

dyou said that earlier, And all the rest said the same thing."

"Ask them now," Mathu says.

I look at the Prince. W"Well?"

~~"Why don't you ask somebody else?" he says, as~~  
~~defiant as ever.~~ "He did it."

We look at each other a while, then I look at one of the others.

"Well?"

"Mathu telling the truth," this one says

"Are you all ready to say that?"

"If you promise to write what we say. If you don't, then we just go back and say we all did it all over again. We ain't got no where ~~to~~ to go."

"I'll write what you tell me, but I Think Mapes and Candi ought to be in here."

"They can come in," Mathus says. "Silas," he says, over his shoulder to one of the old men.

The old man opens the door and speaks to Candi and Mapes. Candi's name is noo sooner spoken, when she has pushed herself inside and over to the fire place. Tho old man who offerred me the homemade chair offers it to Candi, and she sits down facing Mathu. Mapes with the pump gun, and looking very very tired, yet with a sign of relief, is standing behind th3 chair.

"What is it, Mathu?" Candi says.

"I'm tiruning myself in," he says to her.

"No, you're not," Ca di says. "We all did it, You're not in th s alone."

"We been talking, Miss Marahall."

"Well, I dare any of them to say you did it--I dare them," she says. "I will not stand for anybody to call me a lie."

"We made up us mind, Miss Marshall," Mathu says.

"Well, I wasn't in on it--and you're not going to any jail. If one go, lall go."

"I kilt the man, Miss Marshall."

"He dese ved to di," Candi says.

"I think you ought to let Mathu talk, Candi," Mapes says.

"Not me," Mathu says, looking up at him. "Not me. These people here. I ainit going to jail for killing Beau Boutan. I'm going for these people here. I don't feel bad for killing Beau Boutan. He was go'n kill <sup>may be</sup> ~~this~~ boy, and I wasn't go'n stand for it. I kilt a mad dog, that's all."

"I killed him," Candi says. "Bing killed him, Ding killed him, Snook killed him."

"I kilt him, Miss Marshall," Mathu says. "We all agreed."

"Behind my bac?" Candi says. "Behind my back?"

"Yes ma'am," Mathu says. "Behind your back."

"Well, that don't hold no water with me."

"It's go'n have to, Miss Marshall," Mathu says. "That is how we want it."

"Well, I donit. And I won't have it."

"Afraid you'll have to, Candi," Mapes says.

"Afraid so, W" the Prince says.

"What?" Candi says, turning on the Prince. "Who are you to tell us how to live down here? You started all this."

"That's right, I started it. And they're going to end it."

"You're the one doing this," Candi says. "You're the one putting words in their mouths. You're the one putting that foolishness in their lheads."

"I told them they were men, that's all," the Prince says. "I told them they had God given rights to stand up as

men. I told them they had God given rights to think as men. I told them they had God given rights to make their own decisions--whether that decision meant life or death. They didn't reach a conclusion just like that," the prince says, snapping his finger. "They knelt and prayed. "Mr. Hawkins, that you white people call Hog, led them in prayers. After they prayed, they talked. Yes, they came to their own conclusion in this room themselves. Look at this place. Look at it, Candi. Look at it well. You didn't use iron nails when this house was built, you used wooden pegs. You stuffed the cracks with mud and moss. The boards--ceiling, walls, floor--their fathers and grandfathers cut out the swamps. As slaves," he points out. "As slaves, Candi, to your people."

"I had nothing to do with his."

"Of course not, Candi." ~~And~~

"Don't blame him, Miss Marshall," Mathu says. "We needed for somebody to come wake us up before we died."

"So I haven't been treating you right, is that it, Mathu? That's what you trying to say to me after all these ~~xxx~~ years?"

"You've treated me good, Miss Marshall."

"Except for one thing," the Prince cuts in.

"I'm not talking to you now," Candi says.

"I'm talking to you," the Prince says. "Yes, you treated them fine--as long as they didn't think for themselves. Just like today, you did all the thinking. "

"You better shut up."

"Only if they tell me to shut up--not you," the Prince says. "I'm not one of your niggers, Candi. And after this day, they won't be either."

"Maybe I should've just let Beau kill you with that scythe blade?"

