.~~

"Jesus Christ," he ~~uttered~~ ^{singing} groined as the painful words bit.

The poet leaped away as he sang out,

"And dedicated to the proposition that all men are created
equal!"

"Oh, God," said Jim Bob, "no."

The startled mobsters heard the foreign language and
stiffened into statues. ~~They forgot they had been crawling on Daniel.~~

"Its a spy!" roared Jim Bob as he recovered and hustled to
his feet. "A spy! Go get him!"

For such words could explode through the ^{Mobland} ~~Southland~~ worse
than a load of ^{Reps.} ~~Daniels~~. A chain reaction that would flicker until
all magnolialand was aflame. And that patriot, Jim Bob, forgot his per-
sonal feud with ^{Levy} ~~Daniel~~ as he proceeded to save the ~~same~~ South ~~land~~.

"After him!" he bellowed. "Its a spy — a dirty Communist ~~spy~~!"

And the Mob pounded after the poet.

But he was small and running close to the ground so they
saw not a soul, only heard the unstoppable words whipping and crackling

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through the land's dark.

The ^{poet} ~~boy~~ ran in silence after he had pulled them from the commons. He had them strung out along Delta street now. ^{boy} ~~Daniel~~ would have gotten clear already, ^{so} ~~so~~ the poet scurried behind a safe fence. He heard the heavy ~~her~~ trompers thud, thud past. He sneered a polite goodnight at the boots.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

They had Big Lem down soaking him in the bayou. They stripped him and they slid him in and they swore at the marks on his body. The easy tidal flow cuffed him gently. He coughed and sneezed and choked. He sat up fast and roared. The kids quieted him with the names he knew. He blinked his mind clear and saw the well disposed faces.

"They got to Big Lem," he told the kids.

He worked his shoulders and sucked in his belly to see how far in the ruin went.

"Jim Bob?" the kids asked.

Big Lem nodded. He was remotely thinking of the blows into his body as he had hung on the arms of the two white boys.

"Jim Bob," mused the little guys. They thought how the score was always mounting. Older guys doubted whether it would ever be settled. The kids only thought of — when.

"(erry?"

"~~Daniel~~? He back yet?" Big Lem asked.

"No," the head kid said. He was named Abel and was astonishingly swift. He and Angie the kid were close friends. Little Angie who had fixed the mobsman.

Big Lem thought of ~~Daniel~~^{erry}. The ~~glory~~^{College Man} man was safe. With some luck, he could even by now be acheless in the arms of his woman. Big Lem choked and spat blood from a few loose teeth.

A kid whistled at the top of the beach and a batch of Big Lem's forearms spanned/~~Daniel's~~ body. They ran with him into the nets. They burrowed among the nets they had hung on the poles to dry. They were safer in there than if they had turned a key. It was doubly dark in there but Big Lem felt his nakedness falling all over him among these kids. He asked for his clothes. They understood so

they passed his clothes along. He drew them on, wet as he was. He felt better. They were still punks, dammit.

The kid on guard at the top of the beach whistled again. They came out from among the nets. Big Lem went to his feet ~~and~~ and no pain slammed him back. He had bells ringing behind his ears however, where Jim Bob at the last had hit him.

They went down to the ^{small} boats.

~~They~~ sat on an upturned keel. He was surrounded by the fishing kids. Everybody was laughing softly. Big Lem went up to the boat and saw it had been ~~Daniel~~ ^{Levy} for whom the kid had whistled.

"~~Daniel~~," Big Lem said.

~~Daniel~~ repeated the story about the poet. ~~in the Memorial Park.~~ The kids laughed again. They hadn't reckoned the poet for being such a good guy.

Big Lem looked over the water. He wasn't laughing.

~~Daniel~~ looked at him. "What's with you?" he asked.

Nobody said anything.

"You guys playing dumb?" ~~Daniel asked.~~

"It's Big Lem," Little Angie said.

"What about Big Lem?"

"Jim Bob caught him," Angie the kid said.

"God Almighty," ~~Daniel~~ ^{Levy} said as he climbed from the boat for a closer look at Big Lem.

"We found him in the gutter on Delta. Jim Bob gaffed him," the kid said.

"Bad?"

Big Lem looked in at the ravage Jim Bob had wrought.

"I'll live," he said curtly.

"The head cracker had these two white boys with him. They held Big Lem while Jim Bob worked him over," Angie said.

"How bad?" ^{Larry} Daniel asked Big Lem, peering at him.

"I'm bleeding. I could use some of your funny stories for bandage," Big Lem said.

^{Larry} Daniel didn't say anything. Big Lem stepped closer. He was a vast, forcible man.

"Yeah, heal me, mister. Tell me about you in the Memorial Park." ~~Only you seem to be having a good time tonight.~~

"You walked into Jim Bob," ^{Larry} Daniel said quietly. "You have eyes and ears and enough Paradise ~~South~~ in you to feel the ^{Jim Bobs} ~~eyes~~ in your pores. Yet you walked into Jim Bob."

Big Lem sat down on the boat. He couldn't tell them how it had been. A ~~big~~ guy like him, trying to bed-in at the ^{cat} ~~cat~~ house like any kid ^{had} on a crazy integration kick. He ^{had} ~~had~~ lived all his life keeping out of their way but now the lunacy had reached him too, so he wanted to mix. ^{Being with Larry and these kids} ~~They~~ had turned him into a frisky old tomcat. And full of mirth and muscle, he had allowed Jim Bob to nail him. Jim Bob had just stepped from the shadows and chop ^{ped} him.

"If you'd stayed on the beach, I wouldn't be out there casing the town for no Jim Bob to nail me," he said sullenly.

"So maybe you bawled, 'Dont hit me again, Cap'n. I'll tell you where ^{Larry's} ~~Daniel's~~ at — "

Big Lem leaped from the boat but Jim Bob's club had slowed him down. ^{Larry} Daniel turned the blow and started one of his own. The kids jumped and held ^{Larry} ~~Daniel~~. They dragged Big Lem out of reach.

"No, he's ^{Gotta} ~~gonna~~ sleep off Jim Bob. That cracker really hit him," Abel the head kid said to ~~Daniel~~ ^{Larry}.

~~FUTURA~~

Torch was an outlaw woman whose face haunted a fellow like he was hurting. ~~Torch~~ ^{FUTURA} was a barrowgirl, ^{She sold prawns from her barrow} one of the tawny ~~sexpot babies who pulled their barrows through Paradise South~~ ^{up and down all the streets of Prohibition and} peddling ~~prawns~~ ^{HOPE} for a short-time pawn on a black ^{OR WHITE} fellow's future.

But Torch was no run-of-the-romp cock tease; she glowed and pulsed like a city at dusk, alive and warm all over.

Day was gilding the ~~curb~~ ^{FACADE} of the Cotton Exchange across Fourth of July Avenue when Torch Futura's barrow turned into Delta street. Folks in Paradise ~~South~~ ^{in a pleasurable} heard the little iron wheels growl ~~with pleasure~~ over the warm asphalt and turned uneasily in their beds. She called huskily,

"Prawns? Prawns? ^{Bayou - fresh prawns?} ~~Buy my fat bayou fish?~~ ^{Who will buy Futura's brain?} ~~Fish? Fish? Buy my fat bayou fish?~~ ^{fish?}

~~at~~ The women stopped their ears with the bedclothes ^{while} to that impaling their men with the single eye left out ~~for their~~ purpose. ^{to that} "Buy your prawns in the cans," ^{Every coon or big,} ~~Any~~ whispered. "Get it from Jack the first." For the outlaw woman was ~~one~~ ^{lay} whom ~~all the fellows~~ ^{in Paradise or Prohibition} in Paradise or Prohibition ~~desired more~~ ^{desired more} than ~~all the catfish in the world~~ ^{all the catfish in the world}. A deep down ~~lust~~ ^{lust} that undermined every hope, and only ~~love~~ ^{love} was stronger. ^{A DREAM}

^{HANKERED} ~~no amount of Howard Johnson outfits or hairstyle extravaganza in~~ ^{no amount of Howard Johnson outfits or hairstyle extravaganza in} ~~Ebony or Jet made their own bedmates more desirable than the~~ ^{Ebony or Jet made their own bedmates more desirable than the} ~~cat woman named Torch whose swinging walk livened the environs of~~ ^{cat woman named Torch whose swinging walk livened the environs of} ~~Paradise South. The payday dreams in~~ ^{Paradise South. The payday dreams in} ~~Ebony and Jet that helped a~~ ^{Ebony and Jet that helped a} ~~downhome woman to heal~~ ^{downhome woman to heal} ~~the fractured pride in~~ ^{the fractured pride in} ~~turned~~ ^{turned} ~~boy anything~~ ^{boy anything} ~~white moccasins~~ ^{white moccasins} ~~blue-eyed him.~~ ^{blue-eyed him.}

"Aint nobody needing ~~fish~~ ^{SOUL-FOOD?} Aint nobody ^{buying SOUL-FOOD} needing fish this fine magnolia morning?" she cried mockingly.

For on boll weevil days, the menfolk ~~often~~ ^{would} come out to see her go by, but ~~none of them~~ ^{not on magnolia mornings. None} had the sex drive on a magnolia

good
when the chances were ~~deep~~ to live it to the stone-cracking Dixie culture. off a ~~the~~ 87
day, ~~could~~ could so easily lose it to the clasp knives of the Mob. ~~the~~
~~torch~~ looked up Delta to Fourth of July Avenue. It

~~caused~~ ^{July} her to think of crossing over today. Sometimes she crossed
Fourth of ~~Avenue~~ ^{Boys} into Mobtown to raise a welt on the lusts of the
denim ~~and~~ ^{straw} ~~hatted~~ mobsmen, hatching new mobbery as they
sat (in the shade of their automobiles) working out knots for
nooses.

Hunkered down on guard ~~posts~~ ^{posts} for the virtue of some
gentle Southern belle, whose hardtime face ^{outside the schoolhouse} ~~repulsively~~ contorted
in the love-hate of finer Mob feelings, ^{yelled from millions} ~~was getting~~ of tetanin scenes:

"Nigger, come home!"

And blushing in triumph to the roots of her hag hair
for the hoteyed rape she thought she got from a running coon.

"Nigger, come home to Dixie!"

to Dixie where the lynching bees roam
and the lash and the gelding knife play.
Where seldom is heard an ^{integrating} ~~encouraging~~ word
and the tromping boots tromple all day.

Her lonely face turned into the sun's eye, ~~torch~~ ^{Fortune}
~~barrow~~ sang softly, mockingly,

"I'm a-coming, I'm a-coming
For my scrotum's hanging low.
I hear those gentle voices screaming,
'Fix Black Joe!'"

~~She grinned suddenly.~~ They had barred her from Mob-
town. The Daughters of Evolution had invoked the Act banning
incest. But a lot of fellows from ^{both} sides the Avenue still pushed
into her crib to come flying out moments later, scary mad in their
faces.

High boned face tilted proudly ^{called} ~~and~~ pushed her
barrow down Delta street. She ~~cried~~ ^{and caught} ~~her~~ ~~fish~~ again and caught the

The madam
madam's handwave. ~~she~~ stood on the stoop of the schoolhouse. The
big auditorium was lively with ~~the~~ gusts of laughter from horse-
playing girls. Above it ~~xxx~~ was heard the Banker's voice intoning
the cash balance. He was having trouble reconciling a buck thirty,
while
lost in a fast lay/ ~~xxxx~~ his back was turned. He ran up and down
the cubicles checking the dirty sheets. They could hear his sharp
heels clicking along the tiles. He came back to
leather ~~xxxxxx~~ the
auditorium. The soles of his patent leather shoes slapped up the
steps of the rostrum.

"Somebody's pullin' something!" he yelled from the
rostrum. "I'm out a buck thirty!"

The madam put back her head and bawled, "Count the
contraceptives ~~in~~, you lint head!"

~~Future~~ opened the refrigerated box. ~~showing~~
~~Future~~ turned back the cooling cloth with which she had
~~covered the barrowful of fish.~~ The madam looked in at bass and
lying on top, ~~turbot glinting in~~ ~~several black.~~
perch and ~~axfinezjanzfishx~~ a fine ~~jew fish.~~ She looked up at ~~Future~~
~~orch~~ and met the flat ~~orch~~ eyes fixed unwinkingly ~~on her.~~
"Got a fine one
"A fine jew fish for a crackerwoman," ~~orch~~ said softly.

The madam's face flamed. She said slowly, "Some day,
Jim Bob's going to bring you in," ~~shexsxi~~

But the girl was standing carefully humble, the long
neck curved down, the malice in her eyes hooded now. ~~xxxxxx~~

"You fixing a treat for the plowboys?" she asked the
madam.

Looking down at the high priced fish the hard time
folk in Delta street wouldnt buy since they could settle for
prawns.

The madam looked her up and down. Her eyes slid over
the flat belly and pelvic swell and long, capable legs.

"I got room for a high yaller," the madam said.

and was sorry abruptly. For in,

On the eyes that widened abruptly, the madam saw ~~the~~ a jury struggling to their chairs.

They cracked their shins and swore as they sat, ~~on~~ the seats creaking ~~and~~ ^{and swimming} ~~again~~ in the ~~retina~~ ^{of the} jury-box eyes.

They held up their hands and swore ^{before God} to legally kill the madam who had fed and whored the plowmen into their culpable oblivion.

The madam plunged her face into her hands and waited until the chairs ^{quieted} ~~had ceased~~ to knock about in her head. ~~Then~~ She opened her eyes again ~~and saw~~ ^{and saw} ~~a~~ yaller-nigger wench she had been thinking to put into a cubicle. But that had been crazy. Jim Bob would have killed her.

"You got no room for me," the girl said softly.

The madam shrugged. "I aint prejudiced, ^{Roney, Cuddy} ~~honey~~," she said.

"But I am," the girl said.

The madam flushed. She said angrily, "Watch your goddam tongue. You're gonna talk yourself into trouble."

"What sort of trouble? They got any new ones? I know them all."

"You're so high yaller you could pass for dark ^{Coyote} ~~skin~~. Why dont you move out of Paradise ~~soon~~?"

^{no-good laugh} ~~she~~ ^{pinched} A ~~little smile~~ played ~~at~~ the corners of ^{Fentress's} ~~her~~'s mouth.

"Think I'll tell Jim Bob just that. Think I'll tell him where I got it."

"You goddam part time tramp," the madam said, ^{fully employed} ~~angrily~~. ^{possibly, she will find in that portion of her mind when it all came to clarity, a bitch-goddess.} ~~She was~~ ^{Of} ~~She was~~ ^{life} ~~long eyed,~~ ^{etc} ~~pulsing with life and passion~~

and mockery, ~~she~~ ^{was} ~~purr~~ and claws and a patience that could ~~send~~

^{call} a guy into impotence. To coldcock the quick triers with an ear at the window ~~listening~~ for the alien tread. The poor minded bastards who hustled in unbuttoned for a quick snatch at the fruit. She

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would do a plowman no good.

The madam stepped away, ~~from the burrow~~

"Beat it," she said to the girl.

The girl picked up the shafts. She grinned, very young.

"One of these days I'll come in. Give the plowboys a swing. ~~IV~~ Maybe they'll talk to me then."

The madam was angry but puzzled too. "What you want to do that for? Guys come in for a hustle, you hustle them. Who do you think you are? ~~Half breed~~ ^{Half breed} nanny to the world?"

A low laugh came from the girl's sensuous mouth.

"Like to talk when I do it, is all. Like to know what a fellow thinks when he's on the tread."

"You want to ~~be~~ ^{Senator,} a Congressman, not a whore." ~~Blow~~

"Yes, 'm." Malice scudded through it.

"You know what?" the madam said.

"What?"

~~She was slow to rap back for it was too full on truth. RAP BACK for it was slow~~

"I don't think you've ever been laid."

~~She was slow to RAP BACK for she was REELING,~~

~~And the madam reeled azzay from the roar of truth that~~

crashed through her. ~~she~~ stopped looking at the cabalistic woman.

"By nobody alive. Tell the ~~Banker~~ I get ~~my~~ my kicks holding Wakes," the girl said.

A steam whistle in the ~~coloured~~ Quarter shrieked.

A steam whistle ripped the poet to pieces. He was holed up in the cellar at the whorehouse. He thought that Joel could manage a night without him. The poet did not favour running into JimBo so early after last ~~XX~~ night.

He lay on his back in the cellar at the schoolhouse and

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thought with an urgent social conscience on the lot of the poor in
Paradise ~~land~~:

How that at a quarter of seven when the
yellow sunlight leaking off the roofs and
down the walls is as hot and eager as a wish
in hell, then the steam whistles rip a poor
black ^{more} ~~guy~~ to pieces.

Ripping him from his warm safe bed.

Hurling him into a world of scrofulous
crackers, their red necks elongated to
peck a poor Nigra out of his boll-weevil
hiding place into the magnolia love-time.

And with the sleep still knotting his limbs, the Poet
groped drowsily around in his head and said to one of the
noises:

Good morning, Old Man Mule, haulin' Uncle
Jed's junk cart up and down Delta street
and telling me good morning back by the flap
of your ears.

And he heard another noise and said to ~~the~~ ^{the coffin-maker for} ~~the~~ ^{Tin}
Bob's coal ~~black~~ Mammy:

Good morning, Uncle Remus, telling me all
those real good stories by the sound of
your hammer falling on the satin.

Satin for a Nigra woman who gonna cross
over Old Jordan riding on a cushion of
satin.

Soft falling hammer in a coffin talk, telling

me an Uncle Remus story calculated to
snatch a body straight from the ~~area~~
NOW ~~xxxx~~ back into the oldtime fine time.
Hammer falling thickly and softly — like
Mob boots running over a common.

And then the poet was bolt upright, last night flooding
into his head. Saying the good mornings faster now while he sneaked
around for an empty shower stall/^{at}~~in~~ which a bed-in could shower
in safety from a Banker patrolling his investments.

And standing in the shower shiveringly looking up and
saying:

Good morning, Shower.
Please to kill me, Shower.

And the cold water fell and killed him.

And hearing the Banker's footsteps on the stairs, he
fled into Delta street, fled among the fast walking downhome folk,
their go-fetch heads full of clocks.

Roundhouse men in dungarees hurrying to beat seven o'clock.

Longshoremen in navy canvas shoes softly racing to flog
seven o'clock.

The poet wiped his face with the tail of his shirt and
began swarming swiftly through them.

He slowed at the corner of Dixon and Mason, and looked
across the Avenue. Mobtown began over there. It was a canon of
survival that ~~the~~ Paradise South folk crossing the intersection
would first look to see that he disputed no passage with any of the
Mob people. The poet darted across Fourth of July Avenue and got up

to the massive marble walls of the Cotton Exchange. He edged his head past the angle of the building. He ~~xxx~~ rolled a look along the sidewalk until he ~~saw~~ the ragged turnups of the castoff Mob denim the Buck Dancer wore. He slid along the sidewalk on the rump of his pants until he was beside the turn ups. The Buck Dancer waited for a lull in the traffic before he spoke.

"Take this to Joel the Fool. Tell him that Jim Bob done put down 'Rook at any cost' beside ^{Lenny's} ~~Dancer's~~ name," the Buck Dancer said.

At the gates of hell, the poet whispered shakily,

"Jim Bob said anything about me? He put 'Rook' against my name too?"

The Buck Dancer made to spit but took it back in. For a cullud couln't spit in Mobtown. He could only bleed.

"You aint worth a dam', poet," he said disgustedly in a club-scarred voice.

He was a broken down thief who cleaned the locker rooms at the Mob's clubhouse. He was one of the tame oldfashioned crooks who had never left magnolia land. But he was smalltime, ~~was~~ so the Mob mostly let him be.

He was good for antics. A regular clown. He made the Mob chuckle or guffaw over his cullud folks jokes.

"He wasnt never uppity," some of the crackers said regretfully after they had broken both his ankles one exuberant Abie Linkun Wake day.

He flopped around until he had healed. His dancing days ^{though,} ~~were~~ ended, ^{so} the Mob gave him this fine job in the ~~xxxx~~ locker room at the clubhouse.

"I wo'th more than a couple of dam's, Buck Dancer," the poet said coldly.

