

It was an old car, well deserving of the title, horseless carriage, an old black model T, more red with mud than black, its front wheels wobbling precariously as the car swirled to avoid the deep ruts on Ramey's side of the road. The driver look as austere as ~~the~~ automobile. He wore black and when the car came close enough so that there was no reflection in the windshield, Ramey could see ~~the~~ ^{the} white, thin collar around the man's neck. The preacher was looking straight ahead and did not seem to notice the young man walking in the road. Ramey could see the preacher's lips moving as the car came slowly closer; the man didn't seem to be looking at the road at all. Ramey walked out into the middle of the road and waved his suitcase over his head. The car did ~~not~~ slow down at all and the the preacher seemed to see the ~~guy~~ because his eyes opened up wide, but it was too late to stop. Ramey jumped out of the way in time but the preacher swirled anyway, hitting the rut on the other side of the road and bouncing up into the cornfield. Dust was everywhere. The car choked and sputtered to a stop. The preacher was out of the car in an instant and came hurrying over to Ramey. From the look on the preacher's face, Ramey was prepared for a vituperative outburst, but instead the preacher ran over to him and said. . .

"Are you ~~xxxx~~ hurt. Oh my god, I thought I had hit you. "

"No, I'm not hurt, said Ramey, "You didn't even come close to hitting me. "

"I just didn't see you. Just where did you come from all of a sudden like that. One instant you there was nobody in the road and the next instant there you were right in front of my car. Oh thank heavens you aren't hurt. "

"I was standing there all the "

"Oh, I've got so much on my mind today, " the preacher interrupted, "I guess I'm just a danger on the public road. "

The preacher sounded faintly foreign. Tom Ramey had heard such an accent from several of his fellow law student friends at the University of Texas. The boys had been from up east some place.

"Why were you standing in the middle of the road like that, " asked the minister, now getting a little ruffled and more nervous. "

"I was trying to flag down a ride. I have walked all the way from Natchez without seeing anybody. You're the first one. "

" Well then, let's get moving. I'm already late now. I just can't see why they wouldn't wait just one more day. I would have had plenty of time on Monday. Just one more day. Oh I guess that would be wise either, not in ~~this~~ heat, " The preacher's remarks didn't seem to be intended for Ramey's ears. As they walked quickly to the automobile the young preacher's face was pointed toward the ground, and his statements at first clear^{ly} spoken became a mumble. The preacher looked up when the two reached the car.

" Oh good heavens, How on earth did I get up there, "

" Don't worry, we'll get out of here in no time. "

" No its stuck, it's stuck. I know this stupid little car. We'll never get it out. Why if they expect a man of God to carry God out into the country don't they give him a decent car to do the job with. "

Ramey threw his suitcase into the backseat, then walked around to the front of the car to inspect the damage to the wheel if any. The car seemed to be in good shape though it was straddling a high ridge of dirt and gutter that bordered the cornfield. Ramey stuck his head around the side of the car to see the preacher who was pacing impatiently towards the rear of the car, mumbling wildly to himself. It didn't sound like prayer.

" Hey, preacher, Ramey said, " Do you know how to crank this baby. "

Ramey's words were taken immediately by the preacher as an insult.

" Good heavens, " he said, even more obviously ruffled, " How do you think ~~xxxxx~~ I convey myself around this Godless countryside. Do you think I have a negro slave do it for me. "

" Then you crank it up for me and I'll get you out of this field here. "

The car was already leaning dangerously to the driver's side. There was no door on the driver's side. ^{when} The preacher ^{got out} must have crawled or fallen out. Ramey got into the car and the preacher walked around to the front of the car, still mumbling to himself.

" When I give you the signal I want you to crank her up and jump clear, OK? "

The preacher nodded, bent over and grabbed the crank. Ramey could see the little man's two small, ferret-like eyes looking over the radiator, waiting for the signal.

