

listless

# Little Nigger

It had been a long <sup>hot</sup> morning, and the sun was still advancing toward noon.

Ocie ~~stood~~ <sup>rocked</sup> back on the heels of the ~~ragged~~ <sup>rickety</sup> ~~old~~ <sup>wood</sup> chair, and ~~waited~~ <sup>addressed</sup> the ~~splendid~~ <sup>mediocre</sup> ~~people~~ <sup>gathered</sup> ~~in the~~ <sup>place</sup>.

"Yesser," he said, ~~thrusting~~ <sup>tilting</sup> his square head back to ~~Salant~~ <sup>Salant</sup> (tightening the screws) ~~on his~~ <sup>shouting</sup> Yankee brother-in-law, ~~and~~ <sup>(moving up the rank on his stump)</sup> "They ain't nothing like living in this neck by the woods if you want to have a big time." <sup>(The visit)</sup> Things hadn't started out <sup>(in hostility)</sup> (that way) but

it looked like they would end <sup>(in the way)</sup> (as such) - if they ever did end. <sup>(if)</sup> ~~it~~ <sup>the</sup> beat the heck out of ~~it~~ <sup>the</sup> sneaking around, as Ocie had since their

arrival the evening before, trying to <sup>improve quiet so that he might</sup> find a quiet spot to read his newspaper and learn what they'd done to cause his riddled stocks to drop. <sup>(it)</sup> ~~He~~ <sup>had</sup> clasped his hands behind his <sup>gray</sup> head and cut his eye toward the old tool shed, cluttered with <sup>random</sup> ~~various~~ <sup>junk</sup> objects ~~collected~~ <sup>(from the old home place)</sup>.

He'd already <sup>(altered)</sup> exhausted 1/3 of the <sup>(careful</sup> ~~patient~~ <sup>traced)</sup> ~~of~~ <sup>his</sup> ~~deliberate~~ <sup>deliberate</sup> tales.

pon-ty-a yankee

improve quiet

There was a measure of truth in all of them but <sup>more</sup> ~~not~~ exaggeration. (~~being~~ hyperbole)

Let's see... He'd used up the <sup>last</sup> ~~old~~ semi-john jug, which Ida planned to use <sup>turn</sup> ~~for~~ <sup>into</sup> a terrarium, first dance she got: <sup>one hundred proof</sup> moon shine up to the trim, every body - even the youngsters, when they were home - sampling staggering beds to the still in the <sup>pine</sup> woods behind the house for a refill.

His laughter caught in his throat as he recalled his tale, watching dancing at John Merritt's <sup>black</sup> <sup>hair</sup> pruned like a city cedar on his right. John looked odd <sup>over</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>planted</sup> in the other ~~chair~~ discarded chair beside ~~Idie's~~ tool shed. ~~Idie~~ Idie

~~usually~~ entertained only special friends there in her little clearing between <sup>the</sup> <sup>two</sup> <sup>sheds</sup> <sup>(archaic practicality of the)</sup> <sup>overgrown</sup> <sup>garden</sup> <sup>armed with stout rustic posts</sup> and the tool shed. The woods <sup>reached</sup> at his back with <sup>brush</sup> <sup>crickets</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>pine</sup> <sup>in</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>summer</sup> <sup>beige</sup>.

He had a <sup>generous</sup> <sup>view</sup> <sup>(in the colliery)</sup> <sup>(the</sup> <sup>working</sup> <sup>mine)</sup> of the dirt road in front of him where his neighbors passed enroute to work, <sup>community</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>church</sup> <sup>functions</sup>, <sup>some</sup> <sup>had</sup> <sup>clearings</sup> in the <sup>country</sup> stone <sup>quarter</sup> away at the crossing. ~~He~~ He had to work in town. Most of them farmed - like or he had before he retired. ~~The~~ The sounds of each of their tractors he could identify.

Simmer's <sup>engine</sup> <sup>peeped</sup> <sup>like</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>killer</sup> <sup>deer</sup> <sup>noise</sup>; Idie'd offered to tamper with it and locate the problem, as soon as Hoke <sup>got</sup> the crop in.

Crawford Hall had bought a new one with ~~last year's~~ <sup>his crop money from last year</sup> ~~money~~ ~~it was~~ a smooth sweet song on the day. It was a mistake. Ocie'd told him. Farming was too ~~unstable~~ <sup>unstable</sup> for 1938. But he was secretly glad that someone still had the ~~faith~~ <sup>faith</sup> to purchase a ~~new~~ <sup>new</sup> tractor.

