

That Glory Bell

Judge Nathaniel Broom pushed himself back from the table to give his stomach more room. Under ~~his~~ closed lips he ~~moved~~^{pressed} his tongue in a clandestine semi-circle across the surface of his bicuspid and incisors, stopping here and there to savor a last tidbit of Sunday chicken, and then he belched, silently, of course, and then he ~~followed~~ the tidbit with a sip of warm rose. The wine did not agree with him.

"Then you heard the bell this morning," he said, ~~xxxxxx~~^{he} leaning over in my direction.

The statement had come ~~xx~~ quickly and with out warning. Because he had meticulously avoided even talking about the subject since I ~~xxxxx~~ arrived ~~xxxx~~ that morning, the remark came as rather a surprise.

"Yes, I heard it," I said.

"What did you think of it?" he said.

"It is beautiful in its own way, I guess. It is rather loud."

"Loud, Hell, It sounds like the end of the world, the voice of doom. Why Gabriel's horn has nothing to compare with the sound of that bell." He pulled a cigar out of his pocket, offered it to me and when I refused, he unwrapped it~~x~~ and without snipping the end put it in his mouth. He did not light it, having ~~xx~~^{off} noticed a rather forbidding look from his wife, Mrs Broom, who was sitting at the far end of the long dining table. "She ~~won't~~^{couldn't} let me smoke ~~any more~~^{only} than two a day," he whispered to me. He had a slight gleam in his eye, though, ~~when~~^{as} he said ~~that~~ it ~~it~~. I assumed that it was one rule

except in his wife's presence
which he did not follow, " They say, and the're probably right I might add, that the bell is the loudest in the state of Mississippi. On still mornings the damned thing can be heard clean over at Kingston, and that's more than seven miles away. Can you believe it. Can you believe negroes owning a bell like that? Have you seen that church? "

later " Your colored man, Jasper, took me up there to see it after he picked me up at the station this morning," I said. The first thing that Jasper said to me, I remembered, was that Judge Broom was sure that I would want to see the church I had been sent to write about. We drove for ten miles or more through the town of Vermilion and out along a narrow ~~but~~ cement paved highway before turning off onto a dirt road which led to the church. I did not see it at first. In fact Jasper had to point it out. The building was above us, perched rather precariously upon a high red clay bluff. It was a clapboard affair, of great age I assumed, for it had fallen into an advanced state of ~~disrepair~~ disrepair, ~~and~~ the building leaned awkwardly as if resting ~~xxx~~ old joints. There were many mules standing idly at the base of the bluff. There were several wagons and even a few automobiles which like the church were also in the state of decrepitude. There was one car, however, that was not like the others; It was a shiny (inspite of the Spring mud) black car which was certainly brand new ~~xxx~~ and expensive. Jasper informed me that it was the preacher's car and that the other side of the car, carefully parked against the bluff, did not look as ~~good~~ *pretty*. The preacher, who had never driven in his life had ~~already~~ wrecked the car twice. I asked Jasper where all of the money had come from. he would not ~~xxx~~ tell me, but instead motioned for me to get out of the car and follow him up the footpath ascending the bluff. The path was slippery. I fell twice before I was halfway up the hill. Even Jasper had trouble keeping his footing and he cursed openly, inspite of the fact that he was so close to a house of God. We were about three-fourths of the way up the hill when Jasper stopped.

det. story " We can see it good 'nough, from here, " He said. " I don't cotton much to religion an' dey wouldn't like hit if dey sees me up here. "

The church was in full ~~view~~ *approach* before us. It ~~somehow~~ *looked* even older than it ~~had~~ *looked* from the base of the bluff. Many of the boards had splintered and had fallen away, and I could see the people moving to the wild shouting and singing inside the church.

Reminds " Don't believe in it, " said Jasper. " You can't keep Molly, my wife out 'o der, but I ain't never comin' back. " *family says dey got de bell (the way a Methodist)*

" Why? " I said.

*Reminds
Molly
was a
Methodist*

" You know de reason, Mr Reporter. You come from up North don't ya, den you heard de wild music an' you seen de high livin' dey got up der. You know what happen to a nigger when he leave de land an' go to de city. Where you say you come from? "

" Cincinnati," I said.

