

And I thought about the other one, the one who had to sit in a chair, strapped down, while electricity shot through his body until he was dead. He had chopped wood in this same yard, probably with that same axe, five, six, seven years ago. A big, slowit, wooly headed, thick lip, misshapened teeth boy; never askeng for the axe, but once he had taken it his big hands he would not release it until the last piece of wood had been cut.

"Jefferson?" I used to say to him. "Jefferson? Let somebody else work."

"I ain't tired, Mr. Wiggins. ^{im} Far from getting tired."

I used to stand back and look at him and wonder how I could get him to study his books with half the determination with which he swung that axe. But nothing, nothing I did. He was too big for me to whip or make him stand in the corner. So there was nothing else I could do but to talk to him, which could never penetrate that thick skull. But now, now, within the next few weeks, possibly a few months, they wanted me to... ^{PREPARE} ~~him~~ ^{Him}

I looked at the boys chopping the wood. The two who had been sawing were now splitting the logs, and the two had been using the axes were now sawing. The same one as before still ^{studdled} ~~sat~~ the log to keep it steady. They were still having fun. As I had had fun doing the same when I was that age.

^{And} There were others. They had chopped wood here, too, then they were gone. Gone to the fields, to the small towns, to the cities, where they died. There was always news about

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one who had been stabbed to death, shot to death, who was still in his teens, or in his twenties.

But the big mulatto ^{man Poulaya} had predicted it, hadn't he? It was he as teacher then who stood by the fence while we chopped the wood. He had told us then that most of us would die violently, and those who did not would be brought down to the level of the beast. That there was no other choice but to run and run. That he was living testimony of someone who should have run. That in him--no, he did not say all of this, but we felt it--there was nothing but hatred for himself as well as contempt for us. That he hated himself for the mixture of his blood and the cowardice of his being, and that he hated us for reminding him what he was. No, he did not tell us this, but daily he showed ~~it~~ ^{us this}. As clearly as anything he showed his hatred for himself, and for ^{and that this was} us. That he could teach any of us only one thing--flight. Because there was no freedom here. He said it, and he didn't say it. But we felt it. When we told our people what he said, they told us to go back and learn all we could. There were those who did go back to learn. Others who only went back. And having no place to run, they went into the fields; others went into the small towns and cities seeking work, and did even worse. But she told me that, no, I would not be one of the others, that I would learn as much as he could teach me, then I would go away to learn from someone else. But

what he had to offer.

that I would learn. And when he saw that I would learn he hated me even more than he did the others, ^{because} I challenged him, the others did not. The others believed what he said. They went out into the fields, others went into the small towns and into the cities and died. So you think you can? he said. So, you think you can? No, he did not say it with words, only with his eyes. You will be the loser, my friend. Maybe he did not say friend; ^{it is} he probably didn't say friend; fool, probably. Anyway, you will be the loser. Yes, I will teach you. You want to learn, I will help you learn. Maybe in that way I will be free, knowing that someone else has taken the burden. Good, good, you want to learn? Good, good, here is the burden.

Even after I had gone away for further education and on returning to the plantation to visit my aunt, seeing him still at the school, I could still see the hatred in him. And after he had retired from teaching because of ill health and I would visit him ^{at his home in Paulaya,} I would still feel his hatred for himself, for me, ~~for the~~, for the world. Once sitting at the fireplace with him he said to me, "Nothing pleases me more than when I hear of something wrong." Hitler had his reason, and even the Ku Klux Klans of the South for doing what they ^{do.} ~~did.~~ "You don't believe me, do you?" he asked me. "No sir, I don't," I said. "You will one day," he said. "I told you what you should have done, but, no, you want to stay. Well, you will one day. When you see that those five

and a half months you spend in that church each year is just a waste of your time, you will. You will. You'll hate. You'll see that it'll take more than five and a half months to wipe away--peel--scrape away that blanket of ignorance that been plastered and replastered over that brain the past three hundred years. You'll see." Then he would become quiet a long time while we both stared into the fire. "I'm cold," he said one day while we ~~sat~~ were there looking into the fire. I got up to put another piece of wood into the fireplace. "That's no good," he said. "I'll still be cold. I'll always be cold." He looked at me. "You'll see, you'll see." "I must," I said. "No, you don't must," he said. "You want to. But you don't must." "You did," I said. "Yes, I did," he said. "But I told you not to. I told you to go. God has looked after them these past three hundred years, he won't--" *without your help* "God?" I said. Because I had never heard him say God before. Because when we had said our bible verses for him he seemed to have hated the very words we spoke. "Did you say God?" *I said.* "I'm cold," he said. "I stay cold. You better go. Come back some other time if you like. I made a mistake." I came back a month later. I remember that it was cold that day, too... Now, about that mulatto teacher and me. There was no love for each other. There was not even respect. We were enemies if we ~~were~~ *meant* anything to each other. *at all* He hated me, and I knew it, and he knew I knew it. I didn't like him, but I needed him, needed him to tell me something that none of the others