Thinking about last night. Thinking how he had made a Mob go running after a couple of words, sick to ~~the bed to~~ catch *them*.

"You tell Joel what I told you," said the Buck Dancer.
"Seven o'clock. That's when I get to work."

He stepped into the crowd. In the heavy boots ~~and~~ cast offs, the Buck Dancer thought that he walked with a mobster's stride claiming a thousand sidewalks in a thousand Southern towns where cullud folks got off mighty fast without disputing a mobster's due and equity. But folks who saw him saw a shuffling old Nigra trying to imitate a mobster's gait.
~~He was a strong, light, fast, snappy dancer.~~

The poet looked at the slouched back and swinging hips ^{putting on} of the Buck Dancer/~~trying to walk~~ as if he was from Mobside, and the old sorrow sank ~~in~~ dragging like lead at the bottom of the poet's belly.

Sorrow for the black folk holding cotillions in the sculleries of Mob ^{Town} ~~city~~.

^{their} Dragging/cast off Bonwit Tellers through aisles of grease rimed pots and pans.

Shooting the roll in a pathetic gamble to be out of the bruised mouth anger.

"Wish I were a Snic," snuffled the teary poet, looking at the Mob's notion of a marching-in saint, a broken down dancer in ~~black~~white folks old clothes.

"Wish I were a goddam card-carrying, non-singing, knife-slinging Snic, sworn to sleep-in at Jim Bob's whorehouse," wept the poet in roaring tears as he micturated against the wall of the Cotton Exchange.

But the Buck Dancer strode proudly on, thinking how fine

it was to be going to work and not having to go gopher like that poor nigger ~~Daniel Ebony~~ ^{Bony}. He, Buck Dancer, was not one to go meeting trouble. The Mob was on the mound but he would switch hit the shit out of them. His old eyes narrowed as he saw ~~Torch~~ ^{Anthony} push her barrow up Delta street. He glared at her, hating his need.

~~Torch~~ ^{Fatima} halted her barrow at the blacksmith's shop. Uncle ~~Amos~~ ^{Hope} was broad, squat and very powerful. Uncle ~~Amos~~ ^{Hope} and Aunt Salvation were the only two people close to her in Paradise ~~South~~ ^{Bay}. One was too old to covet and the other had no man to lose.

Uncle ~~Amos~~ ^{Hope} met her at the door. He favoured his right hand in the left. He massaged the fingers.

"I'm an Uncle. But when the kids passed the door yesterday, I followed them," he said.

"And now Jim Bob's after you too?"

"The Mob knows I got time to lose. Moreover, I'm an Uncle. Its ~~Daniel~~ ^{Larry} they after."

"Sure. ~~Daniel~~ ^{Larry}. Him and Jim Bob. Folks still holding me between them? They still wondering whether I sleep with them both at once?"

Uncle ~~Amos~~ ^{Hope} rubbed his hand down the burlap apron. He looked into Delta street and he ~~thought~~ thought of who would win and he was sure only that the heat sweated the asphalt.

"Its hot early," he said.

His two boys stroked the hammers in the ~~X~~ shop behind him. He could smell the sparks. The boy who had the broken wrist from the fight last night laughed at the awkward way his left hand worked. Kids nowadays laughed at things like that, Uncle

~~Amos~~ remembered.

They didnt sing the gumbo songs anymore.

They didnt hardly know the sweet moanin' no more.

The deep down music we used to make when I was a boy, they dont make no more.

"Got some watermelon. Nothing like ~~the~~ watermelon when it gets to sizzling like now," he said.

The girl ~~took~~ took up the shafts of the barrow.

"Leastways, stop by and talk a little," Uncle ~~Amos~~ ^{Hilda} said helplessly.

"You be at the burying, Uncle ~~Amos~~," she said. ^{Hilda}

"The burying?"

^{leery} "Sure. ~~Den~~ ^{It's marmy.} ~~Ebony~~ will be there. ~~him~~ and Jim Bob Slocum ~~will~~ ^{be there too. She's his real black marmy.} Uncle ~~Amos~~ ^{leery} frowned. "Reckon ~~Daniel~~ ^{Hilda} pushing it too hard."

~~Torch~~ ^{Torch} said softly, "He got no time. Neither him nor Jim Bob."

~~Amos~~ ^{and Hilda} watched her go up the street. He knew that those fellows who could, would be watching the woman-walk through cracks in the boarding. Most of the menfolk in Paradise South and over in Mob ^{town} City wanted her. But there wasnt ^{anybody} ~~anybody~~ wanting her so much as ~~Daniel~~ ^{leery} and Cap'n Jim. They were the horniest.

He went back inside the shop. To the fire and iron. He understood the fire and iron. ^{Yahudah}

"You're too private, ~~Torch~~ ^{Yahudah}. Folks wont approve of you nohow," he said, grieving.

~~Torch~~ ^{Father} watched the poet out of the corners of her eyes. The poet was shaking down Delta street, a leer in his eye. She

braked the barrow near to him. He stood off from the wall. She watched his heel flutter as he straightened. He hid it but he was nervous. It was a satisfaction to ~~Torch~~ ^{she} ~~her~~.

"Poet," ~~Torch~~ ^{she} said,

She had a soft spot for him, a spot to put him in and pack ~~the~~ the dirt over him. He was too smart. If he burnt, he didnt show it. Other kids in Paradise ~~South~~, especially the randy Snics, showed it when she went by. They twisted inside their clothes and she ~~she~~ could see the hunger in their eyes.

"Poet? [?] what's cookin'?"

The poet took a step towards her and halted warily. She was a quick girl who could belt you fast. If what he was thinking showed up in his words, the dam' tart might want to belt him.

"You had a good ~~time~~ time at the Wake last night?" she asked.

The poet stuck his hands in the pockets of his tight dungarees and drew up his shoulders. He looked mean.

"Millions of folks enquired why you didnt show up," he said.

"How come they missed me?"

He shrugged. "I told them. Told them I saw guys lining up ^{your crib} outside like you were putting on a world series."

He was poised for flight. She grinned. ~~He~~ ^{today} ~~wasnt~~ ^{inclined} destructively. He stood easier.

~~Torch~~ ^{Editor} knew you had to give him plenty of rope so he could ~~stay~~ stay off in his own field of enquiry. He was a deep little guy. If he only knew it, she wasnt too locked ^{up} to him. He could be a peck of fun if he were around when she was in the mood.

The poet stood easier and said, "Big Lem is better. His old buoyant self."

Her ~~eyes~~ face had the wood cut quality he, a guy with brains, couldnt pierce. He wondered at the ^{many} bloods in her. She had been created out of a long roll in the hay. A few thousands years long.

"What's with Big Lem?" she said.

Jim Bob

~~"The Mob~~ did Big Lem. Did him good. An old guy, like him seeking to bed-in at the schoolhouse. He got a hunk from Jim Bob. Then ~~Daniel~~ *Lenny* went after him; and now you asking what's with him? He almost got killed, is all."

Lenny? ~~"Daniel? Why Daniel went for him? He beat up Big Lem?"~~ *He beat him was Lenny on to*

"No. The kids stopped him so Big Lem aint too bad. So you werent at the Wake?" he asked, ~~his head~~ his head on one side intently.

Intently
Torch pushed her barrow. Over her shoulder, she said,

"Why dont you go look for a bed-in at the schoolhouse too?"

"Aint taking no chances with Jim Bob. I keeping whole for you," the poet said.

But he said it softly. His sharp young eyes had already returned to slapping the truth out of ~~his ghetto~~ *his ghetto* ~~Paradise South~~.

Intently
Torch ~~push~~ wheeled her barrow to the burying yard. The coffin was mounted on saw horses. Uncle Remus stood off to look at the wood. It was dark grained, thunderous in the sunlight gathered in the knots.

"You telling a good story in the coffin, Uncle Remus?" she said behind him.

On the saw-horses, the
Uncle Remus spun around, startled. ~~The girl placed on the saw horse~~ the fish she had brought to help out with the food folks would expect to eat after the burying.

Uncle Remus was a tall, stooped, black-grey man whose big knuckled hands had whittled at coffins for generations while he told his stories. His eyes on the girl were afraid but angry.

"You only bring fish to the dead. You never seem to sell none to live folks." *"Maybe I price them too high. Maybe folks want some live."*

"I want high, Uncle Remus. Folks buying my fish they gotta make."
"Women folk went and the men cant. The women went 'low them. I not from fool. Guess thats why they like your stories."
Dont figure the women stop them from listening to your stories though.

They know you telling it mainly for ~~the~~ live white folks. That black folks die off quicker when they listen to you. That you're the best coffin-jockey in Paradise South."

Rage rolled around inside Uncle Remus's head.

Uncle Remus trembled with rage. He had been telling stories for a long time now. He could tell when people didn't like what he told them by the way they breathed, how they ~~was~~ slapped at 'skitoes on windy moonlight nights when there were no 'skitoes within miles. His finger shook as he pointed at the coffin. He picked up a small hammer and rapped the velvet lining. He rapped out a rhythm. The muffled beat was ^{cool and groovy} ~~as from~~ as from ~~the~~ any ~~skitoes~~ Arlington cat.

"You telling me that aint good? You telling me you wouldn't like to go out on that?" he shrieked.

She looked into his eyes and hers was older.

"You aint never going to tell no stories over me," she said softly.

Uncle Remus felt the cold flurry. But because he was old and angry, he came back quickly.

"Who are you, woman? Why you so different?" he said nastily.

"I'm the ~~skitoes~~ gal they all want. I'm sweet and valuable and hard as a gold dollar."

And he was afraid. But because he was old and had just seen it, he whispered bravely to her,

"You have pity now, you hear me? You have pity, girl."

Father
~~Remus~~ took up the shafts and trundled through Delta, calling in a deep, sweet voice,

"Come buy from me."
~~"Come buy from me."~~

The wheels rolled and she called twice again and the

he flutters,
 hope in her voice hung over ~~Paradise South~~, hung in
 the garbage smells of ~~Paradise South~~ and ~~in~~ the ancient magnolia smells
 from Mob ~~City~~ ^{town} where Mobfolk were sending out love-thoughts to
 the downhome folk in ~~Paradise South~~. She leaned into the shafts
 and the skirt snuggled to the backs of her legs. She was enticing,
 exciting, provocative.

The poet heard her street-cry and his pubescent eyes
 found the ripe legs and strong-armed them apart. He saw the shut
 and barred street doors. She was up for grabs and a ^{townsful} ~~lot~~ of fellows
 were turning from the wall cracks in flight. She whacked their loins
 with the love ache, and they ran harder.

"Murder," groaned the young poet, his eyes fastened on
 her legs.

"When I grow up and reach my prime, I'll open the earth
 and flatten the hills, seeking such legs," he cried, the make believe
 tears starting.

his turn.
 He looked around ~~Paradise South~~.

Where a prophet hornswoggled a drouth with a battery of
 empty cans, and a poet-apprentice sought the word from a crummy
 hooper.

"I will, I will," moaned the poet, the phantom tears
 scalding.

7.0.0.0.0.0.0.
 And ~~Torch~~ Futura walked her barrow, drubbing at the
 blind tomorrows.

Jubilee! she said ~~harshly~~ harshly.

The barrow shafts jumped in her hands and the wheels
 slewed wildly into the street.

The driver of the Mob car angrily honked his horn and
 steered past her. Jim Bob raked her body with his eyes. He pinched
 his fat knees hard and gave nothing away to the fool boy driving

the automobile. You couldn't tell about the young guys. Maybe they couldn't understand the special heat an older guy could have for a high yaller girl.

"Go on, son," he said in his comfortable voice.

He looked through the ^{window} ~~the~~ at his ^{own blade.} ~~Paradise~~ South folk. A couple of them had shied violently ^{as} ~~at~~ the auto passed. It was a big, black, dusty tourer he had used on many a night ride. He ought to get it ^{sluiced} ~~out~~ out. Maybe it smelled of blood and human hair. The Nigras were very sensitive to the smell of ~~the~~ a car which had towed away one of their folks.

He looked ~~at~~ at them through the window. There were so many of ~~the~~ Them. Different from Us, but hollering like hogs on Larding Day, wanting to be People. The soft sons of bitches ^{in Pig Swamp} up ~~North~~ wouldn't know the ring-a-ding it was to keep Them in their places without shutting down the whole economy. For Paradise South needed Mobtown as ^{Mobtown needed Paradise South.} ~~much as the other way around. As High Potentate,~~ It was his sacred duty to keep things going. Especially the whorehouse. He chuckled with amusement.

a cherubic face a little shopworn with hate. The ^{Under Potentate} ~~Under Potentate~~ said quietly as if he ran the kingdom, "Sing."

But the kids looked back roughly. Some spat on the beach. Under Potentate's ^{Under Potentate,} The ~~Under Potentate's~~ face creased into mob-love. By God, thought the ~~Under Potentate,~~ these he could have affection for. These he could swing and hammer and shoot full of holes when the right ~~time~~ time came along. When a mobsmans' time came rolling ~~around~~ around. When them fellows up ~~stopped~~ stopped No'th/ ~~horning in~~ horning in and a man could go about the old ~~boffola~~ boffola ~~ways~~ ways. The old foolin' ways. ^{a smokey} Saying in a gentle blue-eyed way to/ ~~so full of swish he had stepped a spittin' out of~~ ^{smokey.} line, "Sing, ~~smokey~~ ^{smokey}."

And a ~~smokey~~ ^{smokey} would unlimber the two hundred year old banjo humped on his back and sing of red-eye gravy and joy in ~~Swanee~~ Swanee ooze.

"Sing, boys," said the Under Potentate.

But the kids looked out to the bayou again. The ^{Under Potentate} ~~Under Potentate~~ said in his soft everloving voice, "You-all aint goin' no place. Best you can do is sing for us mobfolk."

"No," little Angie said.

"Dance, then," the Under Potentate said. "Aint no fear you steppin' out of line iffen you dance. Or maybe sing."

"We aint fearing steppin' out of line," Abel said.

"You come closer, Cap'n, we dance real good for you," little Angie said, a little kid so taut and eager to dance, he trembled.

"You come closer, Cap'n," he said.

And Big Lem in the middle of them prayed, Lordy, Lordy, it was a risky road a fellow took ~~when~~ when he walked with these crazy kids. For he saw how they hoped the ^{Under Potentate} ~~Under Potentate~~ would come closer

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

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

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

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

Remembered him ascending the platform, hair plastered down with harness oil, wearing his denims with the nail through the suspender but already with the organ sweep of oratory in him. The shit-and-stay convention room genius already in him that would pinwheel him straight into Potentate.

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

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

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

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

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

Aunt Jemima shook her head as she remembered.

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

CHAPTER TEN

Big Lem said sombrely on the beach at Delta street,
 "They gonna fix him for good now. They gonna fix his little waggon
 for him. 'hat's what the man said. ~~The~~ Mob ^{turns} a real mad."

The small-boat kids moved restlessly in and out
 of the hanging nets. They catfooted around, looking at him
 from the most unexpected angles. Sometimes they really scared
 Big Lem. Made him want to forget ~~Daniel~~ ^{every} and all this crazy busyness
 and go back to his job on the piers. A guy got on well with the
 white folks in Mobtown when he worked as a longshoreman loading
 all those bales of contraceptives the Mob shipped upstream to
 the Plowmen.

"They gonna roast your buddy ~~Daniel~~ ^{every}," he said again.

"You got a worrywart big as a silver dollar. I ought
 to take it off with this," Angie the kid said softly, showing Big
 Lem his knife.

Big Lem sat on an upturned boat working his arms
 boxer fashion, probing for pain. The old muscle flow was there.
 A twinge at his ribs was the only reminder that Jim Bob had met
 him. He stood and jumped, kicking his short powerful legs. He
 wasn't fancy. That would take a day or two. And then he hoped he would
 find a cracker. Alone. Maybe even Jim Bob. He doubted he would find
 Jim Bob alone but sometimes God was goshawfully good to his
 cullud chickens.

"They saying that ~~Daniel~~ ^{every} is the guy who chopped the
 mobsman?" Angie asked.

"There's a list. ~~Daniel~~ ^{every} is at the head," Big Lem said.
 He looked thoughtfully around, planning the lie.

"They got others of you on the list too. You, and you, and you. Jim Bob's gonna roast you all," he said.

He listened to the silence. ~~These~~ ^{boys} These were Daniel's kids. He worked with them. He told them the best times to bed-in on that crazy stunt they were riding. ^{lem} Daniel was what the kids called a good guy. He, Big Lem, was strictly a survival guy. ~~Some~~

^{lem} "And all who help Daniel from now on will catch the same fever, the man said. 'Rope fever,' Big Lem said.

They had no respect for him. They eyed him coldly. Big Lem shrugged. Guessed he hadn't scared anybody.

"See you around," Big Lem said soft as a kitten. He went through the nets, his heavy shoulders swaying.

He went up the bayou, the sun hot on his back. He grunted when he got under the pier. The underpinnings glistened above low tide. The trestles that spanned them were dry. A real gloomy cathedral of timber and concrete but Big Lem knew the voices of the choirs overhead: the rattle and thump of winches, packing cases bumping down the holds full of the goods which fed the great export trade of Mob crappery to the North ^{Swamp}. A ship's manifest fluttered in Big Lem's head and he read off the descriptions of the goods ~~stored~~ stored below (away from boilers): ~~the~~

Belles, Delicate & Fragile, suitable for
bawling 'Nigger, go home!' into t.v.
cameras;

Manners, Ante Bellum (sample: 'Suh, I'd
take it mighty proud if you'd just hold
her other nigger leg while I use this
lil' ole corn cob. Thank you kindly;')

Wistaria, Moonlit, suitable for climbing
up gallery pillars; where unobtain-
able, for climbing up Yankee assholes;

all the mumbo jumbo that kept the creeps in ^PBig Swamp happy for a tradition that the new rawboned land so hungrily desired.

Big Lem shook his head and dislodged the ~~ship's~~ ship's manifest. He was no Snic punk to get angry over every little deal. He was strictly a survival guy.

He climbed aboard the trestles and rode them all the way under the pier, looking for ^{Lenny}~~Daniel~~. They were wide and well bolted. A sensible fugitive could sleep hotel easy. He called ^{Lenny}~~Daniel~~'s name softly as he went. Big Lem wasn't for the impolite rush that could fetch him a cracked skull. A fellow who knew his survival drill could cut his risks to the bone.

^{Lenny}~~Daniel~~ swarmed along a trestle to meet him. ^{He}~~Dan Ebony~~ wore shorts and sneakers. His head stood clean and bold on the greatly muscled shoulders.

^{College Man}
 "Big man," Big Lem said.

"What goes on?"

"Jim Bob's asking for your birth certificate. He wants to put the right date on your tombstone."

"Funny man. What's the deal?"

"Cap'n Jim, he gave new orders. He wants you real bad now."

"What do the folks say?"

"Dont worry. You still a hero, but I keep remembering."

"What?"

"They dont fight long," Big Lem said. "They stop after a while. Go fishing or hunting. Or just looking for bread. Man,

you know our ~~folks~~ folks. They aint with you for long. They got commitments. They got ^{town} Mob ~~world~~ to live with everyday. All they get from the kids, them fishermen and you, is a few Sundays of fun."

^{born} Daniel kept looking down into this water flowing underneath. Big Lem sure had it figured out. He was the most whole guy in Paradise South. He had a little of Joel in him, and a little of ^{Jim Bob} Daniel and a little of the kids and a ^{lots} little pure gumbo. A hell of a lot of pure gumbo. Jim Bob would be proud of him.

"You talk a ~~hell of a lot~~ ^{to impregnate a nuke. What's the small boat bulletin?"} ~~of a lot.~~

"Plenty of inland water chop. But they aint worrying."

^{real dedicated.} Your small boat kids are ^{They never get sent to college so} ~~teach~~. Hope ^{when they grow up they} ~~will~~ wind up being prime bait for Jim Bob. ^{have more sense than you."}

"Yeah? Tell me more about them."

"They ~~laughed~~ ^{born} from here to Slocumville when I told

them that Jim Bob would be after them too. I guess you knew they would laugh ^{like that crazy thing.} ~~like hell.~~"

"Sure." ^{born} They have no time. No time to go fishing or hunt-

~~ing or looking for bread. They have all the dough they want."~~

^{them snick}

"They got heart," Big Lem agreed. "Trouble is, we aint sure whether they got brains."