"So you could keep control over them? So you could ~~be~~ always be "Good Candi"? Is that what you want? Don't you think they can respect you just as much if you let them stand on their own feet?"

"Do you know what you're saysng?"

"I know what I'm saying."

"No, lyou don't know a damned things about what you're saying. Because if I hadn't been down here, them Cajuns would have lynched you by now."

"That's the chance a black man must take in this country whenever he says he's a man. "

"You weren't so critical of my decision earlier?"

"We've talked since then. And I didn't twist anybody's arm. They all came to their on conclusion."

"To send Mathu to jail for life?"

"To immortality," the Prince corrects her.

"And what's that suppose to me?"

"It's simple, Candi. You decided to be the heorine here. ~~We~~ decided, or they decided to make Mathu the hero. Just reversed everything."

She's getting angrier and angrier by the second. "You brought all this ~~on~~ on. You. You and that damned liktle red car out there."

"I would not have been here if you had not invited me. And it was Avis who rented me a little red car, I asked for somethsng black."

"Well, let's get moving," Mapes says. "I've ~~h~~ heard enough."

"You haven't heard anything," the Prince tells him.

"Don't get smart with me boy," Mapes says.

"It's boy now, huh?" the prince says. "Boy, huh? Now, that you have your man, it's boy, huh?"

"What did you expect?" Candi asks him. *"Mapes?"*

The Prince grins at Mapes, without looking at Candi.

"Don't you want to know what's in that paper bag on the mantelpiece?" the Prince asks Mapes.

*"Hag Candi?"* "Pecans?" Mapes asks him.

*"Uh-uh."* "Uh-uh, The prince says.

"Peanuts?" Mapes asks.

"Uh-uh."

"I give up," Mapes says.

The prince leans his shotgun against the wall, then he gets the paper bag off the mantelpiece, and dumps everything into the fireplace. Everything turns out to be about thirty empty shotgun shells. I look at the empty shells for about five seconds, then I look at Mapes and the Prince. And they're looking at each other. You can see that it takes Mapes a few seconds before he begins to put things together. Or maybe it takes me that long. Because Mapes's face doesn't tell you anything. Yet, you know he's thinking--adding, subtracting, multiplying, even dividing. Thinking that if the empty shells are out, then there's a good possibility that they've been replaced by some that are not so empty. But replaced when? Where did the shells come from? Did Mathu have them here all the time--about ten and twelve gauge? Did the old men have the shells in their pockets all the time? Or was it the little boy messenger?

Mapes nods. "I see," he says.

"That's right," the Prince says.

"Candi made them fire, You made them reload?"

"Something like that," the Prince says.

"When?" Mapes asks.

The Prince shrugs.

"How ~~Mapes~~" Mapes asks.

The Prince shrugs again.

"The little boy messenger?" Mapes ask, eying the Prince a little from the side.

"Could be," the Prince says

"Ready for war, huh??" Mapes says, looking around at all the old men, then back to the Prince again.

"Just want to be sure he gets to town safe and sound," the Prince says. "Accidents usually happen between the place of arrest and the jail house."

Mapes looks from the Prince down at Mathu.

"Ready to go when you are, Mathu," he says.

"Thank you, Sheriff," Mathu says. "After they have their say."

"I don't care what they say," Candi says. "Mathu, you're not going to sit in no jail. You'd ~~xxx~~ die in jail. You know you'd die in jail."

"Somebody's got to go, Miss Marshall," Mathu says. "The people done picked me."

"But what's going to happen to us here? All of us?" Candi says. "You're like the patriarch of this place."

~~"He wasn't so much a patri"~~ "You didn't think he was so much a ~~xx~~ patriarch when he had to move this morning," the Prince says.

"I always thoutht he was the patriarch. And no matter where ~~we~~ went, I was going to see after him. But you wouldn't understand this." She turns back to Mathu.

"I love you, Mathu. I love you. I been knowing you all my life. You've carried me lon your back, you've held my hand. Rembeber when I've come and picked beerries out of the yard. Rem ember when I used to search in the grass for hen eggs, and you used to tell me mind out for snakes? Remember, Mathu, remember?"