could or would. I brought some wine. He sent me into the kitchen to get two glasses. "This will warm you up," I said. "Nothing can warm me up," he said. He sat in the rocker gazing down at the fire with the blanket tight around him. He was a big bone man, but very skinny now. "To flight," he said, ^{raising his glass} "But you didn't go," I said. "I'm Creole," he said. "Can't you tell?" "Was that it?" I asked him. "That was it," he said. "I'm Creole. Do you know what a Creole is? A lying cowardly bastard. Do you know that?" "No, I didn't know that," I said. "I was afraid," he said, looking into the fire. "I was afraid to run away. What am I? Look at me. Where else could I have felt superior to ^{so many} ~~anyone~~, but here?" "Is that important?" I asked him. "It is," he said. "For everyone. Especially for the Whites and the near Whites. It is important." "Do you feel superior to me?" I asked him. "Of course," he said. "Don't be a ^{damned} fool. I am superior to you. I am superior to any Black man." "Is that why you hate me?" I asked him. "Exactly," he said. "Because that superior sonofabitch out there said I am you." "Do you think he is superior to you?" I asked. ^{him} "Of course," he said. "Don't you?" "No," I said. "Just stay here long enough," he said. "He'll make you the nigger you were born to be." "My only choice is to run then?" I asked him. "That was your choice. But you won't. You want to prove I'm wrong. Well, you'll visit my grave one day and tell me how right I was." "Tell me more," I said. "What's wrong with ^{that Unity?} ~~them at Southern?~~" he asked. "Don't they tell you?" "They tell me how to succeed

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in the South as a ~~Black~~ man. They tell me about reading, writing, and 'rithmetic. I need to know about life." "I can't tell you anything about life," he said. "What do I know about life? I stayed here. You have to go away to know about life. There's no life here. There's nothing but ignorance here. You want to know about life? Well, it's too late. Forget it. Just go on and be the nigger you were born to be, but forget about life. You make me tired, and I'm cold. The wine doesn't help." I visited him again only a month or two before he died in the Winter of 1942. He was forty-three years old. That was my first year as a teacher. I had been teaching two or three weeks when I visited him. We had just gotten our first load of wood for Winter. ^{that} Mayb~~e~~ that's why I had to see him then. I could always remember that first load of wood for Winter, how we the older boys had chopped the wood into smaller pieces while he stood back against the fence overseeing us. He looked awful frail. ^{that day.} I hadn't seen him in several months. He was being looked after by a relative who did not care too much for anyone visiting him, and especially ~~Blacks~~. *Caland Park.* She admitted me into the room and left us. He sat at the fireplace. Summer or Winter he always sat at the fireplace when ^{over} he was inside. We shook hands. His hand was large, cold and bony. He was coughing a lot. "We got our first load of wood last week," I told him. "Nothing changes," he said. "I guess I'm a genuine teacher now," I said. He nodded, and coughed.

He didn't seem to want to talk. Still, I sat there, both of us gazing into the fire. "Any advice?" I asked him. "It doesn't matter any more," he said. "Just do the best you can. But it won't matter in the end." "Each generation must try," I said. "That is the only way we can--" "Sure," he said, and coughed. I looked at him out the corner of my eye. I knew he was ^avery ^{mal}sick. "I want to know," I said. "I need to know." "I've already told you all I know," he said. "Flight?" I asked him. "Where I will be very soon," he said. "Free." "There must be something else," I said. "There has to be something else." He was quiet. Then he coughed up phlegm and swallowed. "Do you remember Ty Robillard?" I asked him. He stared into the fire. He didn't answer. Maybe he could not remember him. "He was a student of yours," I told him. "A grade ahead of me. He died in the electric chair in New Orleans last Friday." He stared into the fire, and nodded his head. "Well, I better be going," I said, and stood up. He raised his head and looked up at me. He was very sick, nothing but skin and bone. "You want me to say something profound?" he asked me. "I don't know anything profound to say to you. I wish I was a better human being. I wish the world was a better place to live. I wish I believed in God, so that I could believe in man. But I believe in nothing. That's all I can say to you." "And my students--what do I say beside reading, writing and 'rithmetic?" "Lie," he said. "Lie as you have been taught to lie. And just pray that you will never learn the truth and have to tell them the truth. That could be the worse day of your life.

Good bye. I'm tired. Take care of yourself." I heard him coughing as I went out the door.