^{born} Daniel leaned forward. He said softly, "But I'm sure, Big Lem. Every poor son of a bitch in ^{the} Paradise ^{ghetto} South got brains, and plenty of it. Or they couldn't live. They've had to have brains to live ^{with} in ~~this~~ Mob ^{town} world. To lie and twist and hide and run so ~~that~~ they can live. What the kids and I are trying to do is ^{so} give folks more heart. You're wrong. Dead wrong. It aint the brains that's the trouble. Its heart, Big Lem."

Big Lem considered it and shrugged. He ~~thought he had~~ got Daniel ~~that time~~ but the College Man had outsmarted him. The

College Man was making ~~per Big~~^{him} sweat with double-think. And double-think could land you in deep trouble. A lot of double-thinkers were stone cold dead in the ~~brinkin'~~^{man's} graveyard ~~with~~ with a white ~~bastards~~ signature on their pine box.

Big Lem ~~looked at Daniel~~^{He} snapped his fingers and rolled his eyes, ~~humming~~ humming a big beat through his nostrils. ~~Dan Ebony~~ ~~ginted~~.

"Okay, Big Lem. I know. A guy's got to survive. Scratch a downhome boy and you find a buck dancer."

"Yeah, suh boss," said Big Lem.

"Cut the funny routine. Anything else?"

After a time, Big Lem said, "They ~~laying out~~^{you} ~~laying out~~^{Mammy} ~~for the buryin'~~ for the buryin'. Mob ~~people~~^{town} people been around asking questions. They want to know when's the funeral?"

"Folks talking?"

"Not yet. They scared of your little killers."

"Wont hurt them being scared. They're used to it."

"Yeah. But it used to be just Mob scare. Now they being scared of their own kin too. Then ~~Say No I Cant See~~^{since all} ~~is~~ as bad as the Mob in some ways," said Big Lem.

"They get scared enough, they'll step into line with the kids. Help to bust up Jim Bob."

Big Lem said, "You turned cold, you know? You know you turned cold, ~~Daniel~~ Cottonmouth cold."

"So's Jim Bob. ~~It's the only way to fight him~~^{W.E} ~~He~~ down in Paradise ~~South~~ been warm so long, we even begin to think the fire Jim Bob lights under us is a bayou breeze. We've gotten so used to the whip, we've stopped showing scars."

"Jim Bob says he's staking ~~out Paradise South~~^{out the place} until he finds you. Aint no buryin' going to be held without him."

"He's real hot."

"Sizzlin'. So I reckon you aint going to no buryin'."

"You talking funny again? ~~Of course I'm going.~~"

Big Lem looked at the bold, ~~angry~~ ^{lemp} tilt of ~~Ben Ebony's~~ head, ^a column of neck and the arms like maces that had flattened a couple of mobsmen the time they had held him at the station house and scared him up enough for him to break out.

"You're crazy," he decided flatly. "Big strong guy gone crazy. The Mob's gonna be out like New Year's Eve. Nobody could save you."

"Know what day is the funeral?" he asked Big Lem.

"They laying out for ~~Thursday~~ Friday."

"Friday. ~~And~~ that's the day the Plowmen come in for their lessons in Jim Bob's schoolhouse," ~~Daniel~~ said.

Big Lem looked incredulous.

"You reckon they will save you? Goddamit, they wont even see you. They'll have their minds fixed on the lay ahead. They'll have all that long hair falling down over their eyes and ears. They wont be thinking about anything but a cunt."

"Maybe I should draw you pictures, you're so dam' dumb," Daniel said. "You know what's a burying in Paradise ~~South~~. The lodge people marching in front with the brass band, folks singing. Now somewhere on Delta, the procession's gonna meet up with the procession of Plowmen shuffling ~~along~~ ^{down} to the whore-house."

It was a familiar enough picture. Big Lem could see the swords and the insignias of the lodge, the gloved and shiny booted mourners locked in a lockstep of triumph up the golden stairs in the wake of a winner who had whupped the Mob by just

up ~~and~~ dying. Who had stepped ^{out of from an} ~~the~~ losers. ^{And} ~~there~~ was no white ^{folks} ~~mob~~ powerful enough to embargo ~~the~~ the robe and crown just a-lying on that table beyond the pearly gates, waiting for God's little darkskinned chicken to come by and pick them up.

"Oompah oompah, hey hey hey," rumbled Big Lem, moving his short thick leg like he was marching.

"Yeah, you should be on the stage then Jim Bob would have a hanging name for you," Daniel said. "Alright. Soon's the Plowmen meet up with the mourning people, then's when I'm gonna show. Now, if I know Jim Bob, he wont be reasoning any, the minute he sees me. So Jim Bob's gonna grab for me and our folks at the buryin' aint going to like that."

For buryin' time is a triumph time, a getaway time for ~~the~~ hard suffering black folk, ^{trapped} ~~in~~ in the ^{ghetto} ~~dungeon~~ of their Southern skin.

"Folks should show respect for a funeral, so when Jim Bob grabs for me, my kids and the ^{rest, you, are} ~~longshoremen~~ you're going to ~~deliver to me, they are going to~~ crack back at Jim Bob. And you're gonna see the biggest free for all you ever did see. And guess what?"

"What?" promptly asked Big Lem, showing big eyes like he was enthralled.

"The Plowmen will be in the middle. We're going to haul 'em in if we have to pull them by the hair."

"Golly. And what's that going to buy us? A few more coffins?" Big Lem asked.

"The Mob dont want the Plowmen disturbed. It rocks the whole ^{economy,} ~~beat,~~ both North and South. And so the fellows up North who hold the power and the purse are gonna get mad at the Mob. That's what we want, Big Lem."

"Then they'll both fall on us and beat our black ass off."

"Folks want peace. Real folks. Not the psychotics down here. I mean the ~~black~~ ^{among} ones up ~~North~~. And the Plowmen. The Plowmen are going to be asking questions."

Big Lem looked at him. "Man, they never ask questions. Didnt you know that?"

"Nobody ever socked it into them before."

"Like how we're gonna do it?"

"Like how we gonna lay it on."

The fear smell began rising into Big Lem's nostrils.

"You watch it, ~~Deniel~~ ^{Levy}. Watch it, man. The Mob and them plowboys, they all one," he said urgently.

said softly. ~~Said Daniel gently,~~ "You ought to be a travelling man," ^{Levy} "You been down here too long. Those Plowmen, they're different from the Mob, even if they're both white. The plowboys got things hidden in ~~Big~~ Swamp they want to keep."

"What? Stocks and bonds? You told me that before. You said they got gilt edged stuff buried in that rich muck underfoot."

"Yeah, stocks and bonds. But that's not all. They've got freedom there, boy," Daniel said softly.

"Freedom?"

"They feel clean, Big Lem. They havent got this dirty hatred fouling them inside. ^{But now, you} ~~look~~ look at Jim Bob and his crowd. You can see they're dirty. You can know they feel dirty inside. They feel the dirt filling up inside them. You look at a crowd of Mob folk. Look at any cracker crowd. You can see them feeling the dirt inside, caking their insides. They're filth, mister."

Big Lem looked mildly angry.

"The way you talk, sounds as if you gotta ^{a few} ~~branch~~ of angels

in Big Lem's
 passing for folk up ~~North~~, he said.

Long
 Daniel sighed and rubbed his forehead.

"Guess so. Guess I made it sound that way," he mumbled.
 "Dont mean it that way, though. ^{Meant} ~~to~~ to say they ^{were} ~~was~~ working better
 at being human. Sometimes they go crazy too like these down here
 but then they cant keep it going. What happened was that, a long
 time ago, they gave us a chance to show we could be ~~people~~ People.
 A lot of our folks made it. We got congressmen, senators, ^{boxers,} ~~fighters,~~
Singer, doctors,
 social workers, even diplomats. Down here they never gave us much
 of a chance. Guess you cant even blame 'em for ~~being~~ despising
 us. We aint showed yet, Big Lem. They still dont knw whether we
 can be People."

"So, take it easy, huh? Dont push 'em too much," Big
 Lem said eagerly.

Long
 "You go to hell," ~~Daniel~~ said coldly.

Long
 "Okay." There's one thing. Suppose the mobster dies? The
 one with the piece of steel through his gut."

Long
 "I hope he doesnt," ~~Daniel~~ said. "If he does, then we
 just gotta move even faster. Though I dont see how we can speed it
 when everything will hang on when the Plowmen come in."

Big Lem slapped the girder on which he sat.

"You know you didnt knife no mobster. Why should you
 take the rap?"

Long
 "The kid who did it, did it for me," ~~Daniel~~ said.

"You think he was thinking of you?"

"I'm the kingfish."

"Then why didnt he come out and said he did it? The
 kid who did it. Why didnt he tell you he did it? Or why didnt
 any of the other little guys? No. They all keep their mouths

shut. Kingfish, huh? That why they putting you on the hook?"

"The kid's scared. The others know this and kids stick together. Maybe they reckon I'm old enough to go, anyway. They wont give me to Jim Bob, but if somebody has to go, then its better that it be me."

Big Lem's mouth ^{hung open.} ~~was~~

"Well, gee, I never heard a lousier way of ~~being~~ a guy looking after hisself," he said.

"You dont like the kids at all, do you?"

"No!" exploded Big Lem. "They all show and shittery. They rockin' the boat and a lot of Paradise ~~South~~ folk cant swim."

"You're straining to be an Uncle. I'll put in a word with Jim Bob for you," Daniel said.

"Aw, ~~shucks~~, I wont take that for anything. Jim Bob says boo and you bolt under the pier. You keep skulking, glory man. Teaching Jim Bob's got his strap out to larrup you," jeered Big Lem.

"You should get to know those kids," ^{boy} Daniel said. "They're mostly out on the bayou. They dont have to depend on the Mob for a living — or at least, they dont know they have to, which is the same thing. They dont live close ashore under Jim Bob like the older folks. They dont scare, yet. When they get too old for the boats and have to live ^{town} ~~in~~ Paradise ~~South~~ like the rest of us, then they'll get scared like the rest of us."

Big Lem was getting fighting angry. ^{boy} Daniel was ~~tear-~~ing into him for no reason. ^{boy} Daniel hadnt put it right. It wasnt that a guy got scared. You just got careful. He hadnt been afraid last night when Jim Bob was working him over. He had only

been scared enough to kick Jim Bob in the balls, ~~by god~~. But a guy had to survive. A ~~big~~ guy had to work to eat. The Mob could cut you off easy. They ~~was~~ owned all the jobs.

They say to a job, Go, and that job went.

He had given ~~Daniel~~ ^{erry} the best. He had faked passes and run guard until he was spinning like a big fat toy some guy had pulled a string on.

Did ~~Daniel~~ ^{erry} think that living in Paradise ~~South~~ and yessuhbossing with the rich laugh and the clown acts was easy?

The Mob held your job and your eatin' time. They held hostages for you, just like that old Hitler cat. So you stayed with it and maybe hating like a drum.

"You scared like anybody else. You holed up for the fear season. You gotta have us to run interference for you, glory man. You scared like the rest of us."

His voice had been hammering at ~~Daniel~~ ^{erry} and he couldn't keep the snarl out of it. And even before he had finished ~~the~~ sounding ~~off~~, he was sorry like a hound dog in a mess of polecats. For ~~Daniel~~ ^{erry} was really heating up and a guy didn't hurt so deep if some of it wasn't true.

"You dirty, lousy — I'm not in this for myself!"

~~Daniel~~ ^{erry} said.

"Holy Jesus! For who then?" jeered Big Lem.

And then ~~Daniel~~ ^{erry} swung and they fell off the trestle.

Then went under trying to hit each other with fat underwater blows like pillows. They tugged and wrestled until they let go and rose for air. Big Lem bobbed up under the pier but ~~Daniel~~ ^{erry} broke out into hard yellow sunlight. Big Lem heard the roar of a power boat and the crash of a foghorn. He took it in as he caught the wild

look in ^{boy's} ~~Dan Ebony's~~ eyes.

Big Lem dived and swam underwater until he had cleared the pier. He rose in ~~the~~ sunlight. He managed a few waterlogged strokes before he heard the Mob voice bellow, "Hey, boy! Hey, ^{boy} Daniel! You stop or we'll shoot you!"

But he reckoned they wouldnt shoot him since it was clear he ~~wasnt~~ going anywhere fast. He wanted to give ^{boy} Daniel enough time to make it ~~even~~ under the pier. So Big Lem swam stubbornly on as he heard the motor roaring nearer. A boat hook fell on his shoulder and numbed him. The hook went inside his belt and they hauled him into the boat.

"You beggin' to be killed, ^{black boy} ~~nigger~~? Dont you know when a ^{white man} ~~mobman~~ calls your name, you freeze?"

Big Lem sat up and glared at the magnolia in the jacket of the mobsman in the boat.

"Cap'n, ^{boy} my name aint ~~Daniel~~. It aint changed from Big Lem to ^{boy} Daniel. If you changed it, nobody done tell me," he said.

"This one aint ^{boy} Daniel," another ^{white man} ~~mobman~~ said. "Where's ^{boy} Daniel, boy?"

Big Lem laughed the high one and clowned his face the way the magnolia people liked to see it done.

"^{boy} Daniel? Got him in my pocket, Cap'n. Take him out soft before he bites you."

The mobster looked angry but he was real slow with the cuff to Big Lem's mouth. Light stuff too. Didnt do more than loosen a tooth. One time he would have broken a jaw but Jim Bob had said they should take it easy until things got clearer.

"Go overboard," he said angrily to Big Lem.

But Big Lem shook his head. He was running his little

mile for Daniel. That boy sure needed protection.

"I'm hurt, Cap'n. I go back in there, I'll drown. You gotta take me ashore."

"So you drown. We didnt push you in," the mobster said. Big Lem shook his head.

"Them cullud fellows up on the pier, they watchin' you, Cap'n. You make Big Lem drown, them ~~the~~ culluds going to talk."

The white man didnt get angry. He seemed a little confused.

He said, "Its gotta be over soon, boy. Then we gonna take payment from all you niggers. With interest."

"Cap'n, reckon you dont know it but I'm Cap'n Jim Bob's boy. I aint behind in no payments," Big Lem said.

CHAPTER TEN

CHAPTER TEN

Leaning crossed Proctor
Aunt ~~Salvation~~ walked down from ~~Wanny Ebony's~~ *Mansion Street in Harlem to the* cabin on *get the*
~~Delta~~ *where* Uncle Remus was taking down the satin padding; the *new*
neat hammer blows falling on the ~~box~~ *told* ~~blowdown~~ *Minth of the* telling folks there *wasn't*
was no sickness a coffin couldn't cure. Nailing down the mess of *her head*
cutrate trouble *the white* ~~the~~ folk dragged to your door, *high-* fixing to hogtie *and*
~~away~~ *down the* to this trouble until your born days ended in the *of sombre*
pillar of salt all this pain and weepin' erected, where, a god-child *walks on a*
should have a heart. *sheet where*
Uncle Remus

Aint nobody gonna tell me we aint all god-childs, Aunt
Samiana
~~Salvation~~ said to herself, *as she* ~~as she marched~~ *marching* down ~~Delta Street, its~~ *the*
 asphalt darkly shimmering in the noon ~~time~~ *time*.

She could see the Mob limousines at the foot of Delta where the street lost itself in the bayou. There were other Mob ^{mobemobile} autos on stake-outs all over Paradise South. Jim Bob had ringed them ^{ghetto with the long black leashes} of Mob limousines. ^{long} Now he was sitting around waiting for ~~Denise~~ to ~~show~~ enough to pop up ^{seared}.

"But he aint gonna pop up," whispered Aunt Salvation, her eyes shut tight. "My sister's boy aint peppin' up for no Tiken Bob."

She blinked them open again and scowled, ^{She was} aware that the pain and fear had hit her into a corner that time.

"We reared him tough," she said. ^{we}~~she~~ looked around and saw all this pain and fear and ^{we}~~it~~ reared him tough, ^{she said of her}

A couple of Say-Noes ^{went by,} ~~passed~~ her, their feet slapping bodied lightly, swift-~~boated~~ as wolfhounds, kids fishing and probing and ~~weak spots~~ testing for the ~~rotten~~ places in mobbery. She went into Uncle Amos' shop.

Uncle Amos rested the big hammer and nodded the two

boys from the shop.

~~Salvation~~ Aunt ~~Salvation~~ eyed him narrowly.

"~~Is~~ ^{in to the Mobtown church?} my sister gonna make it?" she demanded.
she asked.

Uncle Amos looked steadily back at her before he nodded.

Aunt Salvation breathed heavily and sat down on a stout wooden

stool. ^{On Sundays Uncle Amos wore} In his black frock ~~coat~~ coat and beaver hat, ~~Uncle Amos~~ and rang the bell ~~on Sundays~~ for the ~~the~~ ^{the} Mob chapel ~~on the Avenue~~ in Mobtown.

"Guess they did it for you 'cause you're a good Uncle," she said bitterly. "Only 'cause you asked, is why they 'lowing to churl my sister's body inside a Mobtown church."

Uncle Amos ^{tightened} ~~pursed~~ his mouth. He turned away and gripping the handle, worked the bellows until a flame spurted up from the coals. He poked a pair of tongs inside the flame. He took out the red hot iron and cooled it in a water trough. He took the small hammer and rapped the work into shape. He raised the tongs and showed the work.

"No. They did it because I told them she was a Mammy. They will do things for a Mammy. Folks like to deal with people they feel they can trust. Black or white, folks ^{act} ~~like~~ like that," he said quietly.

Aunt Salvation opened her mouth to retort but Uncle Amos was a tough adversary. Better to let well alone and just do what ^{gray} ~~Daniel~~ had told herto do.

"Reckon I should go back and tell her she's gonna make it," she said.

Uncle Amos said harshly, "The woman's dead, Salvation."

But Aunt Salvation just glanced at him and went back to her mumbling.

"Flat on her back she's gonna make it. ~~But~~ ^N Nobody ever made it standing up. Nobody from Paradise ~~South~~ ^{a Mobtown} ever made it into ~~the white folks~~ church standing up," she said.

"I made it," ~~she~~ Uncle Amos ~~as he~~ cut into her mumbling. "I made it, others of our folks will make it in time."

Aunt Salvation glared angrily at him as she kept talking.

"Nobody ever made it on their own two feet 'cepting Uncle Amos 'cause he rings the white folks bell. So they give him a stool by the door, he can hold the door open for them like any good whiteheaded Uncle."

"You so mad about it, why you so crazy for ~~Manny~~ ^{leaves your sister} Ebony to get churched there, before the buryin'?" Uncle Amos demanded.

Aunt Salvation said suspiciously, "You dont run into no trouble? They didnt ask you a passel of questions when you told them you wanted her churched?"

"Lots of things easing nowadays," Uncle Amos said. "We wait a while longer, more will be eased."

"Our folks in the procession, will they be 'lowed into the church with her?"

Uncle Amos stared, incredulous.

"To go with the body ~~XXXX~~ inside the church? Our folks? You crazy in the head, Salvation? I said things were easing. I didnt say things were busted wide open. Our people can wait outside while ~~XXXX~~ ^{inside} the body's/s ~~sides~~ the church."

~~Aunt Salvation said~~ "Guess I couldnt have everything."

"But you
Her flinty old eyes softened. / ~~ZYBX~~ did right well."

"I dont know if I did. Knowed ~~Manny Ebony~~ ^{your sister} all ~~my~~ ^{her} life ~~and~~ ^{from before} ~~the~~
~~she was wet nursing Jim Bob, when she had Leroy, and~~
never knowed her to hanker after going into ~~XXX~~ a Mobtown church.
You aint ^a ~~no~~ liar and I asking you now. Why you so anxious for ~~Manny~~ ^{leaves}
~~her~~ ^{get churched} to be ~~passed~~ through the white man's church?"

She didnt look at him.

"Its ~~Daniel~~ ^{leaves}," he said in a low voice.

~~Aunt Salvation met his eyes and looked away again.~~

"~~Daniel~~," he said. "Why? Why he pushing so hard? It wont work out if he pushes so hard."