" Well, I don't know how close dat is to Memphis, but its de same way up der. Hell its even de same way in Jackson o Baton Rouge or even New Orleans. I been to New Orleans so I knows. City aint for niggers. Dey gets dat high life in der blood an dey go crazy. I seen it; I knows. Now dat dis here depression done made every body poor, niggers are coming back to de country all de time and people like judge Broom ~~stake~~ stake 'em so dey don't starve. But dey been back for years now and Church is changed. Good old spirituals jus' aint no good any more. Religion jus' aint de same. "

I could see the bell, hanging at a slight angle because the ~~tower~~ tower, which at some later date had been erected over the entrance, leaned far out of line with the rest of the ~~building~~ building. It had been braced, however, with fresh, unpainted boards which had been nailed haphazardly and probably without beneficial effect (at least esthetically).

It has been a mistake to fix the bell in this position

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" No, I haven't, " I said.

The Judge belched again. His discomfort was apparent, but he preferred to quiet his stomach with the tepid wine rather than to drink from the untouched glass of ice water sitting on the table before him. Again the wine did not agree with him.

" Well, I'll have Jasper run you over there before the sun sets. They'll be ringing the damned thing again pretty soon anyway for their evening prayer meeting. "

He took another sip of the wine, and in complete gastronomic disgust put the glass on the table, leaned over, eyeing his wife first who piously nodded her consent, picked up the small silver bell and rang for the maid. Molly, the maid, practically burst into the room, followed by her two small children. She had on a coat and a hat and her purse was under her arm. The expression on her face was a veritable monument to negro stubbornness; I knew as I quickly turned toward the judge to observe his reaction, that Molly would have her way, whatever it was and that she had probably had her way all along. I think The judge was trying to hide behind his cigar.

" What is it? " asked Broom with resignation.

" I don't have time to pick up the dishes, suh, " she said. " Church is startin' in ten minutes and I'm gonna have to run as it is. Dey ain't gonna be no dessert neither. "

The reaction of Judge Broom was notable. He sank back into his chair, acquiescing as a child might do, who having been deprived of his sweets by a stronger force must face his fate with silence. There was even a pouting look on the judges' face, but it was kept fairly well suppressed. Mrs. Broom's reaction was different. She was of old family, had married below her class (I was later to learn) and had a way with negroes. It was obvious who ruled this roost when Philippa Broom spoke, which was seldom, but always with authority. There was a considerable thawing of Molly's stubbornness.

" This is the third week in a row that you have done this, Molly. I do not see anything wrong with your new love for church life, but you have responsibilities here. You must fulfill your obligations ~~with~~ as a servant with us as well as with your God. "

" Yessum. "

" I will try to have everyone at the table a half an hour earlier so that

you will have time to clear the table and to serve dessert. Now, you'd better go on an hurry so you won't be late for church. "

" Yessum. "

" And Molly? "

" Clean those two boys of yours up if you are going to keep taking them to church. Henry and Able have been playing out in the back yard all day and their both simply covered with mud and leaves. Clean them up next time. You are taking them to see God, remember. "

" Yes, mam. " said Molly, now completely thawed. She grabbed Able's hand, then Henry's hand, led them out of the dining room through the hall and out onto the front porch and the Spring evening air. The screen door banged behind ^{them} her.

Most of the ^{relatives} ~~guests~~ had left the table. A few of them still walked about the front yard with croquette mallets in their hands or some of the ~~relatives~~ had already settled themselves down in the wicker chairs which lined the entire ^{veranda} front of Judge Broom's big house. Their easy conversation, punctuated with laughter, drifted through the open dining room window. Occasionally one of their cars could be heard putting down the drive way for home; they gave no thanks for the Judges hospitality. Sundays at Broom's place was traditional and it was this tradition which had long ago put an end to formality. They were expected to come. I was told. They did come. For some of them to whom the depression had brought more trouble than their more fortunate ~~relatives~~ such visits to Judge and Phillippa Broom's house were now more than just tradition; they were of necessity. Poverty and bad times were never spoken of at the table by Phillippa Broom's decree. The judge told me that there were occasionally squabbles and that there were ^{plenty} ~~plenty~~ of black sheep in the family who never found their way to the Judges Sunday supper table. Of late, however, some of the lightness had been taken out of the conversation and replaced with vitriolic displays of rhetoric by the judges brother, Marshall Broom, a retired (~~because of the Depression~~) farmer whose ^{own} ~~farm was~~ bordered the very property upon which the negro Baptist church had long peacefully established itself. There had been no talk about the bell ~~story~~ at the table this Sunday, though, and I was certain that Phillippa Broom's stern look of disapproval towards anybody who attempted to ~~assert~~ ^{insert} the subject in the conversation had put the quietus on the whole thing. She must have decreed during last Sunday's supper that the churchbell issue was off limits for dinner discussions. My presence as a reporter concerned ^{sent to write about} with the subject ^{presented} was a sore temptation, but nobody disobeyed Philipppa.