No. He'd ~~already~~ <sup>already</sup> ~~told~~ <sup>told</sup> John Merritt with the story about the mule ~~that~~ ~~had~~ ~~worked~~ ~~to~~ ~~death~~ ~~that~~ ~~summer~~ ~~in~~ ~~1925~~, he thought allow his eyes to ~~look~~ ~~from~~ ~~the~~ ~~water~~ ~~plow~~ ~~stock~~ ~~was~~ ~~on~~ ~~the~~ ~~reasoned~~ ~~to~~ ~~look~~ ~~at~~ ~~the~~ ~~wall~~. He smiled thinking of John Merritt's shocked response ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~story~~. His ~~wide~~ ~~eyes~~ ~~had~~ ~~glazed~~ ~~with~~ ~~unbridled~~ ~~excitement~~ ~~and~~ ~~he'd~~ ~~babbling~~ ~~some~~ ~~thing~~ ~~unintelligible~~ ~~lament~~.

"Jesse," Ocie had said, "It's here to tell you, a tractor ain't nothing up again a mule. I sware ears of corn a day - if you can remember to feed him - and he'll work till he drops. I reckon I must've forgot to feed ~~him~~ <sup>him</sup> up the day before. Anyhow he shore dropped dead in the field. Course, me & Pa had been taking turns walking behind him since first day. Weren't no water ~~in~~ <sup>in</sup> the branch can of the drought.

Quickest way he'd have got some work if we  
 leted it and we didn't have time, what with  
 the cow needing laying by like it did. By sundown  
 he was staggering, we working on till the moon  
 rise. And that's when old Creasy get started  
 twitching. Pa says, "Boy, what you done to  
 that mule." Course I says I ain't done  
 nothing. "What you reckon 'Aiba him then,"  
 Pa says, standing there drinking a glass of  
 cornsugar water. Man sent out in the a jug.

"I ain't got no notion, Pa," I says,  
 already trying to figger out if I fed him  
 the night before or not. "Reckon he  
 might need some water?" I asked Pa.  
 And before he could figger on it, standing  
 there scratching his head, <sup>neck</sup> ~~head~~ for  
 the sun, that danged mule just dropped  
 like a rock. Didn't move a hair, blowflies  
 blowing him, buzzards circling overhead. Now  
 what Pa says?

"What?" John Theriot <sup>said</sup> ~~asked~~, sitting erectly  
 in his chair, his white shirt ~~reflecting~~ <sup>glaring</sup>  
 in the sun.

"He says for me to go to ~~the~~ <sup>cut</sup> ~~the~~  
 tool shed, right there, and get the shovel  
 and let's bury him right where he lays,"  
 Joe said, cutting her eyes toward John, waiting.

"That shed?" ~~right there~~ John <sup>Merritt</sup> asked, nodding toward it without looking.

"Yeah," said Doc. "Some old shovel <sup>yonder</sup> used when that old nigger Creary dropped dead down the end of the lane..."

"The mule was named Creary," John Merritt corrected, kneading his soft hands.

"Yeah, we named the mule after ~~Old Creary~~ <sup>Old Creary</sup>," interjected Doc. "Anyhow, when old Creary dropped dead, we aimed to drag him off ~~in~~ in the woods <sup>but any body else would</sup> but we figured the fitter thing was to bury him where he plowed so many <sup>furrows</sup> ~~furrows~~ in her good days..."

"The mule," John said, leaning down on Doc with his <sup>hand</sup> ~~hand~~.

"Old Creary," Doc said. "So we dug a hole, say, 6 by 2 or so ~~and~~ and we plum wore out to the bone - and both of us together tugged at him till we got 'em in, <sup>for says a few words</sup> over him, thanking ~~the~~ <sup>the body</sup> for good cheap..."

"Labor?" John Merritt said, leaning toward Doc.

"Equipment," said Doc, deliberately ~~scouting~~ <sup>scouting</sup> at John Merritt.

perblind - slow to understand 6

"My Pa was a righteous man, God-fearing," said Ocie, slipping an old white tobacco sheet <sup>draped over an inside rafters</sup> through the crack in the <sup>wood shed</sup> wall. He was the one headed up the first ~~Klu Klux Klan~~ Klan in these parts.

"No!" said John, mouth agape.  
"I mean to God!" said Ocie, ~~mouth~~ mouth agape, likewise.

He looked back, <sup>twisting in his neck,</sup> secret ~~only~~ as though to protect the women whose hysterical clatter & laughter wafted on the ~~air~~ <sup>back</sup> yards.

A ~~mockingbird~~ <sup>mockingbird</sup> chirped between <sup>on the</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>concrete</sup> ~~brick~~ <sup>brick</sup> ~~door~~ <sup>door</sup>.