" Now "

The preacher cranked hard then jumped out of the way as the car ~~cooughed~~ coughed and sputtered and died. Ramey could see the man's lips moving in some esclesiatical imprecation. The preacher sweating profusely now and beginning to show the strain of his ordeal, because he ^{was} ~~washed~~ slowly this time up to the front of the car, leaned over again and awaited the signal. At the signal he cranked ~~withly~~ and jumped out of the way. The engine sputtered and died again. This time the preacher said nothing. He took off his coat and folded it neatly and laid it on the mud splattered hood. His black vest and once white shirt were blotched with sweat. He bent over and waited for the signal again. This time ~~Ramey~~ it looked to Ramey that the man was praying hard. At Ramey's signal the little preacher jerked with almost superhuman effort on the crank. The whole car shook from the force. The engine coughed to life. The preacher jumped out of the way just as Ramey gas lever off the steering wheel and the car jumped forward over the ridge. The car lean for over, teetering for an instant and then it jumped forward up over the ridge, then down hard into the ruts int the road. In another instant the car was purring contently in the middle of the road and Tom Ramey was looking out the side to see the preacher picking up his coat out of the mud and dust. The minister slapped the coat a few times to shake what he could off it and then he came around the car to the other side. He coat was folded neatly over his arm. He opened the door and stuck his sweating forehead under the canvass top.

" Would please drive for me, " he said with an almost whimpering voice. "

" Ramey said, " Get in. "

" Thankyou, thankyou so much. You have no idea what today has done to me, " said the preacher as he climbed into the car. " It's just been more than I can take. . . this heat, this dust, this whole country. "

Ramey ~~didnt~~ said nothing. He put the car into gear and gave it some gas. The old buggy responded well and in afew minutes they had put the cornfields behind them and were in woods again and were heading toward the town of Numedea at the speed of twenty-five miles an hour.

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At first Tom Ramey thought t that the minister was talking to himself, but there were pauses in the man's speech as if he were awaiting an answer.

" What? " Ramey said.

Calmer
The preacher was more calm now, though he was still wiping the sweat off his face with his limp handkerchief.

"Are you home from the army?"

"No, just visiting back from school."

"School in August?"

"Summer school."

"Oh yes, summer school."

"Where do you or did you go to summer school?"

"University of Texas."

"The university of Texas." "hmm."

"It's not a bad school," said Ramey.

"Oh I'm sure it is one of the best down here. Just what do you study there?"

"Law."

"Oh so you're going to be a lawyer."

"Maybe. You can use law in lots of way, not just being a lawyer."

"I'm sure that you can. I'm quite sure of that, especially in this country."

The conversation ended for a moment because the preacher's interest had been attracted to his coat. He was trying to remove the dust and dirt from the fine black silk which was not shiney any more, instead it was almost grey looking.

"If Father Morris could only see me now," said the preacher. "I'm simply going to look terrible at the funeral."

"Funeral."

"Yes, that poor murdered woman. She's being buried today rest her soul. It seems that she had had a long standing feud with the churches of Numedeia and simply refused to have anything to do with them and the churches were equally adamant. It's really a rather strange and I guess rather pathetic story." I only know what I have heard in the papers. They are holding some crazy people who they say did it. It seems that it was a feud over a goat or something, a really strange, really pathetic story. I swear, they have the strangest people down in this part of the world. I don't think I would have come down here, you see I not from Mississippi. . . . The minister looked at Ramey and could tell that his last statement had been absurd. . . . Of course you can tell that can't you. No, I don't think I ever would have left Massachussetts except that something made

me want to try to help the people down here. Now with the depression being here, the people have nothing left but religion. They have to have something to lean to. God is the only hope left to these people, the only light to show the way out of this valley of darkness. I have come to show them that our Lord Jesus Christ (the preacher crossed himself) has not abandoned his people here and I know that the people here are basically good people and I am going to stick it out here inspite of this country. "

The preacher waited for the young man to comment on his little speech.

" They've still got those two people locked up, huh. "

" Who? what two people? Oh you mean those two crazy people. Yes, yes, they must have them locked up. They are the murderers. I'm sure that they just don't let murderers loose in this country. "

Tom Ramey was staring intently at the road ahead. "Where are they keeping them. "

" I haven't the slitest Idea. I imagine if Nureda has a jail, they must be in it unless there is going to be a lynching or something. Why should you ask? "

Nureda is a small town. It is an old town. It's history is the same as that of any other old Mississippi

