

"He cussed me," Charlie said to Mapes. "I was doing my work good. Cussed me anyhow. I told him he didn't need to cuss me like that. I told him I was doing my work good. He told me he would just cuss me, but he would beat me, too. I told him, no, I wasn't go'n'low that no more, 'cause I was fiftye years old--half a hundred. He told me if I said one more word, he was go'n show me how he treated a half a hundred year old nigger." ~~he~~ ^{Charlie} stopped, and looked at Mapes, shaking his head. Beads of sweat popped out of his skull, running in lines down the sides of his face. "You don't talk to a man like that, Sheriff, not when he reached half a hundred."

Mapes nodded, agreeing with him. Mapes told the people to get back and give Charlie air. The pe ple moved back an inch, then closed in again.

"Go on, ~~Charlie~~," Mapes said. "Then what?"

"I told him I was quitting," ^{Charlie said} I jumped down off the loader to come home. He got down off the tractor and came at me with a stalk of cane. I grabbed me one, too. I don't know why I did it, I hadn't never done nothing in my life like that before, but ^{in all my life} ~~today~~ I did it. ^{today} ~~I did it.~~ I bent over and /grabbed ~~that~~ stalk of cane laying on the ground. That made him stop for a second, then he started grinning at me. Grinning, just grinning at me. He knowed I wasn't go'n hit him. That's what he thought. He thought I wasn't go'n hit him. He came on me swinging that stalk of cane. He caught me twice, once on the shoulder, once in the side. Then I swung back. I caught him side the head, and he went down. I saw his head bleeding, and I thought I had kilt him, and I started running for the quarters. I came up here and told Parrain what I had done," Charlie said, nodding toward Mathu. ~~Mathu was watching him as though he couldn't believe it was Charlie doing the talking.~~

The rest of us felt the same way, I suppose. I know I did. Someone like Charlie, to come back on his own, to ~~xxx~~ admit that he had killed a white man.

"And?" Mapes said.

~~Charlie was still looking at Mathu, looking at him the way a child looks at his parent when he knows he's done the wrong thing~~

"I told Parrain I was go'n run and hide," Charlie said, looking at Mathu, looking at him the way a child looks at his father for respect, for love. Mathu looked back at him, still not sure that it was Charlie doing the talking.

Charlie told him to never
 "I told him I was go'n try and reach the North. While we was standing there talking, we heard the tractor coming up the quarters, And I knowed ^{then} I hadn't kilt him. I told Parrain I was go'n run anyhow, 'cause he was go'n beat me now for sure if he caught me. Parrain told me if I run from Beau Boutan he was go'n beat me himself. He told me he was eighty-two, but he was more man than me, and if I run from Beau he was go'n beat me himself." Charlie looked at Mathu. Mathu nodded, agreeing with him. But still not sure it was Charlie doing the talking. "Me and Parrain was standing in the door when he jumped down off that tractor with that shotgun," Charlie said to Mapes. "He always kept that shotgun on that tractor to shoot at things--hawks, owls, snakes--anything. Akways kept that shot gun with him--even in that pickup truck when he drove up and down the road. Parrain told me he had a gun there too, and he said he rather see me laying there dead than to run from a man when I was fifty years old. Beau was coming in the yard, kputting a shell in the gun. Parrain reached and got his gun and pushed it in my hand. I didn't want take the gun, but I could tell, in Parrain face, if I didn't, he was go'n stop Beau himself. I took the gun and

~~swung~~ swung 'round, and I told Beau to stop, I told him more than once to stop. He kept on coming. He knowed I had never done nothing like that, never even thought about doing nothing like that." He sto ped gain, looking at us, towering over us. Questential of what the whites picture the field, the sawmill, the swamp nigger to look like. Big, black, all muscles, but little else.

But "They come a day, *shebb* ~~he said. Not to us, to himself.~~

"They come a day when you got to stand up. I don't know how I did it. But I helt that gun steady as a rock. Not a tremble, not a waver, steady as a rock. He ~~looked at us~~ kept coming toward the garry. Just grinning and grini g. He said, 'Nigger, I was go'n have a little fun with you first. I was go'n hunt you like a rabbit, and I was go'n shoot you when I got tired. But now it look like I ain't go'n waste my time. He raised his gun, and I pulled the trigger."

Charlie He stopped and lowered his head. But even with his head bowed, he was tall~~er~~ than us.

"What happened after that?" Mapes asked him, after a respectable amount of time.

Charlie raised his head to look at Mapes. He was tired. The whites of his eyes had turned more reddish. He took in couple of quick breaths and started talking again.

ad "I told Parrain I was scared, I told him I was go'n run, try to reach the North. I told him they was bound to put me in the 'lectric chair now. I told him he had to say he did it, 'cause they didn't put people old as him in the /lectric chair. I told him he was go'n die soon, and he could die in jail ~~just~~ soon as he could die in this old house. I told him he was my parrain, and he ought to take the blame for me. I told him Candy would protect him no matter what. And while I was there begging him, I seen the dust coming