"One ~~black~~ dark night," Ocie began, <sup>his</sup> ~~his~~ <sup>madly</sup> ~~as~~ as he leaned nearest John Merritt. ~~Kind in the~~

"It was about this time <sup>one</sup> ~~one~~ the year... You ever seen that picture show, To Kill a Mockingbird?"

"Yeah, why?" John Merritt asked, too loud, <sup>confronting the back yard</sup> glancing quickly towards the back door, clearing his throat, and crossing his legs innocently.

"Well, ~~as~~ you know how stuff gets started out 'ere nothing in the south, then,"

Ocie said, glancing back - one, two - ~~back~~ again at John <sup>Merritt</sup>: "Oh, me! It's here to tell you!"

"What?" John Merritt hissed. "What?"

"I can't tell it."  
 "Huh?" John Merritt said. "It wouldn't tell anyone."  
 "You a Mason?"  
 "A what?"

"You know, a Mason, a member of the Masonic order? You ain't got no clubs in N. Y.?" Ocie asked, squinting at him <sup>deliberately</sup> ~~up~~ <sup>his top row of teeth</sup> ~~at~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~star~~ <sup>flash</sup> ~~the~~ until his <sup>gold</sup> ~~teeth~~ <sup>bleached</sup> ~~to~~ <sup>John</sup> ~~winged~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~he~~ <sup>could</sup> ~~see~~ <sup>it</sup> reflect ~~in~~ <sup>John's</sup> ~~eye~~.

(Require)

(club eliminate undesirable)

~~"We've got the <sup>Require</sup> Rotary Club. I'm a member in good standing."~~

"Naw, that won't do," said Ocie, "won't do at all."

He <sup>convincedly</sup> ~~watched~~ John's dingy painted face by ~~scratching~~ <sup>scratching</sup> his eyes. His <sup>clean</sup> ~~white~~ ~~jaw~~ ~~troubled~~ dimpled chin twitched.

"You a Shriner?" Ocie asked solemnly.

"No," John Merritt said, eyes fixed straight ahead.

"Well, it be damned if that weren't old Clute Tuten come by & didn't even stop!"  
 John Ocie said, ~~sitting~~ <sup>upright</sup> ~~straight~~ and clasping

his hands between his knees, stretching forward to watch the old blue Ford pickup ~~vanish~~ ~~down the dirt road~~ being swallowed by the dust <sup>as it pattered past</sup> ~~the dirt road~~. "That sucker might think he's gonna get my vote without paying for it, but he's ~~gonna~~ gonna get a fooling." "Paying," ~~squeaked~~ <sup>squeaking</sup> John, ~~stretching~~ <sup>stretching</sup> ~~upright and drawing~~ <sup>inhaling</sup> the dust spreading ~~all the way~~ across the <sup>scarcily grassed</sup> yard.

"Yeah, Will Sonden appreciates a man's vote. Bone up to ten dollars fine in the quarter!"

John Meritt's breathing was labored and every air through he had to think each <sup>natural</sup> ~~breath~~ through.

"Orie, you all come on and eat!"

shouted Orie from the back screen door, her voice <sup>striking</sup> sharp on the lull.

"We're coming, dear," Orie <sup>called in a</sup> ~~called~~ <sup>friendly tone</sup> ~~friendly tone~~, going friendlier, malevolent.

"Dump a ghavating woman," <sup>she better have my site</sup> ~~she better have my site~~ <sup>it's always</sup> ~~it's always~~ <sup>chattering this time</sup> ~~chattering~~ "I'm gonna have to take the whips to her, first ~~time~~ <sup>time</sup> last."



John Merritt gazed <sup>with</sup> <sup>at</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>whips</sup> <sup>scarcely</sup> <sup>sorted</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>hung</sup> <sup>from</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>hand-beaved</sup> <sup>shed</sup> <sup>post</sup>. "Can't get it right without a whipping!" Depp added, laughing <sup>jeeringly</sup>.

"You whip Grace now and then, don't you?" he said, <sup>solemnly</sup> <sup>one</sup> <sup>gray</sup> <sup>eyebrow</sup> <sup>twitching</sup>.

"No," John said, <sup>wiping</sup> <sup>from</sup> <sup>his</sup> <sup>forehead</sup>.

"You don't do that with her?"