"You know how to get to any place without pushin'?"
Aint you tired of being pushed? Dont you want to do a little shoving yourself, you blamed old coot?"

Uncle Amos muttered and shook the water beads off the iron he held.

"What that thing you waving in my face?" demanded Aunt Salvation. "What you showing me that ol' iron for?"

"Where's ~~Daniel~~?" shouted Amos. "I want to show him this — even iron ~~■~~ gets humble sometimes and when it gets humble, then its useful!"

"~~He~~ aint coming out to be humbled!"

Amos looked down and spat in the coal dust. He was a massive, quiet sort of man, hard to arouse. A downhome man like Amos played Uncle, because Uncles could baffle and block ^{through} ~~because~~ ~~■~~ concessions to their rank, on occasions when the Mob rode forth on a ^{homefront} ~~spring~~. To ~~■~~ intercede for a ~~threatening~~ ^{his white brother} loser fleeing from the love a ~~mobster~~ ~~carried~~ knotted in a lyncher's noose.

To plead for a hardluck ~~godchild~~ ^{The white brothers} godchild fleeing the boon ~~any mobster~~ bore on ~~■~~ magnolia days.

Uncle Amos took up a spanner and fitted it around his finger. He twisted it. He could tear the ~~■~~ tendons.

"Stop that," Aunt Salvation said sharply.

"The pride in you. In you and in ~~Daniel~~ ^{Levy} and in Cap'n Jim Bob."

Uncle Amos dropped the spanner. He doubled his great fists and rested them on his knees.

"Look at my hands," he said.

Cautious, she looked. He drove two brawling blows to his knees. The wind of them fanned her face. He had immense power. She let go her breath.

"You could break your knees," Aunt Salvation said coldly.

"I could kill a man with any hand. Uncle Amos aint puny. Folks know. But these hands done nothing but swing the hammers in here. Except once."

"Except when you play the piano."

"Except when I used them for ~~Daniel~~ ^{him} last night at the Wake," he said, ignoring her. "Ask me why I used them."

"Because you got six toes."

"~~Because~~ ^{Came} ~~Daniel~~ was doing a mighty job. 'Cause he was doing it clean. Because folks up ^{in Pig Swamp} ~~North~~ would have to hearken to us, Daniel doing it so clean. Now he fouled it up."

Aunt Salvation got to her feet. The strong old face was seamed with wishing that Uncle Amos would lose her some place where she wouldnt have to figure meanings. Why what seemed right turned out wrong.

^{CLAYTON}
"Daniel ^{is my kin} is my kin. You want me to set him up for Jim Bob?"

"He cant beat Jim Bob if he aint bigger than Jim Bob," Uncle Amos said.

"He cant beat Jim Bob if he's dead either. He wouldnt live to stand no trial."

"There would be others," Uncle Amos said.

"Daniel didnt stick no Jim Bob man with no knife!"

Aunt Salvation said fiercely. ■

"That dont matter. He lost his use."

Aunt Salvation strode angrily for the door but there, she turned.

"You wanting some of that magnolia meat Jim Bob got stashed

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in the schoolhouse? That why you want to give ^{Christ} ~~Daniel~~ to Jim Bob?"

"You just old and crazy," snapped Uncle Amos.

"No older nor no crazier than you. You talking about others. What others? We aint seen any ~~KKK~~ others until Daniel and the fishing kids start hitting the Mob where it hurt."

But there have been others, Amos cried silently.

Others like me what do the bit we can and nobody called us glory man. And folks who mind the kids in the magnolia nurseries and hold down the kitchens over in Mobtown. pulling And even/~~KKK~~ on a ^{bell} rope in a magnolia church/~~like~~ pulling folks together so we never become real strangers; but always look into faces and hear voices nearer ~~surer~~ when folks and help the day/~~KKK~~ ~~than-a~~ will get along surer than some crazy kids bent on trouble could do it.

"It dont make sense going against the law. It make sense changing the law," he said.

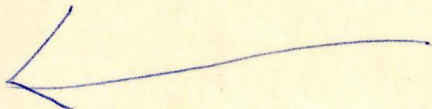
"To hell with the law," Aunt ^{Servina} ~~Salvation~~ said.

"Most of the laws aint bad."

"You still livin' in Paradise South, mister? You lost that feeling that most of the laws aint no good to us?"

"All laws are right laws when folks have a hand in making them. Maybe when Jim Bob was making his law, if he had come along and said to us in Paradise South, 'Now, looky here folks. We want to make this law concerning the whorehouse but we want you to vote on it;' if Jim Bob had come along and said so, maybe we'd

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have said, 'Now see here, Cap'n Jim, we'll think it over.'

"And we'd have thought it over and said to ourselves, 'Now what Jim Bob has in the schoolhouse aint good for us. We better off without it.' Then we'd have voted ourselves out of the schoolhouse.

"But that other law aint got no life since we had no hand in it. A law that dont look both ways is a dead law. There's a law what says, 'Dont kill or you'll get the electric chair.' But the law dont stop there. It looks the other way too and then says, 'But if you kill because that is the only way you can stop yourself getting killed, then you wont get the electric chair.' That law looks both ways."

~~XXXX~~ Aunt ^{Salvation} pushed out her lips. She had been buried under Uncle Amos for awhile. She shook her head to rectify her rumpled identity.

"Jim Bob's law still aint good law!" she ^{slammed} ~~yelled~~ at him.

"The law aint bad. Its just that it didnt have no talk with us before it became law."

"Quit trompin' me. You flying too high. You got charity taking the wind those white folks break in your face when you sit in the back pew like how some people get religion."

"I got surety. I believe in ~~most people~~ not messing with things when they going right. I go through the fire every Sunday. I aint busted that bell-rope once thinking how maybe they used it on my kin the night before. And some Sunday, one of those crackers going come up to me and say, 'Uncle Amos, your people are real fine folks. Whyn't put a couple of chairs in the back here and bring in your family for service?' And you know what?"

"What?"

"That day I'm going to bust him one."

"You — what?"

"I'm going to break his goddam big yellow tobacco stained stinkin' teeth," Uncle Amos said ~~XXXXXX~~ quietly.

"Then why — but I mean, why you old fool?"

"Because that is the lesson he must have. He must learn that no matter what he did to me, ~~UNCLE AMOS~~ even if he had made me crawl, my pride was down there on the floor with me, that there was ~~ain't~~ nobody who could nick it."

"Then they would lynch you, you wooden head."

"It wouldnt matter. I would have done my job and there would be others," Uncle Amos said,

Aunt ^{*Temmy*} ~~Salvation~~ was scared of Uncle Amos.

"You reckon there's more like you in Paradise ~~South~~?" she whispered.

"It breeds lots of us. But most of us die before the cracker comes up. Or we get too old to bust him."

^{*CLINT?*}
"What's this gotta do with ~~Daniel?~~"

^{*CLINT?*}
"~~Daniel's~~ got too old to paste Jim Bob."

"Too old? Daniel aint much more'n a kid!"

"He aged considera bly since that ^{*finking*} kid of his stuck the ~~knife~~ into the ^{*Killer-Cop*} ~~mobster~~. He should give the job to somebody else," Uncle Amos said.

Aunt ^{*Temmy*} ~~Salvation~~ backed off, shaking her head. She quit the shop walking fast.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Big Lem walked briskly along the beach towards the kids loafing in the noon heat. They sat up to eye Big Lem coming. They were not hostile since he was a friend of ^{Clint} the glory man's, but they were wary of any interloper on this careful day. All morning, ^{cops} the ~~Mob City~~ auto had sat ^{around the town and on} ~~on the edge of~~ the beach ~~at the foot~~ of ~~Delta street~~.

"You been in swimming?" Abel the head kid asked looking at the water beads on Big Lem's head.

Big Lem sat down and sifted sand through his fingers. He could smell the bitter, salt washed cleanness of their bodies. ^{Clint} Daniel had once said the kids didnt smell of garbage like the people ~~xxxx~~ who lived in town. He rubbed his shoulder where the boat hook had hit him.

"I fell into the water but some crackers rescued me," he said.

"I know that big guy. He's a great/^{little} ~~zixxxx~~ joker," Angie the kid pointed a finger at him and said.

"I'm a spy for ^{Jim Bob,} the Mob," Big Lem said.

"Show me your badge," Angie said eagerly.

"What's your name?" asked Big Lem looking keenly at him.

"Angie the kid," Angie said shyly.

"A fisherman should be named Peter. You the ^{cob} ~~Mob~~ spy," Big Lem said.

"Somebody told you!" Angie the kid cried.

"Okay. Cut the crap," Abel said.

They waited. They waited on Big Lem.

~~Robert~~ ^{Clint} "That ~~Daniel~~, he crazy as a loon, ~~■~~" Big Lem said.

"He aiming to give himself up? Has he been asking for Jim Bob?" Abel the head kid asked. Big Lem thought he looked real interested.

"Stop tickling under my arm," ~~Big~~ ^{Big} Lem snarled.

"Okay, Big Lem. You come to the beach this bad day and you tell us Daniel's goofy. Why?"

"He wants to go to the buryin'," Big Lem said, looking puzzled.

The yell of laughter nearly locked him flat. He stood up breathing hard and scowling at them.

"Aw, hell, Big Lem. The guys are laughing because anybody should know that ~~Daniel~~ ^{Clint} would go to the buryin'," Abel said.

"Why should he? Aint he heard that Jim Bob's after him for real now?" said Big Lem.

"Well, the way we figger it is this. The Mob's gotta have respect for the dead, aint that right? A dead cullud is a good cullud. That's their fool law, aint it? So we going to roll that ol' hearse right across town with ~~Daniel~~ ^{Clint walking} beside it and Jim Bob wont be able to touch ~~xx~~ him. Paradise South's gonna be ^h laughing at Jim Bob and that's the way we want it," Abel said.

Big Lem looked thoughtfully at him. "Son, you only half right. ~~Daniel's~~ ^{Clint's} thinking that Jim Bob will grab for him."

The others sobered up.

But Angie the kid hissed a laugh through his teeth and his eyes held a faraway look. The other kids turned softly to him and after awhile they were all laughing quietly at the tremendous joke inside their hurt and murderous youth.

^{police} A ~~Mop~~ boat beat softly upstream. It was white painted with nickel trim. A dream boat for dugout kids.

"Yeah, Jim Bob will grab for him," Angie said.

"Daniel knows what he's doing," Abel said.

"Just look at that," Angie said, looking at the dream boat.

Big Lem's jeer broke up their dreams.

"You could turn in ^{clint}~~Daniel~~ and buy a nice boat with the reward bread they would give you. It wouldnt be murder ~~since~~ ^{clint}~~Daniel's~~ turning in himself anyway," he said.

They turned their eyes on him. Big Lem climbed cautiously to his feet. The little kid's eyes all seemed bewitched with where his neck and shoulder joined. Big Lem was a powerful man but he knew how efficiently the small blades in unison were. They were methodical and persistent. The ^{cops}~~mob~~ had found out that you clapped a dozen in the stationhouse, others slipped into the line on their light slapdown of insteps.

"No," Abel the head kid said ^{FIRMLY,} ~~firmly,~~ me.

^{So} they looked away from Big Lem.

"We ought to have limousines. Cats like us aint ought to go to a funeral unless we ride in a limousine," Angie said.

"We have no loot to go around hiring limousines," Abel said.

"We go fishing, maybe we'll earn the loot," Angie said.

They went up the beach for the gear and brought down the masts and rudders. They took down the nets and spooled them in the sterns of the small bayou boats. They hunted out balers and filled water bottles. Big Lem watched the hard slim youths going about their business. They spoke little. Abel looked around the beach and nodded. All was ready. He went to his boat to lead his little fleet on the water. But they didnt go.

They didnt go because the ^{cops}~~mob~~ ^{while} limousine on the beach emptied its crew. The ^{cops} mobsters jackknifed out and came spread-legged

at them. They pointed guns at the kids. The boat roared in the bayou and cut for the beach. The motor ran down to a mutter and the boat thrashed slowly back and forth, parallel to the beach. So the kids were boxed in.

An ^{excellent} ~~Under Potentate~~ had the squad. A fat waisted man in ^{the} ~~blue~~ uniform ^{of khaki} denims and ~~the~~ battered old felt. He had a cherubic face, a little shopworn with hate. He said quietly as if he ran the kingdom,

"Sing."

But the kids looked back roughly. Some spat on the beach. The ~~Under Potentate's~~ ^{cop-mobster's} face ~~xxxx~~ creased with ~~Mob-love~~.

By golly, these he could have affection for, ^{he} thought.
~~the Under Potentate.~~

These he could hammer and shoot ~~xxxx~~ full of holes when the right time came ~~xxxxxxx~~ along. When a mobster's time came rollin' around. When them fellas up ^{in the Federal Pig Swamp} ~~North~~ stopped hornin' in, and a man could go about the old boffola ways. The old foolin' ways.

Saying in a gentle blue-eyed way to a downhome boy so full of swish that he had stepped a smidgen out of line,

"Sing, boy."

And the Nigra would unlimber the two hundred year old banjo humped on his back and sing of red-eye gravy and joy in Swanee ooze.

"Sing, boys," ^{he} repeated, ~~the Under Potentate.~~

But the kids looked at their boats.

"You aint goin' no place. Best you can do is sing for us crackers," the ^{excellent} ~~Under Potentate~~ said.

"No," Angie the kid said softly.

"Dance, then; I aint no fear of you steppin' out of line iffen you dance, ~~Or maybe sing,~~" the ^{sergeant} ~~Under Potentate~~ said.

"We aint fearing steppin' out of line," Abel said.

"You come closer, Cap'n, we dance real good for you," said Angie the kid eagerly, a kid so taut and eager to dance, he trembled while he spoke.

"You come closer, Cap'n. We want to dance for you," he said again to the ^{sergeant} ~~Under Potentate~~.

And Big Lem in the midst of them, prayed, Lordy, Lordy.

For it was a risky road a fellow took when he walked among these crazy kids, said ^{old} ~~Big~~ Lem. For he saw how they all hoped the redneck ^{cap-} mobster would come closer so they could go for the gun.

But the ^{sergeant} ~~Under Potentate~~ smiled. He shook his head. He squeezed the trigger and a small fountain of sand shot up near Angie the kid's foot.

"You better dance where you at, son," the ^{he said} ~~Under Potentate~~ said.

Abel the head kid grinned and showed his hands. He said, "You go ahead and shoot, Cap'n. We aint got no hump on our backs. We cant play no music for you. The banjo done rolled away."

"Yes, you go ahead and shoot, Cap'n," Angie said.

The ^{man} ~~Under Potentate~~ frowned.

"You kids aint scared to die?" He asked.

"Not when it only happens once, Cap'n," Abel said.

And the kids from the bayou boats nodded because they had seen the old folks die so often, they had just plumb promised themselves not to die but once.

"Some day its gonna be fun getting close to you," the ^{sergeant} ~~Under Potentate~~ said.

"Not when a guy aint scared," Angie the kid grinned.

And the hate prowled back into the white man's eye since he knew it was true. A fella had more fun when he was loving them while he was fixing them. He was hating now and they didnt ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~
~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ have to talk to him that way so he would hate them and lose most of the fun.

"I'm gonna hope hard, son, that when he's sending to pick you up, he'll send me," ^{he} ~~the Under Potentate~~ said to Angie.

"Who, killer?"

"Jim Bob."

"What did Cousin Jim say this time?" Angie asked.

So the ^{sargent} ~~Under Potentate~~ smiled again. This kid would be good to handle. He had uppity branded all over him. He spoke ~~with~~ to Angie with a heap of love.

"Cousin Jim Bob said to tell you there wouldnt be no fishin' until he gave the word. He said to tell you, he's squeezing. And he wouldnt stop squeezing until he found ^{Clint} ~~Daniel~~."

He kept smiling at them. Abel the ^{head} ~~kid~~ kid nodded and led the other kids back to loafing in the noon heat.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Jim Bob alighted softly from the automobile and Paradise ~~South~~ turned uneasily. He landed lightly like the hunter he had become. The big head dodged about on his thick neck. His hands were held loosely off his body. His heart was a stone article. Jim Bob was closing on his quarry with a brute focus that shrank his mind into a straight line. The young ^{cop-}mobsters left in the auto avoided his eyes.

He folded his meaty hands over his stomach and inhaled, breathing in the stinks of his favourite suburb. He knew all of it, an imperishable part of him. Folks in the ^{Swamp up}North wouldn't understand the thinly edged love-hate that paraded through a ^{Southern}cracker pursuing his avocation. A smarty pants coarse-grained Yankee couldn't know the soft, refined glow of accomplishment that filled a rooky cracker when he had learnt to shoot his gun with his face buried in his magnolia posy.

Yet, if the Nigras would learn to keep their backs stooped, there would be fewer days of the magnolia. It was when they faced you and their goddam eyes started asking the questions. Jim Bob hated the eyes. He hated the questions.

The patrol car humped over the hill and vanished. Jim Bob had alighted in Delta street. He thought gloomily of Daniel and wondered what went on inside his head. When they caught him, it would take some time to finish him for the fellas would want to know what went on in his head. They ~~knew~~ the Mob-facts on Daniel, his age, height, scars and family name even if they never used it. It was part of the love act that they called all their Nigras by their given names.

Jim Bob was an intellectual, ~~and~~ ^{that in} he thought ~~many~~ at times

like these it should be a part of ^{mobbery} ~~their~~ training ^{for all young whites} in ~~Mobbery~~ to take soundings of those lint heads, so a fella could know what was it that send those poor dumb clucks trying to buck the system. Yessirreebob. Apart from what the ^{bleeding hearts} ~~doggone~~ in the North had shovelled into heads like ^{clint} ~~Daniel~~, it would be good to know what made them come in for punishment like they did.

Jim Bob squinted up at the hard blue glare. But to hell with all that bull, he said. Why bother about their heads? They werent People. Not yet, doggone it. And they never would be if things worked out. If that goddam punk they had knifed would only die. It was bad with some of these new ^{white} kids. They didnt croak as easily for Southern womanhood as the old time fellas used to. If the boy did the right thing, then ^{from Pig Swamp} ~~the~~ ~~sachems~~ up ~~North~~ couldnt do a thing when ~~MM~~ he sent in the Mob after ^{Clint} ~~Daniel~~ and those ~~KKKKK~~ fishing kids. Maybe the boy would die. Jim Bob suddenly felt warm about that boy. He ^{was} ~~could be~~ a real fine kid. Good Mob stuff. He would know it was his duty to die.

He held off the sweaty denim shirt for what wind there was to balloon it. It was goddam hot. He thought of dogwood and azaleas in the piney foothills and rolled his tongue around inside his mouth thinking of a cold mint julep. A curtain moved at the whorehouse. He had to watch ~~xx~~ that madam and the chippies lest they turn into nigger lovers. You bring them too close to the cullud boys and they began loving them, big fat lips and all. As if a white man did not have cock and balls. He was as much stallion as any buck nigger. He could hold his own with any of them. Goddammit, he knew he could. Anybody didnt think so was a dam liar. He could screw and fuck and hit that cunt equal with any cullud man. He was separate, that was all. He could fuck that ^{named Potpourri} ~~Torch~~ high yaller gal with swivel-hipped stallion drives hard as

any black son of a bitch and he would murder anybody who didnt think so.

"I can do it, you sons of bitches!" screamed Jim Bob, shaking his fist at the noontime.

The little losers of Paradise ~~South~~ shuddered and breathed softly behind the shuttered doors. Jim Bob, pale and ~~dripping~~ ^{STINKING} with sweat, stood ~~still~~ until the trembling had ceased. He was a dam fool to get so het up. The curtain moved at the schoolhouse again. One of these days he was going to shut that frigging ~~fricking~~ ^{frigging} whorehouse down, he said savagely.

He heard the boat's foghorn hoot down at the beach and he knew his squads had moved in on the fishing kids. He grinned and felt better. There would be more. He would shut down the ~~dam~~ town. He would squeeze until Daniel popped out. The kids on the beach were ~~Daniel's~~ ^{clint's} special bunch. They had got tougher than the rest because ~~Daniel~~ ^{CLINT had} shown them how to make their buck a day without depending on the ~~mob~~ ^{mobtown}. As soon as the deal had worked out and the chumps ~~on~~ ⁱⁿ the ~~Petomae~~ ^{Swamp} had lifted the pressure, he would see about closing the beach. Permanently. He didnt want any fishing kids around earning ^a ~~XXXXX~~ living on their own.

