

"The little boy messenger?" Mapes asks, 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 jailhouse."

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 they say."

"I don't care what they say," Candi says. "Mathu, you're not going to sit in no jail. You'd 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 here?" Candi says. "You're like the patriarch of this place."

"You didn't think he was so much a patriarch when he had to move this morning," the prince says.

"I always though th he was the patriarch," Candi says.

"And no matter where he went, I was going to see after him. But you wouldn't understand that." She turns back to Mathu.

"I love you, Mathu. I love you. I been knowing you all my life. You've carried me on your back, you've held my hand. Remember when I've come and picked berries out of the yard?

~~Remember when~~

Remember when I used to search in the grass for hen eggs, and you used to tell me mind out for snakes? Remember, Mathu, remember?"

"Yes, ma'am," Miss Marshall. "I carried you on my back, I held your hand. I carried your daddy on my back, too, and held his hand."

"I didn't know you minded, Mathu."

"I didn't mind, Miss Marshall. I wouldn't 'a' done it if I had minded. I woulda died first. But now it's their time, Miss Marshall. We all appreciates what you been doing, but we think we ought to do this."

"You want to be a big hero, Mathu?"

"No, ma'am, Miss Marshall. I never thought of that. A man is all I ever wanted to be. All I ever tried to be. Nothing more, nothing else. But I go along with what the people want. If this what they need, I'm happy to be able to give it. I don't have long to live."

"You'll die in that jail, Mathu."

"I probably will, Miss Marshall."

"Wouldn't you rather die at your own house, in your own bed, Mathu?"

"Yes, ma'am. All men want that, Miss Marshall. But us never know the time or the place. It don't always happen where us want it to happen, it don't always happen when."