"No," John said, <sup>showing</sup> <sup>pernicious</sup> <sup>enlightenment</sup> <sup>in</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>growing</sup> <sup>smile</sup>. <sup>(onto</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>rubbing)</sup>

Depp decided <sup>highest</sup> <sup>to</sup> <sup>turn</sup> <sup>to</sup> <sup>another</sup> <sup>subject</sup>. <sup>she</sup> <sup>had</sup> <sup>turned</sup> <sup>to</sup> <sup>longer</sup> <sup>overstated</sup> <sup>more</sup> <sup>or</sup> <sup>less</sup> <sup>to</sup> <sup>that</sup> <sup>one</sup>. <sup>(The</sup> <sup>best</sup> <sup>deceit?)</sup>

Morning, Mr. Depp! How you a familiar voice <sup>from</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>past</sup>. <sup>Depp</sup> <sup>looked</sup> <sup>up</sup> <sup>at</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>sandy</sup> <sup>dirt</sup> <sup>road</sup>

and saw <sup>Uchabod</sup> <sup>Crane</sup> <sup>sniping</sup> <sup>idiotically</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>crossing</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>ditch</sup> <sup>sideline</sup> <sup>along</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>ditch</sup> <sup>sideline</sup> <sup>starting</sup> <sup>from</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>sideline</sup> <sup>strut</sup>

"How you doing, Little Nigger?" Depp said with relish, booming, the address <sup>bursting</sup> <sup>flourishing</sup> <sup>on</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>end</sup>.

"I be doing all right. How bout you?" Uchabod said, <sup>twisting</sup> <sup>his</sup> <sup>gaunt</sup> <sup>body</sup> <sup>in</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>road</sup>, <sup>making</sup> <sup>scuffling</sup> <sup>tracks</sup> <sup>with</sup> <sup>his</sup> <sup>unlaced</sup> <sup>boots</sup>. <sup>His</sup> <sup>stick</sup> <sup>was</sup> <sup>wedged</sup> <sup>to</sup> <sup>his</sup> <sup>knees</sup>, <sup>held</sup> <sup>up</sup>

He began desperately, covertly, canvassing the ~~to~~ <sup>for</sup> ~~subject~~ <sup>relic</sup> which would ~~reestablish his credibility~~ <sup>was</sup> John's <sup>worship</sup> regard. <sup>Yes</sup>. No. Muleshairs. Cotton scales. A smoky lantern. ~~about~~ <sup>A fiddle bow.</sup>

"Yaa, Lordy!" Ace said, subsiding, ~~wiping~~ <sup>wiping</sup> sweat & <sup>glue</sup> from his <sup>sun-</sup> ~~streaked~~ <sup>streaked</sup> cheeks. "That puts me in mind of what our preacher said the other day. He didn't tell this, 'l want you to know, while he was preaching. It was afterward while a bunch of us was gathered around outside trying to figure out what to do about the Methodists trying to get our members. Anyhow, Bro. ~~Smith~~ <sup>Smith</sup> that's our Baptist preacher - he said ~~that~~ <sup>his</sup> wife & Sister Corolla <sup>got</sup> <sup>so</sup> used to getting ~~dragged~~ <sup>dragged</sup> ~~to~~ <sup>going</sup> for slubbering <sup>over</sup> <sup>her</sup> <sup>work</sup>, got to where she was coming to her front on mornings <sup>she</sup> <sup>didn't</sup> <sup>feel</sup> <sup>up</sup> <sup>to</sup> <sup>snuff</sup> to get her self going."

~~Acie~~ <sup>Acie</sup> ~~went~~ <sup>claimed</sup> ~~laughter~~ <sup>laughter</sup> ~~or~~ <sup>or</sup> ~~what~~ <sup>what</sup> Acie or he reared back on the boggy chair legs & almost lost his balance, catching on one hand. ~~Recovering~~ <sup>Recovering</sup> he came eye to eye with his ~~striker~~ <sup>striker</sup> ~~brother-in-law~~ <sup>brother-in-law</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~while~~ <sup>while</sup> ~~regain~~ <sup>regain</sup> ~~his~~ <sup>his</sup> ~~balance~~ <sup>balance</sup>.