A man from the ~~municipal~~ ^{CITY} laundromat hurried by, a bundle of ~~dirty~~ voters lists under his arm to be laundered for the next elections. Jim Bob stopped him with an end of the club in his gut.

"You got any names on that list?" snarled ^{ugly} Jim Bob.

"Not even a smudge, Cap'n," bleated the scared black.

"Only the white folks got names on theirs."

"Because why?" barked Jim Bob, poised to break every bone in his body if he missed.

"Because us boys aint never oughta want to poke our

noses in white folks business," he said quickly.

"That's right. You keep poking your nose in water-melons, boy," Jim Bob said softly. "You seen ^{Clint} Daniel?"

"No, boss," said the laundryman, shaking a little.

Jim Bob hefted the club speculatively.

"Alright, boy. Next time Jim Bob runs into you, you better know where ^{Clint} Daniel is."

Jim Bob watched him scurry off. He was scared up a tree. Jim Bob chuckled and turned into Talmadge lane. In one motion he ^{laid} ~~had~~ the club against Sam ^{the Waiter's} ~~the Waiter's~~ ear. Sambo had been a sometime finger man for the ^{cop-mob} ~~mob~~ but with the news from up North that things were due to change, he was showing signs of wanting out.

"Bow-wow," said Sambo unexcitedly.

In the eating places and private parties where he worked his trade, Sambo was sometimes ~~XXXX~~ asked for laughs to make like the hounds bugling through the marsh after some poor fleeing bastard. ^{Sambo could be real goddam funny. Goodwill City would be better off with more people like Jim Bob and Sambo.} It was standard practice in Mobbery that a ^{part} ~~portion~~ of off-duty time should be ~~served~~ ^{spent} by some downhome boy telling jokes about Paradise South. It was done kindly ~~by the~~ ^{by the} ~~mob~~ since it sure would help their Nigras to understand that black folks werent anything much. That way, they would keep out of ^{trouble} ~~trouble~~. Jim Bob looked down at Sambo's store shoes. By God every time you saw them ^{blacks} ~~nigs~~ they gave you cause to hate them more. Walking around with new store shoes and Jim Bob wearing his old scuffed ones.

"Call me cracker," Jim Bob said fondly to Sam the Waiter.

Sam blanched. He didnt like it. "Plenty of my friends are crackers," he protested.

Jim Bob gathered a jawful of tobacco juice and spattered Sam's new shoes.

"You got no friends among the Mob. We're good to you because you belong to us, but you aint got no friends in the Mob," Jim Bob explained.

"Yes, chief," Sam said instantly. He could kick himself for ~~■~~ not remembering that these were not boll weevil days.

"Your friends are up ^{in Pig Swamp} North. They're the ones what want to change things. But boy, they aint no good to you."

"That's right, suh boss," Sambo said vehemently.

"Sure," Jim Bob said, warming to this boy now making with the answers. "Look how many of you we made Aunts and Uncles. Now you know what? Them idiots up ⁱⁿ ~~on~~ the ^{Swamp} ~~Potomac~~ want to cheapen it. They want to take off the Aunts and Uncles and make you all into Cousins. But you dont want to be cousin to no Mob, boy?"

"No, Cap'n Jim, suh. I'se fine where I am."

"You okay, boy," Jim Bob said. "Where's that goddam

Clint!
~~Daniel?~~

Sam said earnestly, "I find him, I finger him, Cap'n Jim."

"See you do that, boy," Jim Bob said. He smashed him lightly behind the ear and watched him stagger away.

Jim Bob said to himself that a few big ones, several little ones and the pressure would commence to tell. Dropping the bars on the kids at the beach was one of the big ones. He would also do it to the road gangs, the bucks working on the piers, those at the cotton gin, the canefield hands and the whole goddam bunch. He would teach them where their cornpones and ^{clintings} ~~pickin's~~ came from. And then Jim Bob jumped.

Out of the corner of his eyes, he had seen a crook. He swore roundly. He had always said he could spot one of them

through the brush a country mile away. In the glimpse he had, he figured it could be The Pastor. He had been after rooking The Pastor a long time now. The Pastor was one of the hot ones. Jim Bob thought he had ducked into the Catholic book store.

Jim Bob ran fatly swift for the Catholic book store. He found The Pastor crouched in a corner and the Working Brother who was in charge of the store was covering him with some old copies of ~~pro~~ ^{pro} re nata.

"These aint for the profanum vulgus," snarled Jim Bob who as ~~Potentate~~ ^{head of the cop-mob} had studied every encyclical since he came to office. "This guy's from one of them gumbo churches what aint got no status."

"We're all unhallowed outside the church," said the nervous Brother.

"He's a nigger preacher so that makes him a thief," He hardly went to what you could call a college. He aint a quality preacher. He preaches equality," raved Jim Bob in blind anger at this ^{Yankee} Catholic fella ~~from up North~~ who had come South to ruin it. Adam' Yankee bookseller who had this store in Paradise South even though he could sell not a goddam thing since the Mob had warned the ~~Niggers~~ blacks against buying.

"This Nigra preacher preaches equality, I tell you!" ranted Jim Bob.

"We in Mother Church aint more'n a vulgate away from that too," said the Brother on his way up the cross.

Jim Bob seemed to swell. The veins on the back of his neck jumped. With implacable cruelty, he put the question that he knew would drive home the nails in the wood. He leaned forward and whispered,

"How'd you like one of Them to marry your sister?"

The Lay Brother paled. He had been warned it could happen but like so many stories about magnolia land, he, like other hearers, had seen only the ^{sad} comedy. But now he was down here, south of the Line, and the burlesque and drollery were gone. He had heard what the penalty was, to be handed over to an assemblage of magnolia ladies from the D.O.E. for a Spittin'. And what paled him was that he had seen the belles ~~xxx~~ in telecasts, when they had held the Spittin' on the downhome black boy who had bid for the university. He had watched the screen for a long time, wondering, apart from their repulsiveness, what was it about them that was so strange. Then, in shock, he knew it. They were mindless.

"I - I - I plead the Fourth Amendment," he heard himself quavering to Jim Bob as fear ^{lay in his} ~~XXXXXXXX~~ belly like a hook.

"Answer me, you goddam nigger-lover!" roared Jim Bob.

Slowly, the youthful Lay Brother drew himself up. It wasn't that he feared less being turned over to the ^{mindless} Southern ladies, but the two thousand year old power and glory that had gone into his training, proved stronger.

"How'd you like one of Them to marry your goddam sister?" bellowed Jim Bob as he drove home the formula.

The Lay Brother's ^{voice was} ~~XXXXXXXX~~ steady.

"He would not be marrying me. The decision would be made by my sister," he said.

"You frigging wordsmith," Jim Bob said furiously. "Use your phone. ~~■~~ Tell them to send the wagon."

He gave the driver hell for bringing a non-segregated paddy wagon and waited fuming while it was divided ~~into two~~ compartments by walling it with Indian artifacts from the Seminole tribe (an irony ~~perpetrated~~ inflicted by that egghead Jim Bob on ^{those} ~~the~~ Early Americans whom had been the first to help downhome

folk mount the freedom train and whom, on account of Mob reprisals, had, ~~xxx~~ but ~~vanishingly~~ for their artifacts, vanished.)

"We've been too goddam liberal," raged Jim Bob as he resumed his walk, handgun and club bumping on his hogfat-and-bourbon rump. He looked angrily ~~around~~ up and down the silent, sunlit street. He had a notion like a goad in his head to smash in all the shutters and drag the ~~xxx~~ feisty bastards out, to break their ^{in their ribs.} He shook his knees and hammer/~~splitting~~ head and wiped his sweating face with his palm. He turned into a cooler alley and stumbled on Joel the Fool.

Joel re-arranged a Bird-Eye can Jim Bob had overturned. Jim Bob stood over him and asked, "What's the weather, Joel?"

Joel looked up at the steely blue sky. "Its pouring."
"I dont feel any dam rain," said Jim Bob, his eyes crinkling with fun.

Joel turned his soft ruin of a face up to Jim Bob.
"When the drouth comes, you'll beg," he said.
Jim Bob laughed away down in his gut. Joel always gave him a good feeling. He touched him with the club.

"We made a goddam good college graduate out of you. You returned to us downhome ^{after college} and we made you into a good boy. You keep that rain movin', boy. What you been doing lately?"

"Writing a book," Joel said shortly.
"Yeah," Jim Bob said softly. "What's it called?"
"The Second-Hand Beasts."
"What's it about?"
"Beasts."
"Yeah. Why second-hand?"

"Everybody's second-hand. We all come out used," Joel said irritably.

Jim Bob doubled with laughter.

"Boy, you not only used, you about ready to be scrapped," he gasped as he wiped his streaming eyes.

"I'm good for years. Got a problem to solve before I go. I got plenty of time," Joel said.

"Then you must be the only ^{one} ~~Man~~ in Paradise South whose got lots of time. What about my problem with ^{Clint?} ~~Daniel~~? You got any ideas?"

"All your problems will be solved by the Plowmen," Joel said.

From the clear blue sky he caught a hatful of rain and poured it over his head. He gasped and spluttered and was almost drowned. Jim Bob nodded fondly at him and hoe-downed his big mushy feet back into Delta street. Feeling okay. Feeling good at what the clubs had done to one college man.

Joel looked at the poet crouched in hiding behind a garbage can.

"You got ~~to~~ to learn them. You cant learn them by hiding from them," he said impatiently to the poet.

"They kill you off so quickly we aint got time to learn them," the poet said, bending an eye around the can to watch Jim Bob's big blue riband feet falling on the Downs. "He's a stallion, that Jim Bob. He never tired fucking off poor little cotton heads like me."

"They aint stallions. They are small boys down at the water hole chucking rocks at a kitten. They not killing you, boy. They just playing. Chucking rocks at kittens."

"Got no cause to play so rough," the poet said. "They

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rifling those rocks at me — ouch!"

"They dont know their own strength. You just gotta learn them, learn when to duck."

"If you duck too much, they'll run home for guns — ouch!"

"They sure hitting you with them rocks, boy," said Joel, looking around in the empty alley as if it was filled with rock throwers. "But all they see is a itty bitty kitten."

"Then you tell them to stop. I'm ducking fast as I can — ouch!" howled the poet, swinging high and out with Joel.

Yelled Joel at the rock throwers,

"You dont hit that poet no more! Hear me? He aint no kitten but a poet-cat!"

"Master, I'm up there with you!" shrieked the poet.

But Joel suddenly sagged and fell off.

"Sure wish they would stop throwing at us. Sure wish they'd see we aint kittens but people getting hit," he grumbled.

The poet looked coldly at him.

"You got religion good. You so busy forgiving, you making me your enemy."

"Aint forgiving. Just saying the things I want you to polish up and put on their grave stones," Joel said softly, his ravaged face turned skyward.

The poet emerged from behind the garbage can and gave Joel a sour look and wandered off down the alley in the opposite direction to Jim Bob. Like any young kid, he was angry that Joel had broken off the game just as everything was swinging. For he wasnt a full time poet at all, just a kid with an occasional hard on for the sweetest dame in the whole wide world. So, t

fantasies with which he
~~ing~~ pulsating raptly to the erotic/~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ was
 delighting ^{Futnal} ~~Torch~~, he entered Delta street a small spit from Jim
 Bob. With a springing step, the ^{cop-mobster} ~~Potentate~~ nabbed him.

"Poet, you seem loaded for running. You done something to be scared of Jim Bob?" he asked the fluttering kid.

The Poet hung physically dead in Jim Bob's hand, ^{swiftly} But his immortal brain was ~~never swifter~~ sorting the wildly whirling ideas being broken out for his survival. When he had it, he thought it was stupendous. Life flowed back into his limbs. In the civil war that/~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ had flattened Mobbery for a time, few cullud folks had fought on the side that salvation now forced the poet to choose.

"If they would have had me, I'd have followed the trinity to Gettysburg, Cap'n Pettigrew, Cap'n Pender and Cap'n Pickett," he said simply.

Jim Bob blinked. ^{Sure names he know. Names of the fallen South fighting the Dan Yarkes.} He was ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ ^{CHOKING} filling up. He swallowed back the tears. He wiped his eyes with his fat, ~~and~~ Nigra scarred knuckles and for awhile, dreamed that he wouldnt pound them cullud folks no more.

"You're the light of the world," he said to the poet.

It stunned the poet for he hadnt expected Jim Bob to climb a cloud. But black or ^R white, it just showed that they were all downhome. The beat got to them all.

~~"Cap'n, I'm shock up,"~~ the poet said in some confusion.

A state of mind which he quickly snapped out of but by then he was too late. ^{toke} For Jim Bob had taken a sniff at ^{his buttonhole} ~~the~~ magnolia flower in his buttonhole, and was all hunting mobster again.

^{"Clint,"} ~~"Daniel,"~~ he said to the poet.

The boy drew up his shoulders and showed the palms of

his hands.

"The bastard aint showing, Cap'n Jim Bob."

"If we cant reach him, the Mob's gonna take a couple of others instead. Young ones," Jim Bob said.

The poet's knees gave but he straightened gamely.

"I see him, I holler, Cap'n."

"Those young ones we take, we're gonna cut it off," Jim Bob said, casting his eyes down there.

The poet looked at his plans for ~~the~~ Future and a long shudder went through him. He grew pale with grief. Jim Bob released him and watched him rapidly dwindle along Delta street.

He looked at his watch. Time to jump the road gang. They were at the other end of ~~Delta~~ ^{Restant} and he knew they had been watching his approach for some ~~time~~ while. They ladled out the hot tar, repairing the pot holes. They were whistling casually, not looking at him. The back of the foreman's head was rigid as Jim Bob gave it a cold blue eye. Slowly, it turned, creaking ^{the} around on/~~its~~ hundred-year-old hinge which a Mob had hammered into it.

"You're a hardworking boy," Jim Bob said to him. He was grey and almost twice Jim Bob's age. Jim Bob remembered he had been at ~~Sammy Ebony's~~ ^{the} Wake. He had a high domed forehead. Maybe he was a Thinker. Jim Bob nearly gagged on the hate bile.

"Tell them to sing," he snarled.

But the road gang dipped the ladles in a tar bucket full of a ~~new~~ ^{new} Dan ~~Thony~~ hope that roared in a downhomer's ear and blanked out the magnolia voice telling them to sing.

"We aint singing out of season no more," the foreman said quietly.

"Tell them to stop working," Jim Bob said.

"We stop, we lose bread," the foreman said.

"Tell them."

"We got hired by the man, we get fired by the man."

A Thinker, Jim Bob/^{whispered}~~xxxx~~ softly into his hate.

"Tell them drop the ladles, boy."

But the muscles jumped and the ladles dipped and tilted, pouring out the thick black hope that paved a Paradise ~~South~~ road. They had heard how the kids on the beach had stood up to the Mob. And all through Paradise South, folks were standing up, slithering their hands over it, feeling it, slapping it, poking it, standing up out of the blues, standing up in ragtime and saying, maybe, this time.

"Obey me, boy," Jim Bob said softly.

The foreman was mature, on his way to being an Uncle, but he had been caught up in the ragtime standing-up time. He heard the raging of the animal in Jim Bob's voice and he waited just a little too long.

Jim Bob clubbed him. His skull broke and the men dropped the ladles and went for Jim Bob. It was the ~~Kix~~ Mob cruiser that saved Jim Bob. It came roaring around the corner and when the driver took in what was ~~xxxx~~ happening he punched the squawk horn that immediately set up a sound like a marsh full of hounds on cry. And the old dread sound ripped through their anger and sent the downhomers to the wall. Then as they cowered there, the rolling eyes found Jim Bob and began asking the questions.

And Jim Bob stood there fat and sweating in the curious calm that ravaged him at Question ^{Time}. And he said to himself that even if he left out that part of the crap ~~whizz~~ about History

and Holy Writ saying so, and even if you closed out that part of the book where the pages were drenched with the blood shed by his kin during the War Between The States to prove it, you only had to see how they took to it like cows to a salt lick, to know that this was a ~~Nigger~~^{black man's} meaning for being.

A race of arms and backs to hew wood and dip that old bucket and come to the back door for a handout, not begging it, for ~~CHRIST'S SAKE~~ Chrissake, no. But just coming around for it and not worrying about a thing for they were looked after good and protected until the cows come home.

Block out

P One of the pairs of eyes held Jim Bob and asked, Protect us from what, Cap'n?

P And Jim Bob ejected a stream of chaw juice through his teeth at this down-homer for stepping out of line, for this was a Yankee question.

P And Jim Bob said, We protect you from them up there in the ^{South} North who hurt you with their ideas so you lose your good jobs and your possum and catfish rights.

P But another pair of the eyes found him and pleaded, Jim Bob, suh, why cant we look after ourselves?

P And Jim Bob said bitterly, Because you're ours, like sin and death and love.

P And all the eyes alighted on him and began wailing, Yes, Jim Bob. But we dont like possum no more.

And Jim Bob turned heavily to the God of the Bible-belt Mob

and asked, Couldnt He turn the eyes in the sockets and give him eyeless cullud children again, to whom poor Jim Bob could speak of obedience and the summits they could mount on their knees? For the Nigras needed to be told and the clubs were proving to be poor talkers. And even fire and rope were losing their elements as media for lasting peace.

Jim Bob blinked and found the mobsters from the patrol car staring at him. He rubbed his forehead. A fist from one of the road gang had jarred him.

"Its gettin' bad," he mumbled to the ^{cap-} Mob fellas. ^{the Swamp}
"They listening to them voices from up ~~North~~. We gotta drop down harder on them."

The foreman was on his feet, holding his head while blood trickled through his fingers.

"Knock off. Go on home. This one's closed down until we open it again," Jim Bob said to him.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

climbs!
A little wind climbed to the back of Daniel's head and soon began blowing with some power. He looked back over his shoulder and a fling of spume wet between his eyes. He faced back to Big Lem.

"So the kids went back to sitting under the trees," he said.

"Jim Bob's gonna squado too much for 'em. College Man."
"Meek as a lamb at shearing time," Big Lem said. *That* *Jim Bob* mobster, he a cracker after my own heart."

"Maybe Abel likes sitting under trees," Daniel said.

"He just smart. Not like you. A smart sheep loses only his wool, glory man."

"Comes a day when he's so smart they decide to shear off his neck too."

"No. He smart, he dies of old age."

Daniel swung his foot at the cap of a wave, grinned and said, "Bullshit."

"I give you ten years, kid. I been around longer'n you."

"Ten years older means you're ten years more scared."

"I tell you, I'm glad Jim Bob's gonna squado scared 'em. Better for us to go back being scared. More scared we are, less scared we get."
Everybody used to be more scared until the kids swung loose."

Swinging on a gate that ~~was~~ *could* never *be* really bolted; a key that could never be finally turned since nobody could destroy the indestructible.

Or even quench these *thirsts* with vinegar during these Holy Days.

WEPT
(Or any holy day in this Holy Week, ~~ran~~ *was* Jim Bob *wept*)

thoughts as he sat in his room across the Avenue in Mob City, strong head bowed on his forearms, bawling ~~sorry for himself~~ *A LITTLE IN A PAUSE HE TOOK TO LOOK AT ALL THU BACK TALK,* although poor ol' Jim Bob was hustlin' up with the scourge and

since ^{WHITE MAN} nails, hustlin' to a caper ~~XXXX~~ any mobman worth his spittoon should know that a few cuts of the scourge ~~XX~~ on a black ass

used to bleed out all this indestructible crap. For ^{THEY HAD ALWAYS BACKED} ~~no~~ ^{BLACK}

~~WASXSTRAIGHTZKEATXMMANZANXXXX~~ ^{WATER BEFORE} was straight leaf human anyway, but half ape sure as shootin'.

^{WATER BEFORE} What the hell had happened?)

