

The deputy came back into the yard after turning off the tractor. He stood next to Mapes, looking at the old men with the guns. The old men, the women, the children, all looked back at us in silence.

"Bring me one with a gun," Mapes said to Griffin.

"Sir?" Griffin said.

"He won't bite you," Mapes said. "Go get me one of them."

"Which one, Sheriff?" Griffin asked.

Mapes didn't answer him.

"Yes sir," Griffin said.

Griffin chose a seventy year old man wearing overalls and khaki shirt. He took the old man by the upper part of the left arm and led him back to Mapes. The old man carried his shotgun in the right hand. When Griffin released his arm he took off his hat and held it against his chest. He looked up at Mapes for a second, then his eyes came down even with Mapes's chest. Mapes let him stand there a while before saying anything.

"How come you so far from home, Uncle Billy?"

"I kilt him," the old man said.

"I don't have time for this, Uncle Billy," Mapes said. "I ask you again, how come you so far from home?"

"I kilt--"

The back of Mapes's hand went now across the old man's face, and spit shot from his mouth. Mapes had hit the old man so quickly that I hadn't seen it coming or expected it.

"I'm going to remember that, Mapes," Candy said.

"Let's try again, Uncle Billy," Mapes said. "How come you so far from home?"

"I kilt him," the old man said, looking Mapes in the face.

And pow went Mapes's hand again, but this time it didn't catch me or the old man off guard.

"I'm going to remember that, Mapes," Candy said. "This ain't Mississippi."

Blood dripped from the right corner of Uncle Billy's mouth, but he would not dare wipe it away. He stood there, his eyes even with Mapes's chest, expecting to be hit again.

"Stand him over there, go get me another one," Mapes said to Griffin.

"You're going to beat them all, Mapes?" Candy ~~asked~~ asked.

"Get her out of here," Mapes said to me.

"Like hell if he will," Candy said. "This is my land, in case you forget."

"Don't interfere with my duties," Mapes said.

"Just stand here and let you beat them?" Candy asked.

"I thought those days ended with the sixties?"

Mapes didn't say any more to her, he watched Griffin leading another one back to him. ^{That} The one was about the same age as the other one. Small, wirey, and very black. He

wore a Dodgers's baseball cap, which he removed soon as he came up to Mapes. His head was going bald front and back, and the little hair left were balls of salt and pepper naps. His eyes were on Mapes's chest.

"Kinda far from home, ain't you, Chimley?" Mapes asked him.

"I kilt him," Chimley said.

Pow across Chimley's face. His head jerked to the side, then his eyes came back to Mapes's chest again.

"Didn't ask you that, Chimley," Mapes said. "Asked weren't you kinda far from home?"

"I kilt him," Chimley said, just loud enough for Mapes to hear him.

Pow across the face again.

"Stand him over there. Bring me another one," Mapes said to Griffin.

Griffin took Chimley by the arm and led him to the side.

"You're going to hurt your hand, Mapes," Candy said.

"Don't you think you ought to use a stick or a hose pipe to beat up old people who won't defend themselves?"

"They all have guns," Mapes said.

"You know they won't use it."

"That's right," Mapes said. "I know they won't use it. And they didn't use it."

Griffin was moving among the crowd. He had become a little more brave now. He wasn't choosing the first one he

came to, he was picky now. He was going to get the one he wanted. The people did not look at him as he moved among them. They didn't seem afraid, but they weren't volunteering either. But as he neared the end of the porch, one of Aunt Glo's little grandchildren suddenly stood up before him. The boy was about ten years old, he wore overalls, but no shirt, and he went barefeet. Griffin told him to sit down before he slapped him down. But instead of sitting down, the boy jumped off the porch and started toward Mapes. Candy ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ stood between him and Mapes and told him to go back. The boy stopped, but he did not return to the porch until his grandmother called him. He went back and sat on the steps next to her, and she put her arms around him. Then both she and the boy looked back at Mapes, and both seemed ready to be slapped, if that was his choice.

But Griffin had already chosen someone else. This was Rooster Jackson. He worked in Marshall yard, raking up leaves and looking after the flowers. He was a short, yellow, pocked mark face man who laughed at anything and everything. If you spoke to him he laughed before answering. If you asked him a question, he laughed first, then answered. If you told him to do something, he laughed before doing it. A short, quick laugh. He even laughed at lightning and thunder. He was a small yellow man in a world of black and white, and he found that laughing would get him through.

