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Short story

### The Last Pauper

Passed down, as best I can tell it, the story goes that one of the school younguns at the same old school here in Sowell got the facts mixed up on a story for one of them books the school puts out about old-timers in the county knowed to have done something first, or something last, or something worth recording, which nobody can't get the straight of after fifty years or so goes by, and by then it don't matter to a bunch of younguns but does to a lot of old folks who set great store in their good name and don't take kindly to somebody putting down in writing what ain't the fact but what makes a right good story, and it didn't make Ray Lewis Evans want no less to beat Bubba Carter's backend for getting the facts mixed up and telling how Ray Lewis's own mama - who everybody knows was a fine upstanding woman in Duran County - was put away by the county, instead of her own loving family and somehow ended up - God knows how! - being remembered as the last pauper.

They'd have to write them another book.

Cause here's how it went, according to Ray Lewis, who everybody knows would come a sight closer to telling the

honest-to-God truth than Bubba Carter, who might've been good at politicking but had a big mouth and weren't never nothing but a lot of hot air, and who had the gall to play the big shot and then swear he ain't never told that youngun that Miss Amaretta was the last pauper, had in fact told exactly how him and Ray Lewis and the rest've them was standing around in the courtyard that summer morning when Miss Amaretta come running up out of breath and hollered out that old man Keel had just been found dead at the mattress factory - which weren't no factory atall but a run-down old house on the river where he made a right fine homemade cotton mattress and sold what weren't toted off by that thieving Clute Tuten, who put a new mattress on every bed in his house, they said, when he broke in one night and rolled'em up, one by one, toteing them off home when he got drunk, which was often - by old lady Brunell, happening by with her drove of old dogs, peeping through the window and popping over to Miss Amaretta's to tell her the bad news, which of course she run straight away to tell whoever she come to first, at which time, Bubba sets right in to making arrangements for the county to put old man Keel away, since he didn't have no kin, cause that's how Bubba come by his reputation as "the undertaker" - that's what they called him - cause he was always the one looking to the county to put out for every loafer come by and set up shop,

looking to sell us something that most of the time we didn't have no use for nohow, but like Miss Amaretta said, old man Keel done a service for our community and we bout as well see to putting him away decent, like we done everybody else and didn't they - the men - have nothing better to do nohow than stand around with their hands in their pockets when a man lay dead at the mattress factory and poor old Brunell was having a nervous breakdown trying to keep the buzzards from lighting on the house top while Miss Amaretta run for help, like any Christian would, leaving a dish pan of dirty dishes and a wash tub of clothes a-soaking to run all the way from her house across the road from the mattress factory just to tell a bunch of sorry men standing around jawing - and that's just how things get started in the first place, by men - if you ask her, which they didn't, but they did commence to checking into it, with Bubba running the whole show, as usual, and didn't he just love it when he could get something going, his close-set blue eyes taking on a unnatural shine, because for a fact, nothing much don't happen in our neck of the woods but every once in a blue moon, nothing that is that would do to bring out in the open, and normally Bubba was into that, but this time he swore up and down he didn't have nothing to do with them putting down that about Miss Amaretta being the last pauper.

They'd have to write them another book. They'd have to scrap up everlast one of them everlasting books they could lay

hold to and get shed of them and make up a bunch more to set the facts straight, which was that old man Keel was the last pauper and had his rights and just deserts to that name and not Miss Amaretta, who give and didn't take from the county, not once in her whole life, and had a right to be remembered as a fine upstanding woman in the community who didn't do nothing but her duty by running down there that morning and telling...