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down the road. When ~~kkkkkk~~ the car stopped out there, I see ^W it was Candy, and I handed ~~kkkkkk~~ parrain the gun, and ducked through the house ~~before she could see me.~~ I heard ~~her~~ ^{car} screaming. I was laying back there in the weeds in the back yard. I heard her asking parrain what in the world he had done. I didnt't hear parrain an wer her. I laid there flat on the ground, praying, praying he didn't ~~kkkkkk~~ ^{say} mention my name. I heard Candy begging him to please tell her what had happned. He didn't say a word--I didn't hear him say a word--and I got up and started running.. I ran, I ran, I ran.. I don't know how long. ~~When I started out, the sun was straight up and my shadow was short; when I stopped it was twice long as I'm tall.~~ But no matter where I run, where I turned, I was still on Marshall plantation. If I went toward Pichot, before I got there, something stopped me. If I went toward M^rrgan, somethang stopped. If I went toward that hightway ~~back on~~ ^{on} the back, something stopped. Like a wall, a wall, I couldn't see, ^{Just it} stopped me every time. I fell to the ground. ~~Exhibit down in the ground.~~ ^{are} I screamed, ^{and} I screamed. I bit in the g ound. I got a handfull of dirt and stuffed in my mouth trying to kill myself. Then I just laid there, laid there, laid there. ~~Then~~ sometime around sundown, just fore sundown, I heard a voice calling me ~~from somewhere.~~ I laid there listening, listensng, listening. But I didn't hear it again. But I knowed that voice was calling me back here, and I got up and started back. To face this thing like a man."

He was breathing heavily, his nearly shaven head was covered with beads of sweat. He looked at us with kpity-- not for himself--^{but} for us. It was the kind of look I've seen on faces of people who have just found religion.

They have made it over--what abo t us? ^{He} ~~He~~ smiled, and passed his hand over his sweaty face and head. ~~He~~ ^{as} looked at Mathu.

"All right, Parrain?"

Mathu nodded his head. You could see how proud he was of Charlie. *They all looked at L. that same way. You*

"I'm ready to go, Sheriff," Charlie said to Mapes.

"I'm ready to pay. I done dropped a heavy load. Now, I know I'm a man."

Mapes had put the last of the life savers in his mouth, and stuffed the empty wrapper back in his pocket. He looked at Charlie a long time. He didn't want to admit it, but at least to himself he had to admit it, that he had seen something today that he never exxpected.

"Mr. Biggs, after you," he said.

"What's that you called me, Sheriff?" Charlie asked.

"Mr. Biggs," Mapes said, with respect.

Charlie grinned--a great, big, wide ~~M~~ mouth, big teeth grin. It was a deep, all heart, true grin, a grin from a man who had been a boy fifty years.

"You heard that, Mama?" he said, looking up at the ceiling. "Heard what the law called me? Mr. Biggs. Mr. Biggs, Mama." He turned back to Mapes. "I'm ready, Sheriff. The rest of y'all, y'all done all right for a bunch of old men. Now go on ~~him~~ ^{home} ~~and~~ get some rest. Let a man through."

He led the way, with Mapes following. But they had no ~~longer~~ sooner stepped out onto the porch lwhen a voice in the ~~dark~~ ^dark called out:

"Hand him over, Mapes."

That voice was Luke Will's.

Mapes saw that Charlie had his hands cuffed behind him.

Coot

We was go'n walk him to the car, we was go'n all shake his hand, we was go'n watch the car leave, then we was all going home.

But, then, Mr. Luke Will had to show up.

Charlie was in front leading the ay. Mapes was right behind him. Then Mathu, Candy ^{and} her boyfried Lou, then Clatoo, and me. When Luke Will called from out in the road, only Charlie and Mapes had come out on the gallery. Mapes blocked the door to keep the rest of us inside, and he hollered for Charlie to hit the floor.

Charlie said: "Me, hit the floor? Hit the floor for what, for something like Luke Will? ~~Me~~, I ain't scared of no Luke Will. ^{to work}

He swung around and push4ed Mapes out of his way and came on back inside. He ~~stopped~~ ^{went up to} in front of Mathu and reached out his hand.

"I'm go'n need that again, Parrain."

Mathu looked ~~akkkk~~ up at him. He looked proud. He helt the gun out, and Charlie snatched ft from his hand and swung back toward the door.

"Let me handle this," Mapes said.

"This my fight," Charlie said. "He come here to lynch me, not you."

"This all us fight," Clatoo said. "Ain't go'n be no lynching here tonight."

"Y'all stay back inside," Mapes said. "What you go'n do with all them empty shotguns, use them for clubs?"

"They was empty," Clatoo said. "If you think they empty now--look."

Mapes was standing in the door, filling the door. He looked back.

Clatoo had broke down the barrell. The rest of us was all doing the same.

"That's right," Clatoo said. "Every man in here got a loaded gun, and extras in his pocket. We wasn't scrapping pecans backa that house."

"You'll pay for this," Mapes said to Clatoo.

"No, he go'n pay for it," Clatoo said, nodding outside.

"He go'n pay for a ~~lot~~ of it."
Mapes and Clatoo eyes ^{ed} each other a second, then Mapes looked round at the rest of us. ~~Mapes could see we all was with Clatoo.~~ *no body loaded &*

Out in the road, Luke Will called again. "Send that nigger out here, Mapes.. He ^{get} a minute to pray.?"

"Go home, Luke Wiol," Mapes turned, and called back.

"Like hell I will," Luke Will said.

"Hell'll be your home if you don't get out of here, Luke Will," Mapes said.

"Let it be, Mapes."

"There's your answer, Sheriff," Charlie said. "Now, you go'n move?"

"Griffin?" Mapes said, out the corner of his mouth. He was calling to that little deputy, but that little deputy was standing way in the back of the room. "Griffin?", Mapes called out the corner of his mouth again.

"I ain't raising my hand 'gainst no white people for no niggers," Griffin ~~kk~~ answered.

"You heard that, Sheriff?" Beaulah asked.

Mapes looked around. Not all the ay. He was too big for that. He looked back out toward the road.

"Luke Will?" he called.

"I'm still here waiting," Luke Wiol asnsered, out there in the dark.

Luke Will? "
"What happened to Hilly?" Mapes asked.