

Stuart Gentling
Creative Writing
Nov. 20, 1964

Ramey

(a short story fragment)

This falls in a pothole I haven't seen lately: what you give us is in effect a report of a happening, like a letter about it. None of the implied drama of Ramey's life comes near the page, or the stage. I'm not even sure there's a central figure, really.

Approximately 1000 words.

no drinking
in Miss.

The people of Vermillion, Mississippi mourned for at least a month after the death of Thomas Tartington Ramey. Stores closed, saloons were forced closed, in fact even the barber shop was vacant for several days, following the public burial. It was fortunate for the children that that old Tom Ramey died on a wednesday for it gave the newly completed Ramey High School a chance to show its sympathy by granting a two day holiday for the funeral. It was an unprecedented move. The prospect of having four free days, the two school holidays plus the weekend, was dimmed by the fact that all the children would be compelled to attend the special church services on friday and then the public burial on saturday. And they would be compelled to go too. Their parents would, for reasons, which the children did not know nor care about, make them go. There was no getting out of it because all the grown-ups would be there too. Even Ramey's enemies of which there were more than was commonly agreed upon would attend to make some display of sympathy and to escape public scathing. It was bad business to be an outspoken enemy of old Tom Ramey, even if he were dead.

The funeral was not^a particularly a sad one though there was much display of emotion from both of Vermillion's factions — the aloof, landed aristocracy and the "commercial" classes. Both sides claimed him as their own and because of this there was considerable friction before, during and after the funeral. The first tension evolved over a dispute about whether Ramey's body should be displayed publicly in an open casket in a semi-propped up position which was still the custom in the outlying Baptist hamlets. The old guard ~~who~~ made public its claim that Ramey's family extended back before the founding of Vermillion, in fact before the founding of the state and that his family was strongly rooted in

in the Episcopalian tradition of a closed casket funeral. The aristocracy had to give in, though, for sheer paucity of numbers. They did manage however to gain a small concession. Though the casket was to be open for public display, old Tom Ramey could at least be spared the "Indignity of being propped up." There was friction over just who the presiding preacher was to be. It was common knowledge among interested people that Tom Ramey belonged to no church or congregation though his Christian nature had been well displayed to the local populace through his philanthropy. Just then who would have jurisdiction over his body? Young Tom Ramey had been known to go to the Episcopal church, infact the Reverend Dikes even had papers to prove Young Tom's membership. There was a side development also. It seemed that the members of St. Andrews among the Angels without wanting to place themselves too much in the spotlight had granted Old Tom an honorary membership pending until his confirmation which had never and now would never be carried out. The Bowie Avenue Baptist church flatly protested. Records were shown to point out the fact that Ramey had given the church building fund over thirty thousand dollars, far more than any other church in town. The decision lay in the hands of young Ramey who at that time just happened to be running for District Attorney, a position that his father had held for several years before becoming mayor then senator in the state legislature. Young Ramey who ~~xxxxxxx~~ to all appearances was under the stress of the greatest of sorrow expressed his concern over the problem. He made his decision at midnight on wednesday. The Vermillion Halloo, the town's only newspaper which at one time was owned and to some extent runned by Ramey waited its morning edition until the decision was made. Old Tom Ramey was to lie in state in the city hall, his eulogy would be delivered by the reverend Mister Joseph Frey of the Bowie Baptists and his burial service would be short and dignified and Episcopalian. As to the site of the funeral none of the churches in town would be large enough to accommodate all of the mourners from miles around. The Bowie Baptists answered the need by donating in good and impartial faith a revival tent. The tent was pitched at the edge of the cemetery which was located off the highway just outside of town. The people literally came in herds; many were mourners, many were just curious or struck with faith by the sight of so many gathered at a revival tent. The tent overflowed with people. The socially prominent managed to have a section reserved for them which remained largely unfilled until just a few minuets before the

Small towns do not
have mourning
during a funeral

this service was to begin. This created some bad feeling but the Reverend Mister Frey soon calmed them down. There was a moment of silence while the reverend seemed to be collecting his thoughts and then the ^{eulogy} ~~sermon~~ began. It first began quite calmly. The reverend cited the virtues of Tom Ramey giving biographical data where needed. The early part of Ramey's life was too obscure for comment but there was much for the reverend to say about Tom's civic accomplishments both through his newspaper, through his one dollar a year salaried job as district attorney, and through his philanthropy given from a fortune in land holdings which he had acquired over the years. There was truly something for everybody. The reverend revealed an artistic side of the old man never before widely known. It seems that Tom Ramey wrote a book, fiction, about a plantation family which rose from the obscurity of dirt farmers to the owners of great plantations, protectors of the faith and education of their future progeny. The book was written and published privately just before Ramey's unsuccessful bid for Governor. It was upon discussing this book and its theme of "rising up from the dirt of life" that the Reverend Mister Frey succumbed to the weakness of any preacher in that position. Out there in the ^{audience}, congregation were more people than he had ever had gathered before him in his ^{Career} as minister. There were too many ears to reach with the gospel and he succumbed. It was a gradual drifting away but in a few minutes it was apparent that Reverend Frey was no longer talking about Tom Ramey and his many earthly accomplishments. It was a remarkable bit of oral engineering but he was now talking Revival talk, sin and redemption. Many left; others came and stayed and occupied the reserved section which was the first to ^{vacate} ~~vacate~~ in mass. Later that afternoon, after the revival ~~Exting~~ Thomas Tartington Ramey was semiquietly laid to rest.

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