Visible now and self-assured, things meshed, objects focussed - what acuity, imagination, a ~~cat~~ <sup>black</sup> cat dashed ~~forward~~ <sup>under</sup> a ladder against the tool shed; Acie growled, white himself pale; ~~he~~ <sup>he</sup> ~~immediately~~ <sup>immediately</sup> rolling his <sup>thin</sup> cotton shirt sleeve on his <sup>stout</sup> hairy arm. He growled again and rubbed the <sup>green</sup> tattoo ~~etched~~ <sup>etched</sup> on his forearm which read, "Kaisin' hell." He almost sniggered as he rolled his <sup>eyes</sup> back and ~~scratched~~ <sup>wrenched</sup> his neck, like a dying mule, ~~being~~ <sup>being</sup> John's <sup>concerned</sup> <sup>white</sup> <sup>face</sup> <sup>above</sup> <sup>him</sup>. <sup>What</sup> <sup>next</sup> <sup>?</sup> <sup>The</sup> <sup>devising</sup> <sup>rod</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>thought</sup> <sup>holder</sup>.

added

by a <sup>want</sup> ~~light~~ ~~long~~ hay rope. He carried a  
 hobo stick and a cane pole <sup>across</sup> ~~propped~~  
~~on~~ <sup>one</sup> ~~each~~ shoulder. ~~Running~~ ~~with~~, he exposed  
 bare pink gums, flecked with brown. His  
~~white~~ ~~longer~~ ~~constant~~ly flicked at the smate  
 around his broad flat nose. ~~His~~ ~~eyes~~  
 were flecked with brown like his gums. His  
~~jet~~ jet black back and chest blended through  
 his ~~tattered~~ white shirt. Thin as a rail, he  
 gazed, shyly ~~timidly~~ ~~curled~~ about rolling his  
 eyes as he continued ~~on~~ ~~aimless~~ ~~staring~~ ~~at~~ ~~the~~ ~~change~~.  
 (SALUTE)

"Who that you got there?" Mr. Ocie?  
 he said, his speech in <sup>trilling</sup> ~~spilling~~ jambies.

"Ah, that's just my wife's sister's  
 husband from up around N. Y," Ocie said  
 still booming, grinning, watching John Herolt's  
~~sharp face~~ ~~eyes~~ <sup>(also)</sup>

"Miss Ida's brother, you say?" Lealod  
 said, dancing foot to foot. "All the way come  
 from N. Y."

"Yeah, he's just down here for Miss  
 Grace to visit the old homeplace, check  
 on family and all," said Ocie.

"That's good. Good! Gotta check on the  
 family," said Lealod, ~~purblind~~ ~~staring~~ ~~at~~ ~~the~~  
 grow bored, <sup>restive</sup> ~~eyes~~, as though he tried

to find an appropriate point for departure,  
"Off a fishing, huh?" said Ocie.

~~Yawsuh~~  
"Yawsuh, you wa see if I can y  
catch me some red pike out 'in the banch,  
suh."

"Catch many yesterday?" Ocie asked.

"Yawsuh, warn't enough for a man."

"Don't say," said Ocie. "Well,  
come on back by and get you a mess  
of ~~blanching~~ <sup>blanching</sup> peas when you get the chance,"  
said Ocie, ~~sayin' it~~ <sup>sayin' it</sup> ~~down~~ <sup>down</sup>.

"She will grow," said Ocie. "I  
be seeing you, heah."

"Good-day," said Ocie <sup>watching him scuffle along the  
ribbon of gray sand, curving  
at the corner</sup>.

"My God!" said John Merrit, flushed,  
fanning <sup>watching</sup> ~~watching~~ <sup>leaving</sup> ~~leaving~~ <sup>glancing off</sup>. "Where  
do ~~you~~ <sup>you</sup> whip your negroes at?" he  
asked, still watching.

"Huh," said Ocie.

"You know!" said John Merrit, <sup>flushed</sup> ~~flushed~~, "Whipping,  
Where do ~~you~~ <sup>you people</sup> whip them?"

"Little Nigger?" asked Ocie, <sup>winked</sup> ~~winked~~, falling  
into cadence again. "I tell you, my  
pa's whipp'd a many a nigger."

"Ocie, you come on now!" shouted  
~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~lola~~ <sup>lola</sup> from the back door.

"One time..." Al Die started, letting it ~~drop~~ <sup>linger</sup> as he stood and ~~carried~~ <sup>carried</sup> both chairs to the shed, seeing all the implements & tools from the past so proudly displayed on the walls. He had hung each on existing nails, where his ~~father~~ <sup>grandfather</sup> had ~~hung~~ <sup>conveniently</sup> ~~them~~ <sup>50/100</sup> ~~before~~ <sup>years before</sup>. He thought he would choke on his own stammering, smothered in John Heron's breath on his neck. (~~continued~~)

~~They would not meet again & would they never be lost.~~

~~A confederate sabbler, tarnished and merrid, hung on the wall where he placed the chairs. (two chairs)~~

As he placed the chair against the wall, a tarnished confederate sabbler <sup>(tumbled)</sup> fell, ~~falling~~ <sup>falling</sup> ~~across~~ <sup>across</sup> the chair, seat to seat.

(clattered & struck  
clattered & lay seat to seat across the chair)