Big Lem ~~hummed~~ ^{CLINT FOR} a tune through his nose, grinning ^{ed} now and then at Daniel. ^{JIM BOB} For he figured ~~he had~~ the glory man ~~fixed~~. That fine Under Potentate with the squad had ^{FIXED} ~~made~~ it so Daniel would ^{CLINT} ~~have~~ to cool his ass under the pier and not go fooling around ~~XXXX~~ ^{NO COAL BLACK MAMAY TO BACK SCRATCH} burying ^{with} a bunch of kids.

Big Lem ^{lit and smoked,} had brought cigarettes in a waterproof bag and now he took out a couple. They lit up and he grinned and leaned his back to the piling. He held the cigarette ^{held} between his first finger and thumb, ^{smoking easy, as a guy who MM} ~~ELEGANTXXXXXXNONXOFZAZXXXXX~~ has made his goal. ^{HE HAD WHAT HE} A Big Lem ^{NOW:} wanted a mite of this: a hold up to all this fightin' and runnin', to put ~~XXXX~~ down roots in a furl of smoke, to see gold in a cigarette's glow.

^{Clint} "Smoke up. We've got work to do," Daniel said.

Big Lem sat up, ^{narrow-eyed.} ~~He looked~~ ^{foul-eyed} ~~XXXXXX~~ as he asked, "Work? What work? What we got to do? Aint nothing to be done. That redneck with the squad done took care of everything."

"We got to get limousines for the kids."

Big Lemuel began to chuckle. Poor ^{Clint} Daniel, he never stop trying.

^{Clint,} "Daniel, boy, you killin' poor me," he chuckled.

^{is} "Fishing ~~are~~ jumping out there," Daniel said, indicating with ^{Clint} ~~XXXXXX~~ his head the open water.

^{already} "Got nothin' to do with us. They all hooked by the ^{JIM BOB'S PEOPLE} ~~mob~~."

^{Know} "What we're going to do?"

"Nothin'. Jim Bob said so."

"We're taking out the seine," Daniel said softly.

"You dam fool, you sick in the head," Big Lem grated.

"You think ^{anybody} you and me could get a boat off the beach with them mobsters sittin' back and front of us?"

"The crackers ashore have gone back to sit in their ^{car's} auto, aint they? And now that the wind has come up, the cruiser must stay well offshore. All you gotta do is go to the beach and ^{get} the kids to take off from under that tree, ^{They can} and set the seine in the shallows. Then you and me will go fishing."

"No!" Big Lem roared.

"Dont be scared. I'll do the fishing. You'll be the anchor man. I'll take an end of the purse seine and make for deep ^{water,} then circle into shore and the kids ~~IM~~ can haul up."

"Jim Crow me outa this!" bellowed Big Lem.

"Cut the vanderbilt."

"Boy, you really messed up."

"What will the Mob be doing all the time we're pushin' the net? Pitchin' horseshoes?"

"The rednecks will be looking for boats. They'll expect the kids might try for a break. ^{those fellows} ~~The Mob~~ dont figure we can change our methods and that's where we ^{will} ~~can~~ edge them. We changed the pace on the ball the time we ~~sank the kids~~ turned the kids into fishermen ^{so they could be independent of Mob jobs,} and then we had the Mob swinging like a rusty gate," explained ^{Clint}.

^{Daniel}. For you needed to hone a good edge, when use and ~~misuse~~ ^{even been} misuse had dulled a man like Big Lem. And ~~even~~ Big Lem had ~~caught~~ catching spithalls lately, what with Jim Bob hammering him on Delta street.

So ^{Clint} Daniel went in easy ^{again,} to Big Lem, dropping the fat soft powder puffy ones. "Yeah, Lem. Jim Bob cant do a thing really to the kids for none of them hustle on a Mob payroll. So, boy, we can

make it." •

"Why we got to make it?"

"Because everytime we scrape some more meat off that cracker bone, we're fattening a downhome feeling, Big Lem. Because we gotta show our folks we can win some of 'em. Because we've been losers so long, we've grown used to the cellar. Its safe down there, folks dont worry about you and try to swing at you."

"Why should I want folks taking a swing at me?" Big Lem asked, ^{TEERING} ~~sitting under the pier and listening to~~ ^{study} all this talk from a ^{College Man who was} ~~glory man~~ in the cellar too.

And ^{Clint} ~~Daniel~~ knew that ~~Big~~ Lem needed more of the soft ingoing talk to fan the old forgettables into new heat. So he proceeded, ~~and~~ ^{rocked} ~~sat~~ with his shoulders straight although he ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ to the rhythm inside, listening to it pumping steady and smooth.

"Yeah, man, Big Lem. We used to make with the gumbo singing. Where the songs were about hurrying up old man death and climbing the golden stairs to collect our winnings from the Big Guy in the slot. But man, man, now its different. We dont even throw rocks anymore. We throw ~~MM~~ law books instead. Nothing in the law says those kids cant go fishing. Those kids work for no Mob outfit. Nothing in the law against it, Big Lem."

"What will it buy us, ^{eagerly.} ~~Daniel?~~" Big Lem asked ~~in a low voice.~~ ^{he desired above all to be a shopper,} For ~~Big Lem~~ wanted something to buy, even though he gave away most of his riches in the clown acts by which his buskined kinsfolk purchased time.

"It will liberate us. It will remove the straps from our souls. It will take us out of the minority."

"You mean, if we straighten out Jim Bob, there'll be more of us than there is now?"

"You'll look around and all you'll see are American faces."

No black and white American faces, but just plain American ones."

"By golly," said Big Lem.

"You wont ever need to run as long as you live. You wont have any black in your face for folks to point at and say, 'There goes one of 'em.'"

"What about the crackers? Them rednecks? It gonna do anything about their faces?"

"Boy, you'll never be able to ^{Pick} ~~point~~ out ^{where Mr Charlie} ~~an o'ay~~ again."

"^{Clint} ~~Daniel~~, you're gonna take away all my fun," Big Lem said with a highish giggle. Then he looked guiltily at Daniel and grunted. ~~He filled his lungs and dropped quietly into the water~~ ^{CLINT HAD} ~~and he was~~ ^{him} ~~aimed~~ like a rifle, ^{clint} ~~owned by~~ Daniel, faithfully warping his big body forward to the kids on the beach.

at many windows. Someone may have seen Dan'l enter the lane and told Jim Bob about it. The Mob had leaned its weight on the Village and some would weaken and pop out. There could be a traitor among them. So Ebony went to the backdoors of those he could trust and whispered the quiet questions. He worked at the streets, fleeing or creeping under cover when a squad car hove up. But nobody had seen Jim Bob with a Villager. Ebony scrambled into the mouth of an alley when ENE a Mob car stole down on him in Dixon street and he crouched beside Chris until the car went by.

"Ebony O'Hara, Moore's best friend. You should've been in Pincet lane to help him scour Jim Bob."

Ebony felt a draining of his energies. He slid to his bottom beside Chris and asked weakly, "What were you doing in Pincet lane?"

"It was raining," Chris snapped. The night had been dry.

"Did you talk to Jim Bob?" Ebony asked gently.

"He didn't see me. He was too busy talking to Dan'l."

"Then did you see him talk to anyone before he met Dan'l?"

Chris hurriedly moved a tin to catch a sudden downpour. "He talked to Amos the Black. Then he got angry and fired his gun."

"Amos the Black!" Ebony said violently.

But no no no, not Uncle Amos, a man whose truth you'd defend with your head on the block.

"He talked to Fay too and he ran from the schoolhouse as if they'd put fire on him."

the whole skyblue truth, for Walker's idea was to press the town, to close off the men from their earnings and so squeeze their pockets long enough for them to pop out Dan'l. For he believed every last one of them knew where Dan'l was.

The Town was shut down by three o'clock. At three-thirty, the sergeant who had been knifed, died of pneumonia. The Piano Mover was the first to hear of it, and so he hurried to Central and was sweeping the yard under Walker's window when the secret instructions were passed out.

They were on the outskirts of The Town and Johnny walked slowly along, his head bent, searching in the gutter for his poetry. Tommy Moore shuffled behind him in a bemused way, thinking of Inspector Walker's threat. They had cut a semicircle around The Town to avoid him, heading north to ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ Queen street and ducking past the bridge where there were policemen on duty. Now they were slanting in again, ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ but they went slowly, ~~XXXXXX~~ so that bulldog Walker would have shaken the rest of The Town in his teeth and then gone his own growling way by the time they got in again.

"Poet, you think Walker knows my face?" Tommy Moore asked anxiously.

But since the Poet was at work, he'd hardly hoped for a reply. Johnny's thin face, pointed towards the gutter, had collected sun shadows at the base of his nose and in the hollows around his eyes. There was an empty can, caught in the swirling water on an island of cigarette boxes and dead leaves. The can had contained cane ~~SUGAR~~ syrup and now a cockroach fed brown and bloated at the opening. The tentacles waved feebly as the furry

Ebony grabbed Chris and shook him. "Fay? He went to Fay?"

"Watch out! you don't cause an eclipse," Chris said angrily, his arms spread protectively over the cans. "I saw him go in and come from the house and you ask me if I'm sure."

But O'Hara was already away, his thick legs pumping down Abas street. He roared Fay's name as he hit the steps and the only regard he made the door was the grunt he gave when his body slammed into it. He hurtled in among Fay's girls and scattered them like butterflies.

"Fay!" O'Hara bellowed, his chest a mountain.

The chandelier shook. So did the little whores. But his girl of the bad night with Jon Bob came forward and proved a heroine.

"Where's Fay the mother-whore!" O'Hara roared in her face. She swayed but she righted and replied.

"Fay took Paul to the hospital. Fay bailed him out from the Mob but she had to take him to the hospital because of the beating he got," she said.

Thunder sounded from O'Hara. He crashed out of the parlour and into the corridor. He flung through the old classrooms which Fay had made over into cubicles for the girls, kicking cots aside and ripping bedclothes. He stormed back into the parlour, and crooning Fay's name to the terrified girls.

"Fay? Tell her Ebony O'Hara is coming back for her. You will tell that to Fay?"

They nodded carefully to him.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Paul the Pimp huddled on the piano stool fighting off the ghosts in the room. There was Sweetie Lorraine whose long dark thighs he'd bitten until she'd screamed and flung her legs apart. Paul made a face at the ghost and wished now he'd broken both her arms instead of the wrist. He shrank back as ^{she} ~~the~~ Lola sauntered by him, the honey-skinned ~~man~~ ^{sample} whom he had procured with the lure of patent leather shoes like his. The last he'd heard of the poor dumbknot, she was somewhere upcountry working in a rivertown crib. He shielded his bandaged head with an arm and peered through his fingers into the corners of the room.

He hadn't moved from the piano stool since Fay had brought him back from the doctor. She was somewhere in back with the girls and he wished she'd return. The ghosts vanished when Fay was in the room. He cried out as a hand held his arm.

"It's me, Paulie dear," Fay said softly. "Don't be afraid. Nobody will hurt you ~~xxx~~ here."

She cradled his head on her flat bosom. He shuddered in her arms and in the mirror above the piano, she could see his eyes rolling in the sockets, fearfully scanning the room. She knew about the ghosts and she held him tighter. He had come back a bruised, cowering man, starting at the lift of a hand.

"They said a pimp was the lowest crawling thing in God's creation."

"Don't talk about it," Fay said, rocking the wounded head on her bosom.

"And who was it that had me registered as a lobbyist for the Mob? They ^{put me in love and} said I should do a good job for them with the plowmen from the marsh who come to the schoolhouse, didn't they? That dirty Jim Bob, turning against me now, calling me a pimp," Paul said bitterly.

"Those were the thistle days, Paulie, ~~my~~ love," Fay said. "This is the day of the magnolia."

"I'm a pimp."

"A good one, Paul, a good one."

"I made this the best flesh-house in the Village." ~~XXX~~

"The plowmen come in hundreds for their lessons," Fay said. ^{angrily to}

"It was my job," Paul said ~~angrily to~~ the girl-ghosts.

"They know, Paul. They know."

He wrenched his head out of her ~~arms~~ ^{blazing} with ~~with~~ fury. "Its that man-dog, Dan'l! Its him that's been the cause of it! Him wanting to go up against the Mob! I'll kick him to death with these patent leather shoes!"

He looked at the shoes, scuffed and all the shine gone. A button dangled from the silk jacket. He cupped his hand below the button and said with a dazed air, "They tore my silk suit."

"We'll get you another," Fay said gently.

"They started up the ghosts too. Jim Bob wanted to know about all the girls I've had here."

"He came back here," Fay said. "He asked who was Moore's woman. I told him."

Paul canted his head and looked interested. "Who?"

^{"That woman I've been telling you about."}
"Kedala."

^{call} "The meeting ^{of the future?} Slut. I wouldn't have her in my house for ^{a hundred} ninety per cent."

He paused and then his head jerked like a doll. He shrieked at Fay, "You told Jim Bob about Moore's woman?"

"To my dying day I'll wonder how I could be scarder of Jim Bob than the fishermen. The Mob is that powerful. You look at the magnolia and your knees go watery under you."

"Who knows you told Jim Bob?" cried Paul.

"Ebony. He found out. He came back here while I'd gone foryou."

Paul began to tremble. He put his face in his hands. He knew what the knives of the fishermen could do.

"We'll move to the City," he said. "We'll go out today. They wont do anything to you until after the funeral."

Fay turned her head numbly. She moistened her lips and said, "I dont know what made me do it. I wasn't even sure. It was just something I picked up from talking with the girl. No, I guess not. I guess I'm pretty sure. But what made me do it, Paulie? Why did I do it?"

She turned his face to her but his eyes wouldn't hold. The eyes went away as he said, "We'll have to move out quickly."

"I cant leave the Village. I have my girls to look after."

Paul grinned coldly, his eyes at a corner of the room. "Its you they'll want," he said.

"But I have my job to do!" Fay wailed.

Paul turned his head side to side like a bird. He hummed through his nose. Then he closed his eyes and said like a child, "I want to go to bed."

Fay put him to bed and sat alone in the big room. A couple of hours later, she put on stout shoes and left the schoolhouse for the marsh.

Dan'l heard Ebony out and he knew by the silence that they were waiting on him. Ebony was seated among the fishermen, Moore, on slightly higher ground, facing them. ^{So} ~~So~~ Moore said to himself ^{it was right to be on higher ground for} he was the plump one who had ^{been placed on} ~~climbed~~ to the altar without a bleat. For the first time, he knew ^{to be} he was ^{the} sacrifice. ^{Tartan} The Village had taken him and elected those who would bind him. Little ^{Aubrey} ~~Agente~~ had tied the first knot, ^{when he knifed the Mobman,} and now, there was Fay. For in throwing the girl to Jim Bob, ^{Fay} ~~she~~ had hurt him in a way he hadn't expected. ^{Alida had to wait for her was was that sacrifice Jim Bob.} ^{excellent high priest with the unerring hand, Jim Bob.}

"Did Jim Bob do anything to ~~Kedala~~?" he asked Ebony. ^{Future?}

"No," Ebony said. ^{"You can't do nothing with a woman like Future."}

"Then she's the luckiest woman in the world for Jim Bob has the look," Little ^{Aubrey} ~~Agente~~ said.

"The look of what?" demanded Ebony.

"The Mob look. The look when they ^{are} wearing the magnolia. The look to mess with our women," ^{Young} a fisherman said.

"Leave it. We ^{got} ~~are~~ enough trouble already," Peter said.

They were quiet again and Moore knew they waited to hear from him how they ^{would} punish Fay ^{for her treachery.} ^{Fay's tough and she knows what she may do for her for this. Jim Bob must have been real rough} ~~He must have done something to Fay~~ for her to tell him about ~~Kedala~~, Dan'l said.

^{But} ~~We'll~~ ^{got} have to charge Fay with it," Little ^{Aubrey} ~~Agente~~ said softly.

"And ~~we'll~~ ^{you can} we ^{can} collect," ^{Glory said.} O'Hara grated.

^{Do} ~~Do~~ you want me to collect, ^{Angiver?} ~~Glory~~ ^{Now} ~~Man?~~ Little ^{Aubrey} ~~Agente~~ asked. "Do you want me to go up to ~~Abas~~ ^{Abas} street now ^{and collect}"

"This time, I'll collect ^{Aubrey} my way, ~~Agente~~," Dan'l said.

"What's your way, ~~Glory Man~~?" the little fisherman asked.

"There're twelve hours between now and the funeral," Dan'l Moore said. "The Mob boat ~~hasn't~~ stopped working around the pier since they began earlier. By daylight, the Mob will be swarming the beach. Where'll I ~~find~~ find cover for twelve hours until the funeral?"

"You mean you want to hide in her whore house?" Ebony asked hotly.

^{Aubrey} "That'll be Fay's contribution," Dan'l said and Little ~~Agente~~ laughed with a high, yapping sound.

"Then you'll collect a bullet," Ebony said. "Do you know how it is up in the ^{town?} ~~Village~~? The streets are lit up like a Christmas tree!"

"And what is the blessed reason why they cant be turned off?" Moore asked. "And if the switches are too well guarded, why cant they be turned off by rocks in the hands of my friends?"

O'Hara searched his head for friends with good arms who could shoot rocks at the lamps. He grunted and left them. He sweated a way through the Mob patrols and in Huey street called a name at his first window. He called three times before it opened.

"Dan'l's coming out," he whispered.

The man who showed a nose at the aperture grunted neither what was ~~neither~~ a yes nor no. And O'Hara told himself, "He ^{'Dan'l!'} hasn't heard me, or he'd have shouted ~~and I'd have~~ had to say, 'Be quiet.'"

^{Engineer's} So he whispered again, "The ~~Glory Man's~~ coming

out! We must break some lamps!"

And then his ^{own} name stunned him.

"Ebony O'Hara!" The woman's voice lashed across her husband's shoulder into O'Hara's face. "Who will patch up my man when the Mob breaks him? Your ~~Glory~~ Man has lost him a day's pay already. Who will feed the little ones until Jim Bob opens the factory gates?"

O'Hara said angrily at the man, "Does she wear the trousers? Put your fist to her!"

The man jerked away from the window and the woman took his place. "Go put your fist to Jim Bob, lion man! This one is staying in tonight!" she yelled at him.

"You're ugly. They slapped your face together anyhow like this," Ebony said, clapping his hands softly.

She pushed the window wider and yelled into Huey street, ~~And then she yelled~~ "Jim Bob! Jim Bob!"

Ebony cursed and shot off in a skip-run, looking back over his shoulder. He went into ^{Faubus} ~~Graville~~ street and tapped at another window. He said into the opening, "Dan'l's coming out. We must break some lamps."

But the man who once had the glorious arm for rocks, rested his forehead on the window and said wearily, "It's the old woman. All night, she's been murdering my ears."

"I'll never marry one of them," Ebony said bitterly.

"It's the money. Jim Bob'll not open the foundry until they get Dan'l. ^{Maybe I'm hoping they get him quickly.}"

^{ck} "Fussk you," Ebony said coldly.

"Close the window," his wife said firmly back in the room.

"And you too!" Ebony shouted into the room.

He worked hard at it and he turned up only two who

would throw rocks this night. The women were stepping away from Dan'l. They got a scant pair of lamps before the Mob mobilised against his tiny force.

Agente
Little ~~Agente~~ asked him when he ran on the beach, "The ~~Glory Man's~~ friends were fine tonight? *you broke many lamps?*"

"What friends?" Ebony cried out like a wounded man.

He threw himself down *beside Dan'l* and waited to catch his breath, ~~tired, beaten man.~~ He said, "The fishermen will have to get you up to Fay's. The women have locked their doors to you," *he said.*

Dan'l's face twisted into this bold grin and he wished Ebony could see it in the dark. What was the rare sonofabitch bawling for when he didn't stand to lose his neck? Look at the remarkable man I am, he wanted to say. I took the ends of the rope from you all and knotted it around my own neck, *that* the time when I shouted *to all of you* ~~from every housetop~~ that I wouldn't go to the marsh until after the funeral. That fixes me now. Not ~~Agente~~ *Agente*, not Fay, nobody but me fixed myself. *But then he said to himself again, Ah, shit, that isn't true, I don't know who or what fixed me.*

Lying on his belly in the salt-rotted grass, he ~~crushed~~ *crushed* a place in the grass for his face. He could hear the earth whispering under his hands. A bland cunning enemy who never spoke above a whisper.