I saw fear in his face as Griffin led him up to Mapes. He was in his late fifties or early sixties, and his yellowish hair was just beginning to show some gray. He had a shotgun, of course.

"Mr Lou?" he spoke to me.

"Rooster?" I said.

He was proud that I called his name. He even smiled a little. But you could see he was still scared. His eyes didn't come far as Mapes's chest, they stayed at his feet.

"Off work early today, Rooster?" Mapes asked him.

Mapes knew all of their names. I knew the ones who lived at Marshall because I had been seeing Candy the last couple years, but I didn't know the others. Mapes knew them all.

Rooster didn't answer. Mapes waited. Rooster swallowed hard. ~~xxxxxx~~ I couldn't see his face, but I could see the side of his neck. After a while he raised his head slowly, looking at Mapes clothes from his belt buckle up to the knot of his tie, and finally into those hard ash-gray eyes.

"I, I, I," the little man tried to say.

"I what, Rooster?" Mapes asked.

"Kilt--"

Pow across the face. Unlike his blacker brothers only whose faces jerked to the side when Mapes hit them, Rooster's

whole body hit the ground, and the gun went flying out of his hand. He sat up, but he did not get to his feet, his arms hanging down between his legs, his ~~eyes~~^{eyes} on the ground.

"Rooster?" a voice said from the porch. I looked up, and there was Mathu standing in the door with a doublebarrel shotgun pointed toward the floor. Mathu was the blackest man I had ever seen in my twenty-seven years. He was proud ^{tall} to say that he was pure African, a Senagaleese. He was ~~and~~ straight, maybe an inch or two shorter than myself. He was somewhere between seventy-five and eighty, closer to eighty. His head was snow white. He had lived on Marshall plantation [✓] all his life. His father had been a Marshall slave.

"Get up from there," he told Rooster.

Rooster sat there thinking about it.

"Rooster?" Mathu said again. "I don't want ~~him~~ have to shoot you too, Rooster."

"Yes, Mathu," Rooster's puny voice answered him. "I'm getting up."

He got up without his gun, and faced Mapes again. He was crying now.

"Knocked-off early, didn't you, Rooster?" Mapes asked him again.

Rooster wasn't looking any higher than Mapes's knees.

"I kilt him."

And down went Rooster again. This time, instead of Mathu, his wife called on him to get back on his feet. She told him that none of the others had fallen, and he had no business falling either, get back up.

Rooster put both hands flat against the ground as though he needed a crutch to push himself up. And as he struggled to get to his feet, someone must have given a signal, because every man, woman, and child, began to clap hands and chant: "I did it. I did it. I did it." Candy was clapping her hands and chanting with the others.

Mapes didn't seem confused or angry, ^{just} just tired, exasperated. He jerked his head and walked away, and I knew he wanted me to follow him out into the road. He leaned back against his car and crossed his legs and folded his arm across his chest. He was a big man--two-fifty, two-sixty--and he was very tired. I leaned back against the car beside him, and both of us looked into the yard. They were all watching us. Rooster had gotten to his feet and was standing before Candy with the shotgun. The other two men whom Mapes had slapped around were standing by the garden fence with the deputy. Mathu, tall and slim, wearing a white tee shirt and dark green trousers, stood in the door with the doublebarrel shotgun. His face was black as the inside of the house. You could not read anything on his face from this distant.

"You know he did it, don't you?" Mapes said. *to me*

"Who?"

"Who else?" Mapes said.

"Mathu?"

"Only one in there man [✓] enough," Mapes said. "Besides here. And you know she didn't do it, and I know she didn't do it, and she knows I know she didn't do it."

"Then why don't you arrest him?" *I said*

"On what charges?" *he said*

"Killing Beau Boutan."

"How can you prove it? Because Beau was killed there in his yard? That's no proof. Clinton would have that thrown out of court in two seconds flat. And she knows that, too."

"What about the gun?"

"You didn't look very close, did you?" Mapes asked me. "Everyone has the same make gun. Twelve gage. Everyone probably has the same numbered shell in the gun right now. No, you can't arrest him on that. But he killed him all right. The only one with nuts enough to do it."

He reached into his pocket and took out a roll of life savers and reached it toward me. I shook my head. He put one of the life savers into his mouth, and put the roll back into his pocket. He sucked on the life saver while he looked at Mathu standing in the door.

"I know the old boy," he said. "I've known him all my life. Yes, I know him."