It lay ponderously inert, as if it didn't care.

And when at last you were brought to it, others had to open a hole in it and put you in and close it.

And only then did *the earth* ~~it~~ commence to accept you, taking off flesh and muscles and blood. We're fishermen. Jim Bob makes us hate the earth.

~~The earth was a machine. Out in the cold, it would go into a state of fury, howling like a lunatic or it would grow down and digest you in a cycle.~~

Dan'l thought of Jim Bob and he said to *himself to* him, Jim Bob,

think of me as one of the thieves. Liken me to say ^{The thief known as} Decathalon who goes up through the floor of the warehouses, avoiding the doors you watch, and reap fame and fortune in a way that leaves you chewing your nails. Or ^{Think of me as the thief named,} Blues Singer, or Outfield, or ~~STONEMAN~~ Statesman, ^{whom you carry} or any of them on the Mob books as famous ~~THESE~~ thieves. They've quit the old roads of foundryhand and cottonpicker and there's no way you can cope with them save when they venture into your territory, as you did with Blues Singer who ^{came in to help me and who} foolishly thought that under cover of the Christian church he was inviolable. No place in the Village is inviolable to the Mob.

But I'll rip the floor of your warehouse, Jim Bob, by the power of the true law. ^{You and I are equal under the law of our land. The law that covers City, Marsh and Tartown.} I'll go to the funeral for a plume ^{so} I'll ride among the hot black suits showing only my anonymous back, but ^{townsfolk} the villagers will know that's the back of Dan'l, and they'll laugh that I've done this to you. Then I'll go to live in the marsh under the laws of the plowmen where neither the Mob nor their hounds have jurisdiction; and I'll be the living one to whom the ^{town} Village will look for comfort and assurance in the days of the magnolia remaining.

And ~~EVERY~~ every day that I speak from the ~~Marsh~~, I'll be ripping a plank from the floor of your warehouse, Jim Bob. ^{I'll be the greatest of the thieves} Little ~~Agente~~ ^{Budgie} said softly, "If I'd been Jim Bob, with all those ~~officers~~ ^{mobile} to back me, I wouldn't be the crablouse he is."

Dan'l smiled widely, for he was lonely and what they said didn't bring him company.

"I'd leave the man to bury his dead or I'd go after him alone," Little ^{Aubrey} ~~Agente~~ said, ^{the boy still left in him, talking.}

Ebony said angrily, "You think this is a game? Now your play, now my play?"

Dan'l got up and stretched. He said to Peter, "You get a dozen or so ^{of the boys.} ~~fishermen~~. We'll run and twist and scatter and join again so fast, the Mobsmen wont see when I make the break for Fay's."

"And sure then, you'll be safe in the whorehouse," Ebony said bitingly, looking to lace him with the word.

"This one's a bad risk, better not take him, Peter," Dan'l said about Ebony. "He might scare and run to Jim Bob."

Ebony ^{ignored him and} ~~rose~~ too. "I'll go up and have the girls wash their faces clean to greet the ~~Glory~~ Man when he comes galloping in," Ebony said.

"Keep your hands off Fay," Dan'l warned. "I'll handle it."

And they salted Fay ^{away} ~~away~~ without a scratch. Jim Bob had cleared his Mobsmen from the streets, not risking them finding Dan'l while he was catching up on his sleep at headquarters, so the fishermen ran Dan'l to the schoolhouse and they got there at the same time as Ebony.

The door flew off and they swarmed in on Fay. Calmly, she massaged her tired feet, the stout shoes on the floor beside her. She was glad that her injured little panderer was a man of good sense. He ducked his greasy head under the beautiful linen sheet and seemed to stop breathing. Dan'l stood in the doorway, holding back Ebony. Little ^{Asbury} ~~Agente~~ took short steps to the side of the bed where Paul lay and touched the sheet with a skeletal hand.

Dan'l said gently, "No, ^{Asbury} ~~Agente~~."

"I could cut his seeds out, then take off the nose

of the woman," ^{the boy} ~~Agente~~ said.

Paul the Pimp had curled himself into a ball under the sheet. He was moaning softly. Fay hugged her bony shoulders and stared at ~~Paul~~ Dan'l. She didn't seem afraid. *The Mob has taken that pay from Paul already, she said.*

She said, "I've done wrong, but I've made up for it, you'll see. Have you never feared Jim Bob?" *You work for the Mob yet your insides run everytime they smile at you. They're with you.*

And Dan'l could see the ^{hundred} ~~fifty~~ years of fear laying yellow along the black of her eyes and he felt compassion. *Ebony said an oak leafy.*

"How did you know?" he asked her.

"Another woman knows," Fay said. "But I don't have the words to explain it."

"I'm staying here until the burying. You'll be my friend?" Dan'l asked.

"I'll be your friend," she said quietly.

Ebony, that good man, sighed, for he hadn't wanted to hurt the woman. He'd just been angry before. He said, "Act natural. The Mob will be on the streets in the morning. ~~Send your pimp as usual to the edge of the marsh.~~"

~~"He is sick. They beat him."~~

~~"Then get another one,"~~ Ebony said. *Andrey*

"Act natural," Little ~~Agente~~ ^{Agente} said smilingly as he pinched Paul's leg under the sheet. "Me and ~~the~~ some of the boys will be outside all morning until the funeral."

It was a fine hot morning ~~before the rains and~~
 You could smell the smoky pinewoods ~~from the marsh.~~ The ~~fishermen~~
~~had slept off the rest of the night and~~ at daybreak
 they ^{kids} commenced to move. ~~But it was~~ a quiet morning, one you
 never saw so quiet, ^{with the} ~~before the~~ tongues of the bells lay ^{ing} still
 and not a yelp escaped ^{ing} the whistles. The streets were empty. ^{The Post}
~~Tommy Moore proved it by wheeling across Abas street with his~~
~~arm extended and never touched a soul except the top of Chris'~~
~~head.~~

Tommy Moore turned a somersault and bridged his
 body on hands and heels and chanted at Chris,

"Nobody goes to work today. Everybody's ~~laying up~~ for
 the burying. You got black clothes, ~~Chris?~~ You cant go to my
 funeral ~~with those~~ wearing those rags."

^{Jim Bob said into phone: "Boys, it's gonna be a bit of a love part at the burying for my coal black mammy. You all come over, you hear!"}
 Chris ^{had been} nudging a can to capture a slippery
 sunbeam. ^{He} knuckled his eyes. He'd slept little last night
 and was bleary this morning, but his eyes were stunningly
 clear as he looked down at the boy.

"I've got ^{Clinton} Jim Bob ^{and your brother} in the cans.
 They're two fallen stars," he said ^{evenly.}

Tommy Moore waved his feet in the air and from this
 position he saw the fishermen turn from the beach into Abas street.

"Poet," he cried, "they're coming!"

Johnny, seated near a foot of Chris the ~~taxi~~ idiot,
 flashed away from his master and was ~~at~~ far down Abas street
 before ^{when the idiot's} Chris' tired eyes could focus on the head of the ~~column~~
^{of fishermen coming} column ~~gliding~~ off the beach.

P. 5 IN SOME
 RUNAWAYS IN THE CROWD.
 USE DESCRIPTIONS ON PAGE
 14-15 for "Boxer",
 "Jelly-Belly" etc.

Put in piece with
 for the ~~love part~~ ^{Praise Be on}
 dead body

Also
 Uncle
 Amos.
 See
 page
 72

Said to
 Tail
 the
 idiot.

160

300

8000

Clinton's man's

the burying.

funeral

with those

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Chris' tired eyes could focus on the head of the

column

gliding off the beach.

Aunt Caro plucked the dead leaves from the ~~John K.~~^{redos} Meeks and bougainvillea vines and said, "It will be a funeral as nobody around here ever laid eyes to. A priest to swing the incense and Uncle Amos will carry the bowl with the blessed water."

But Kedala had been cut out of stone and placed on the bench in Aunt Caro Moore's yard to be a reproach to her. Aunt Caro couldn't drag a word out of the girl. Aunt Caro knew there was something ~~badly~~^{wasn't} wrong when this bold barrow ~~sat~~^{sat} on her saucy tongue all morning. It discommoded a body and no fooling. You felt powerfully weak not able to do a thing but talk about a burying to a girl already in a ~~bad~~ way. But Aunt Caro heard herself saying desperately,

"There'll be twenty ~~more~~ automobiles and a hearse drawn by four white horses. The undertaker man wanted to rent us the Cadillac but I told him Nana wouldn't go home behind any stinking gasoline hearse. Four white horses with the heavy net-an'-tassle on their ~~side~~ backs, and the coachman wearing his stovepipe."

The cat look on the girl's face was all bone and hard flesh that gave Caro no clue to her whereabouts.

"The undertaker man wanted to hire bearers for the casket and I said to him, 'For Chrissake, wha' do you think we are? 'Migrants? We lived in this ~~Village~~^{Town} too long to hire strangers to bear our ~~dear~~ dead. And even if our own folks went

burying,
 coward and didn't come to the/~~XXXXXX~~ Jim Bob and the Mob would
for the Mob knows that a dead Tarbuner is a good Tarbuner!
 bear Nana for us, I said to the undertaker man."

But Kedala stared into the heart of a rosebush at the gate and never heard Aunt Caro. The old woman snatched at her temper and missed.

"Who the hell put a peg in your tongue?" she exploded.

A noise to hide ~~thunder~~ in. It ~~penetrated~~ ^{reached} to Kedala and she turned her face to the woman. Aunt Caro sat down abruptly as the black eyes glittered on her face, ~~when the girl spoke.~~

"Where's Dan'l? Isn't he going to the burying?" *Kedala said.*

"His black clothes were taken last night. Ebony came for them," Caro said.

"I must see him before the burying."

"Dont know and wouldn't say if I knew, 'cause I dont know what's going on in your head," Caro said evenly.

"Where're you hiding him?"

"Why dont you go ringing a bell through the ~~Village?~~ ^{town?}"

"That wouldn't bring him out."

"Why do you want to bring him out?" Caro shouted.

"Dont you know the Mob got guns? Dont you know its shoot to kill?"

Kedala stood up from the bench and began to unbutton her blouse. Her fingers twisted and broke off one of the little buttons and then another and with a sudden jerk she ripped off the blouse and exposed the firm flesh, smooth as velvet. She wrenched at the band that joined the cups of the brassiere and snatched away the cloth. She touched the nipples of the small breasts and swayed her hips sensuously. There was a stark, dark strength in the face she turned to the older woman. Aunt Caro had made no move but her harsh old face was stiff with anger.

"I'm going to dance naked in the street," Kedala said. She tore at the waist of her skirt. "I'm going to dance ^{before the plowmen} ~~in the~~ street. That will bring him out."

"The plowmen will soon be in from the marsh. You'll have a trade," Aunt Caro grated.

"I'll dance naked before the ^{marsh.} ~~house of the dead.~~"

"You're a slut."

"If Dan'l doesn't come to dance with me, Jim Bob will, ^{or the plowmen} ~~Jim Bob likes to dance with me.~~"

"Leave my ^{horse.} ~~yard.~~" Aunt Caro demanded in a low voice.

Kedala laughed mockingly as she ran past the gate and Aunt Caro Moore felt the pain knife hotly in her belly at the swift uproar ^{as} ~~the~~ street bellowed a welcome to ^{Kedala} ~~XXXXXX~~ who had come to belabour the dismaying peace which the Mob guns had imposed. Afond, the crippled boy, hooted softly and dragged himself forward on his severed legs as the folk made a way for him. He settled in the gutter and sent the guitar into a clamour.

Her eyes half closed and her fingers spread on her thighs, Kedala danced hungrily before the ^{town,} ~~Village,~~ her lips curved in a smile. They gave her more room as the pain and the ecstasy increased. The barrow girls were seized with the madness and they echoed the insolent whimpers from Kedala as they ripped at their own clothing. But it was a cheerless, uneasy orgy that they danced, for they were tasting the death in Abas street that yellow sunlit ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~/morning.

The Mobsmen in their cruisers heard the commotion in Abas street and swarmed down on the ^{townfolk} ~~Villagers.~~ They clubbed a

way through the crowd and swore busily as they grabbed at the half clad barrow girls and flung them aside and then only Kedala was left, nude Kedala, dancing still even though the guitar had been silenced. Now she was surrounded by the Mob as they gaped and tongued their lips with desire for the swelling breasts and the soft dark field they viewed each time her knees lifted.

But Jim Bob, on his lone patrol, ran for Abas street and when he saw Kedala in her bare dance, a great blue welt appeared on his forehead and he roared mightily as he threw himself at her. The rough red hands clutched for her breasts and his mouth slobbered down on her. A flame glowed in Kedala's eyes and her hand flashed downward to Jim Bob and twisted. Jim Bob's face opened and he screamed pig-high as he let go of the girl and clapped his hands to his groin. He fell, screaming, his knees drawn up to his chest.

Kedala fled on a wild burst of laughter, running past the stunned ~~mobsters~~ mobsters who only came awake when one of them shouted, "Get the bitch! Run her down!"

And they ran after her sweetly rolling buttocks until she vanished into the sheet Fay the madam held out for her. Then between the mobsters and Kedala, appeared the blessed fishermen who had been coming up from the beach. The ^{young} fishermen flooded together and swept in a torrent up Abas street towards the mobsters.

She had been snatched out of Fay's hands by Uncle Amos the Black and he backed into his shop with her wrapped

in the sheet, and elbowed his door shut. Fay returned to her schoolhouse and went in to Dan'l. He was on his back, smoking and reading the ceiling as he used to do when he was a boy in Nana's house waiting for the seven o'clock whistles to lace him with their whips.

"Kedala was dancing naked in the street," Fay said.

He had heard the hubbub and sent her to find out about it. He kept looking at the ceiling, dust flaked into strange patterns.

"Jim Bob danced with her," Fay said.

His eyes flickered from the ceiling and returned. Each time he looked away, the patterns on the ceiling seemed to change. He looked down and saw that his hands had made themselves into ~~weapons~~ weapons. Fay saw the balled fists and whispered some words.
~~to himself~~

"You're not afraid to tell me this?" Dan'l said.

"Yes."

"If you were a man, I'd kill you," he said softly.

Uncle Amos said at the door, "She's a good woman.

She wrapped a sheet around the girl."

"A ^{sub} ~~whorehouse~~ ^{Tartarus} sheet. Slept upon by the plowmen and the Mob and ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~villagers~~."

"You're not a bold man," Uncle Amos said. "A bold man would welcome such a sheet."

Uncle Amos had a fringe of white hair at both temples and was bald on top. ~~He~~ He was the finest of the Uncles. It was ironical, Dan'l reflected, that in choosing those who should wear the titles of aunts and uncles, ~~the~~ an honour they meant to snigger in secret at, the Mob often picked on the tough ones, those

stubbornly intelligent as mules, using the pack the Mob ~~XXXXXX~~ put on their backs to ~~XXXXXX~~ give them balance on the steeper trails where it would be foolish to balk.

"Where is she?" he asked Fay.

"Uncle Amos took her to his shop."

"She wasn't safe there. The Mob saw me take her in. They'll run down on me after they've finished fighting the fishermen," Uncle Amos said.

Dan'l leapt from the bed. "Fighting ^{with} the fishermen? How did this happen?"

"The fishermen pushed them back up the street when more Mobsmen will come and then they chased after Kedala. But/~~they'll get reinforcements~~ they'll break up the fishermen and be after her."

Uncle Amos had moved to the door and now he stood squarely in the aperture, a wide, solid man. Dan'l got furiously into ~~his~~ his shirt and hurriedly stuffing the tails in his trousers he rammed for the doorway. He collided with Uncle Amos and reeled back.

He shouted angrily, "Out of my way, Uncle Amos!"

"You may be ~~Glory~~ ^{Glory} Man for us, but not for a bullet from Jim Bob's gun," Uncle Amos said. "You go out there now, you cant help the fishermen and the Mob will shoot you down. Use your college head."

But Dan'l put down the college head like a bull and said, "Move, Uncle Amos. I'm going through."

"You'll only go ~~XXXXXX~~ through to show me how strong you are. But you know that you show your ~~nose~~ ^{nose} in Abas street and none of the lives of the fishermen out there will be valued two bits, for Jim Bob will tell/~~XXXX~~ ^{his men} to start shooting. So if you want to show me how strong you are, you go ahead and get your

friends killed."

"Move, Uncle Amos!"

"By golly," Uncle Amos said, "I know how you feel. You ^{dont} feel like me at the Wake the other night. But feeling/~~down with~~ win fights. Its thinking that ^{young} twin fights. The fishermen will back away soon enough. I sent one of my boys up to tell them the girl was well hidden and they'll be cutting out for the beach anytime now. You stay here, son and try using your head to beat Jim Bob."

"Where's Kedala?" Fay asked.

"Got her salted away, ma'am," Uncle Amos said ^{respectfully} ~~fondly~~ to the madam.

"Where's she?" Dan'l asked.

"Got her in the grade thirteen room," Uncle Amos said.
"Got her in bed there."

"Is she hurt?"

"Dont know. She wont talk to me. But I guess she is."

"Why didn't you say so before?" shouted Dan'l as he ran at Uncle Amos. But Uncle Amos stepped actively aside so he went on through ~~and~~ Fay said to Uncle Amos, "She wasn't hurt when you took her from me."

"Her feelings, ma'am, just like Dan'l's," Uncle Amos said.

You didn't need to have the blue tits of a hooknosed female shark to know that the Mob would have Dan'l by the crotch if they caught his woman, the ^{young} fishermen said, so they ran to the Mob with the quick slapdown of insteps the way the ^{people} ~~men~~ of the small boats do. No knives glinted, for Peter the captain with a sidelook

at Little ^{Hubey} Agente had ordered the knives left on the beach. The ^{few} Mob ^{men} took one look at Peter's army and backed fast up Abas street bearing Jim Bob with them, ~~impolite as a plug in an outhouse,~~ "Little Agente said."

But at the top of ~~the~~ Abas street, they ^{were joined by} ~~greeted~~ with howls of welcome and ~~an~~ ^{Some of the} ~~inrush~~ of reinforcements and began moving towards the fishermen again. / ~~new~~ Mobsmen wore the dreaded Loop insignia on their sleeves and the cry went up among the ^{Tartownes} ~~Villagers~~ that the ^{hang} Mob would / ~~Kedala~~ Kedala for having raped Jim Bob.

The two forces met midway on the street and went ~~to~~ to work immediately. The hot yellow sun lay like exploded butter on the street and they fought lazily, thickly, ^{in it,} and nobody knew why they fought so, wading towards each other, big-kneed, slow-footed, among the Mob for Jim Bob and looked among until the Poet looked / ~~up the street at the mob and looked down~~ ^{and knew that was why Ray fought sluggish.} the fishermen for Dan'l Moore and saw no leaders. And so the Poet turned his head away in disgust at the poor showing and ^{Lanny} Chris the Idiot, his eyes on his pans, ^{not looking up,} said, "Be my eyes, young disciple. Why do you turn your head away?"

"They have no leaders," Johnny the Poet said, "they fight without heart." ^{{ "Where's Jim Bob?" { "He's gone, impolite as a plug in an outhouse,"} ^{the Poet said}

"Look to the top of Abas street. Do you see the hairy plowmen of the marsh?"

Johnny looked straight up Abas street and he could see the first ranks of the Hairy Ones coming out of the live oaks at the edge of the marsh land. ^{said excitedly to Lanny.} "They're coming out," he ~~told Chris~~.

"Good," ^{Lanny} ~~Chris~~ said, his voice clear as if he owned the best brains in ^{Tartowne} ~~the Village~~. "Now you go up past the Mob and somewhere in the back you'll find Jim Bob resting the hurt where Kedala twisted him. He will be recovered by now. You tell him that Dan'l is in the schoolhouse. Tell him he's with Kedala."

No foolish thoughts about honour or betrayal bothered the Poet, but he had a stout regard for his skin. He gaped at ^{Lanny} Chris the Idiot and said, ~~X~~ "You crazy? Ebony and the fishermen would cut my heart out ^{if I tell them where Dan's is."}

"Don't be a fool," ^{Lanny} Chris said sharply. "Dan'l wants Jim Bob at the schoolhouse. Be sure to tell him Kedala's there too."

The Poet squatted swiftly beside ^{Lanny} Chris and his slaty young eyes clung suddenly to ^{Lanny's} ~~Chris's~~ face. "How do you know close as all this? Since when has Dan'l been/butt-an'-chamberpot with you?"

And because he was talking to ^{Lanny the Idiot,} Chris, he was unprepared for the thunder and lightning that buffeted and scorched him as ^{Lanny} on Chris turned/ ~~to~~ him. It was a tremendous face ^{Lanny} Chris turned to him, with more authority than Jim/~~Bob's~~ and stronger than Dan'l's. And out of the face came the quiet words that struck like a ~~hurricane~~ hurricane out of the gulf.

^{"Go"} "Do my bidding, at once," ^{Lanny} Chris said quietly. slackly

And so the Poet rose/~~and backed away~~ and backed away staring at ^{Lanny} Chris but when the man turned his gaze on him, he whipped around and sped off on his mission.

She lay under Fay's sheet breathing evenly and he thought she must be sleeping. He dropped to his knees beside the bed and said, Kedala. She opened her ~~eyes~~ eyes and she had a warm smile for him.

"You should have seen Boss Jim Bob when he came on me dancing, he could have bored through a wall, he was that put out," she said. "He wanted it right ~~in~~ there in the street."

He was not angry for he saw the pain in her eyes and when

he touched the sheet she was rigid under it. He stroked the sheet where her breasts were and where the curve of her thighs showed and she moved under his hand. He thought that if he was gentle with her, touching her face and throat with his lips, in time she would turn to him. He couldn't understnad how her smile held all that warmth with the pain laying along her eyes. He slipped his hand under the sheet and touched the skin about her navel. She watched him curiously as his fingers trembled on her flesh.

"You shake like Jim Bob this morning. He thought I was dancing for him. He didn't know I was dancing to bring you out."

"Dont talk about him," he said. "By tomorow we'll be in the marsh, out of his reach, where he cant find us."

"If I'm with you he'll find me. He'll come looking for me."

"No, he wont go looking for you. He knows we lose our scent when we're working for the plowmen and his dogs wont find us."

"But he'll come looking hard for me. He always looks for me when/~~he's~~ troubled. And he'll always be troubled because you got away from him."

"Are you his wife?" he said impatiently. "Why should he look for you when he's in trouble?"

"He raped me onet~~i~~me and made me his wife. He says I belong to him."

Dan'l held his head and raged in deep shuddering groans for Jim Bob. He needed him with a strong thirst. Ebony must have known about Jim Bob. If Ebony had told him, he'd have found Jim Bob long ago. By this time, Jim Bob would've been placed in the long hole with his favourite dog at his feet. Did Jim Bob think that because she'd been Jimmy Brave's woman, he had a lien on the body?

~~The Village and the villeins~~ ^{Tartan} was under the Mob and Jim Bob/ ^{could}

cry past his ~~thin~~ monkey thin lips, Bring out your bodies! for the noose or the whip, ^{for} or the blunt instrument at his middle. He had the guns and the acres of hating men to set up whichever body he wanted.

He ripped away the whore's winding sheet and ~~she~~ she was nakedly ~~naked~~ alive like a feline, desirable to set all his carnal hairs quivering.

"Dont take me yet, honey," she pleaded. "I'm cold."

He touched the middle of her hand. They were small, shallow hands shaped for making love on the bones of the back. He gripped his wrists with either hand and ~~he~~ turned to cross the room away from her, placing his feet as the fishermen used to small boats did, straight and gentle and accurate.

"You never loved me, Kedala," he said, his back towards her. "If you'd loved me, Jim Bob could not have had his way with you. You'd have found a way to kill him."

"You never loved me either," the girl said. "Not as Jimmy the Brave did." And when fear had sent him shaking to her room, she'd loved Jimmy the Brave with her hands, her mouth, ~~her breasts~~, her breasts until he had been equipped with the false strength to go looking for Jim Bob. Nobody knew that Jimmy's great footrace had been started from her room. Poor, gone Jimmy the Brave.

"Nor as Jim Bob did. Jim Bob would take me, cold or not, out of his ~~hot~~ hot lust," the girl said.

He turned and crossed the room again and closed with her and the lithe, flat muscles slid under his hand and the soft spread of her mouth was on his. And when he drove in like a bull, she soothed and quieted him with her hands for he was not Jim Bob and he had learnt to wait. So she gave him with her voice and hands the strong, easy

power of patience and then he was doing it slow and long and proudly. And when she commenced turning and crying, he cradled her gently in his arms, taking her through the high sweet shock as he absorbed her shudders and there was no inch of their flesh apart when there came his own lightning bolt of love.

They woke out of it to hear Jim Bob's panicky ~~hysterical~~ cry echoing through the schoolhouse.

"Dan'l! ^{plowmen! They'll wake up!}
~~hysterical~~ The ~~marsh~~ people! ~~The hairy ones!~~ They're coming
for us!"

Dan'l sprang from the bed, gathering his clothes about him and with a bellow of rage he plucked the knife from his waist and ran for the auditorium. He skidded through the door, alert for trickery; but Jim Bob, his pudgy face creased with terror, short thick legs floundering on the floor as he scrambled across to Dan'l, showed his fat empty hands while he shrieked at ~~the~~ ^{the Dan'l} the fishermen.

"The marsh people — they've cut off their hair and are a-coming for us! Multitudes, multitudes — they swallowed the Mob and your ^{young} fishermen and ^{now they} ~~are~~ coming for us!"

CHAPTER NINETEEN

A murmur ran through the Village as the plowmen came in from the marsh. They'd never come down in such numbers, a multitude of them and they shuffled in silently, endlessly out of the trees and down Abas street in the yellow sunlight. The lank fall of hair had been moved off Kēi their faces and all in the Village now saw the eyes that so few had ever seen before. And, in the eyes, they saw knowledge.

The plowmen filled the street, every inch of it, and the Villagers fell back before them, building solidly until by the time they'd retreated to where Jim Bob was hearing from the Poet about Dan'l, they were shoulder to shoulder. Swiftly alarmed at finding himself alone in a sea of his loved ones, Jim Bob tore his ears from the Poet's frightened bleat.

When the Poet came to him, he'd been sitting on a cracker barrel, diverting himself by making fiery crosses out of hairs plucked from his nostrils and extinguishing them with jets of chaw juice while he rested up from Kedala's ill handling. But the sudden appearance of the enemy around him and their curious silence, was, for Jim Bob, full of menace.

He jumped from the barrel crying, "You-all got no cause to worry! Relax - go on home! We only want Dan'l and the fishermen! They been listening to the government in the City and we gotta plug their ears!"

The Poet took swift heart at the alarm in Jim Bob and straightened out of the magnolia humility into which he had folded his spine. "What about Kedala?" he demanded. "She's my future!"

Jim Bob swung to him with a wide nervous smile. "Kedala? I love her, Poet! Nothing will go wrong with our future!"

"You go loving her too much now, you empty her by the

time I grow up," the Poet said.

"She's got enough for us all!" Jim Bob cried in appeal to the faces that looked unnervingly ^{straight} ahead as they backed.

"There's been Jimmy the Brave," the Poet said.

"And me and Dan'l and maybe you when you grow up! Nobody can finish her!" Jim Bob shouted.

"But Chris says you'll keep raping her until you finish her," said the stubborn Poet.

Then Jim Bob's pudgy face reddened as he saw that the crowd had not been concerned with him at all but was being spellbound by something ahead that he couldn't see. With a snarl, he flipped his hand and ^{hurled} ~~threw~~ the Poet into the crowd. He threw up his head to give the old Mob yell that would send the Villagers shaking to the curb and then he saw the plowmen, coming in the yellow sunlight.

They had never come so unendingly before. The hair had been dressed back off their faces and the eyes were alive. Jim Bob poked his head forward, staring at the plowmen. And so suddenly he read their purpose, and so suddenly the panic came, sloshing around his insides, poisoning him. For in the yellow sunlight, the faces of the plowmen held a certain fear. They were afraid of Jim Bob.

He backed away on legs that threatened to collapse at any moment. He thought of his Mobsmen down the street, but there were just too many plowmen for them to handle. He caught up with the retreating crowd and several hands flattened to his spine and heaved him forward again. He bawled, his eyes pulping from his head as the plowmen from the marsh flowed down Abas street and closed the gap to him. He didn't know what he had done to make them afraid of him. He'd always been careful about it, had even given them their own Thursdays in the schoolhouse.

He turned and bulled into the crowd. He bounced into the

Buck Dancer and the old thief said quietly, "You soft ungutsy Mobsman. You running scared. A rabbit Mobsman."

And Jim Bob sweating in the yellow sunlight held to Buck Dancer's arm and cried, "They're too many, man! The Mob just aint geared to fight that many!"

"There's just as many of them to you as you are to us," Buck Dancer said.

"But they've got mirrors on their shoulders!" Jim Bob squealed.
~~XXXXXXXX~~ "You're kinda fighting yourself when you get up to them!"

And all hell for a hoot and a holler, grinned the corner of his head that was always good for some Mob humour, Jim Bob ^{skinful} ~~you're more fun than a~~ ~~XXXXXX~~ sackful o' catamounts. You know you ~~XX~~ just plumb scared to look at yourself in any old mirror.

Then he was scared again and wondered what the hell could ^{chuckles} ~~XXXXXXXX~~ have given him the ~~XXXXXXXX~~ awhile ago. He slammed once more into the crowd, fighting for the safety of his Mob but the hard layered crowd disputed him ~~with their bodies~~ and he was ^{loping} ~~XXXXXXXX~~ trapped in the middle until Chris the Idiot came ~~XXXXXXXX~~ in.

"Chris!" Jim Bob cried, and on this crazy Thursday he never noticed the pure authority which parted the crowd for Chris so he could come loping in.

And Chris took him by a fat hand and led him like a child through the crowd and past the slowly battling Mobsmen and fishermen, and pointed him down Abas street to Fay the madam's schoolhouse.

About that time, the Villagers broke and ran before the silent shuffling onslaught of the plowmen, bolting into the houses and jamming their heads at the window blinds to see what would happen. So there were lots of them to see and to talk

about the way the plowmen overwhelmed the Mobsmen and the fishermenX. The fishermen went under easily enough, for they were being outnumbered by the swarms of new Mobsmen that had come pounding in as they heard of the battle, but it took several flashes of the mirrors in/^{the faces of}many of the mobsters to subdue them.

The plowmen swept Abas street cleanM and in the same deathly silence, broken only by the shuffle of their feet on the asphalt, headed for the whorehouse. They streamed in through the main door of the schoolhouse, passed the cowering little harlots without a glance, and flowed like a ~~high~~ broken dam over the three, Jim Bob, Dan'l and the girl, Kedala.

And those whom the plowmen took, the Village never saw again. For as they returned through Abas street to the marsh, all you could see was the yellow sunlight glinting off the mirrors. It took some time before the Village was aware that the Idiot, Chris, and that one, the Poet, had also vanished.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Following is a transcript of a trial held in the Marsh County courthouse:

The People against Jim Bob*and Clint*

The parties being present in court, His Honour entered and the hearing commenced. Evidence was taken from the plowmen.

Court: You're known as the ^{Good People? The} plowmen, or hairy ones?

Plowmen: That's right, your honour. But they call us the People too.

C: Do you know the accused, Jim Bob?

P: Sure we know ^{clint} old Jim, man and boy. One hell of a ^{fellows} guy, you cant help loving him. One time he wanted to take over the marsh, City too, said we weren't running things good up here. But now we get along, we go down every Thursday.

C: Wipe the goddam smirk off your face. Would you say he's a good ^{fellows} guy?

P: Fact, we always thought Jim Bob a good ^{fellows} guy, pure as a Wabash moon shining on Kentucky stone.

C: The court hasn't got the picture.

P: You kidding, judge? You never been to a movie? Gee, man, there's nothing purer than a Wabash moon shining on a collonade of the old Kentucky home.

C: Yeah, got it. Did you know about the hound dogs?

P: Sure we knew about the hound dogs.

C: And the other stuff?

P: You mean the funny fruit old Jim Bob sometimes

grew on his trees? Sure, we heard about them. But, you know, you dont see these things, you say, what the hell, they'll work it out.

C: Dont buffalo the court. What do you mean they'll work it out?

P: Well, judge, to tell the truth, we couldn't hardly tell what was going on, on account of our eyes watching the ground. Had to watch ~~out~~ step in the marsh. Morass, you sink easy in ~~XX~~ that muck, judge.

C: Okay, wipe your ~~XXXX~~ dam' eyes and let's get along. You know the girl, Kedala?

P: Huh, we guessed you'd come to that, judge. Sure, we know her. Guess you want to know about the Wake for Jimmy Brave. Sure, we saw them waking under the trees, but it was a bad time in the ~~XXS~~ marsh, real soft underfoot, and we argued that old Jim, the poor guy, had problems but he'd work them out.

C: The hell with it. You sure got good answers. Tell the court what made you change your mind about Jim Bob.

P: Change our minds, judge?

C: Yeah. He was the poor guy then. Now he's the bad guy.

P: He turned into a real bad guy, judge.

C: Loosen up, buster. What do you mean by bad?

P: He scared us, judge.

C: Fuller and better particulars, you lintheads.

P: Listen, judge. It put us out when we heard he was thinking of closing down the schoolhouse. Then we got over it when we heard he'd open up the church instead. But when we heard ^{They'd bolt} he'd laid handson Kedala, that really threw us. The

guy had turned unpredictable.

C: Who told you about Kedala?

P: Guess it was Fay here. She said some Idiot had told her that Jim Bob was after to wifing with Kedala. And the girl being our future, what with Fay trying for a long time to get her into the schoolhouse and promising us all sorts of wonderful times with her, we couldn't just stand by and watch Jim Bob grabbing it all for himself.

C: Couldn't you, as plowmen, have shared it with Jim Bob?

P: Judge, you been on a long trip? Didn't you hear about Dan'l Moore? He and Jim Bob would have fought like Protestants over her, perhaps damaging her beyond repair. We couldn't just stand by, dont you see judge? Once to every men and nation comes a moment to decide —

C: Okay okay. Get up off your knees and take a rest.

The prosecution rested.

The accused Jim Bob took the stand.

C: Your name is Jim Bob?

JB: Sure, I'm ole Jim Bob, born and raised in that fair but wounded land not a bobcat's caterwaul away.

RI C: You know the ^{Good People's} plowmen?

JB: Yessirreebob. For years. We understood one another. They're People, judge. Used to tell Them in the Village every day, the uppity bastards.

C: Thunder and lightning, why did you have to do that?

J.B. You kidding, judge? It was good for Them to know they weren't People.

C: But why, man, why?

JB: Aw, heck, judge, we love Them. Dont want Them to lose their possum rights. Real People dont have any possum rights, you know that. Real People gotta get up and go, gotta hustle some. Now my folks in the Village, they never had to hustle none. Nossir. We took good care of them. We love Them more than we love bourbon.

(Here there was a general sniffing of magnolias among the Mob in court and His Honour said all that hamming was only for the TV cameras so he ordered the blooms removed from their lapels.)

C: Now the court wants to hear about you and the marsh people.

J&B: Warm as a bull alligator in heat, judge. Friends from 'way back.

C: Dont give the court that crap. Wasn't there some trouble between you back in 'Sixty-one?

JB: Heh heh. Now that you mention it, judge, there was a mite of trouble, a little flapdoodle.

C: And since that time your High Commander has been missing.

JB: Yessir. Some of the things we do — well, judge, we dont rightly know why, just go along with the old custom. Sure wish he'd come back and give us some new reasons. Most

of them now are pretty old and used up. Gotta get us some new ones what with the City and the ~~XXXXX~~ People seeing no good in them.

C: Do you think the plowmen would perjure to put you in trouble?

JB: Beckon I dont know for sure, judge. Everytime they cut back their hair, they commence seeing things. Back in Sixty-one when we had that trouble, it was because they'd pushed the hair off their faces. They see so durned much then, ~~they~~ they make trouble for everybody.

C: Alright alright. Now listen here. You're on your oath. Remember you kissed the mail order catalogue, ~~and you've got to speak the truth on that sacred book.~~ Tell the court about the schoolhouse and the girl, Kedala.

JB: Yessir. Now that business about the whorehouse. For a long time after the trouble in 'Sixty-one, the marsh people never came down for their fun. But afterwards there came along this little bitty whorehouse and no special days for them either. So the Mob went ahead and fixed up the schoolhouse and even game them Thursday exclusive.

C: Okay. So you gave them Thursday. Now what about the allegations that you meant to hold Kedala in fee simple?

JB: That's the big thing, eh judge? Well, now, I guess I was a little mean at that. She can take care of me and the plowmen. She 's got future enough for both of us."

C: But what about Da n'l? He's entitled to a nibble.

JB: Come on now, judge, you're killing me. The villagers are entitled to nothing except what the Mob gives them.

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C: But she belongs/ ^{equally} to Dan'l. He ought to have a couple of days at Fay's. You ought to open up Fay's to the villagers.

JB: Judge, I'm a reasonable man. I can see this is a big thing with you so I'll tell you what I'll do. When I get back to the Village, I'll arrange with my boys to give Them an hour at Fay's every Sunday.

C: Better hang on to your brithces, sonny boy, while I give you this. You're not going back to the Village.

JB: Not going back? Now how do you like them bananas.

C: You'll be happy here. None of the old problems.

JB: Noen of the old problems? Judge, to tell the truth, I ~~XXXX~~ dunno. What's that?

C: There're no Jews or Catholics or villagers here, only people. Villagers, Wobsmen or plowmen, you'll all be people.

JB: No Jews or Catholics or Them? Only People? I dunno, judge. The Mob's gotta have somebody if we're to stay here. We gotta wear the magnolia for somebody. You have a suggestion, judge? Any Eyetalians? Or Communists? Or ~~XXXX~~ cross-eyed folk? What about lefthanders? You're bound~~X~~ to have lefthanders here. They couldn't all be righthanders. We sure hate lefthanders. You say you never knew we hated lefthanders? Aw, heck, judge, I just made it up but it'll do. They're sure poison. Did you know they blow their noses lefthanded? Button their flies lefthanded? Come on, judge, will you get a few of them for us here? You'll flush some real live ones for Jim Bob? What about it, judge?

(The judge ordered the bailiff to remove the accused and hold him for medical observation, followed possibly by promotion to the rank of Idiot. His Honour then said the court

would not need to hear Jim Bob further since it was clear that the indictment had been wrongly drawn up. His Honour said it was the People who ought to be on trial, and not poor Jim Bob. He therefore ruled that the indictment be changed to read Jim Bob against The People.)

The People entered the dock.

Judge Chris: Now what've you got to say for your lousy selves?

People: We're sorry, judge. But Jim Bob always sounded so collected. ~~When he was in the dock~~ What you think sends a good guy like Jim Bob off his wheels, judge? I mean, we all got problems, dont we?"

Judge Chris: Now that's the most unlikely enunciation of latterday saintliness I've ever heard in my life. Hold it while I dispose of Kedala.

(The court now faced the question of Kedala.)

Judge Chris: Mr Clerk of the court, I think I'll make Kedala into a ward of this court. She'll be in your keeping.

Clerk: Wheehee!

Judge Chris: Hmm. Just another poet with hot pants.

Clerk: Well, didn't you tell me back in the Village —

Judge Chris: Village, swillage. That was in the days when only idiocy was safe.

Clerk: But I rooted my future on her!

Judge Chris: Then uproot it for the nonce. This court now turns its face away from the previous decision and ^{now} rules

that Kedala be made a ward, jointly, of everybody, plowmen,
Mob, fishermen.

Clerk: You're making her ^{the} ~~ward~~ of people
whom you still have to sentence?

Judge Chris: Put out your fire. The court now
finds the People guilty but will reserve judgment. What's that?

Clerk: I said you cant reserve judgment
when you got nothing to reserve it in. All your cans are
scattered.

Judge Chris: In that case, then, the court
suspends sentence and place you all under bond to keep the
peace for at least a generation.

(This is a true transcript as
witness my hand)

Signed: Johnny Poet, clerk.

END