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# Convicts

By Horton Foote

Don't let him get away.

Come on.

- Here. Come on now.

- Move it!

Martha.

- Are you awake?

- I am now.

You hear them hounds?

They're running after that  
convict that's trying to get away.

Reckon so.

Keep going, fellas!

Move it out, god damn it.

Hold on.

Move!

Come on, y'all.

God damn it! Move it out! I  
don't want to lose that thing.

Come on now. Let's get him!

Ben.

- They're shooting.

- I hear them.

- You think they killed him?

- God knows.

It's quiet now. Go back to sleep.

Asa, why aren't those convicts  
out in the field working?

God only knows.

We'll head back to town as  
soon as we finish up here.

- Give me a drink of that whiskey.

- As soon as I've finished.

Before we go back to town, I have  
to stop by my papa's plantation.

What for?

I like to check on things  
out there when he's gone.

- Look at that guard over there.

- What's going on around here?

I expect we'll be coming out here  
before too long for Uncle Soll's funeral.

Well, the old buzzard can't  
last many more Christmases.

Well, you've been saying that

for the last five Christmases.

I'll go see if he's inside.

Don't be long.

Mr. Soll.

Nowhere around.

Goddamn Christmas will  
be ruined for sure now.

I'll be right out.

Hurry up now.

- Martha.

- Good morning, Mr. Billy.

- Where is Horace?

- He's gone fishing.

- Where is Mr. Soll?

- He's around someplace.

He sent for the sheriff.

One of them convicts killed  
another one and run off.

They got the rest locked  
up there in the quarters...  
to keep them from fighting  
amongst themselves.

Is that why it's so quiet around  
here? No one out in the fields.

I thought maybe he gave the convicts  
the day off because of Christmas Eve.

You know Mr. Soll don't  
give nobody no time off.

He'll work them Christmas  
Day, too. Always has.

The only reason that they  
ain't out in the fields now...  
is so the trouble won't spread.

Oh, my God. I don't know what  
Horace's people are thinking about...

letting him work out in  
this godforsaken place.

Would you go see if  
you could find him?

Yes, sir.

Martha, where the hell are you going?

- Trying to find Horace.

- What?

- You seen Horace?

- Not for a spell.

If you see him, tell him Mr. Billy Vaughn is looking for him up there at the store. You all right?

I can't find him. Ben hasn't seen him either.

- Give me some more whiskey.

- That's all I have.

I'm going up to Uncle Soll's and get me some more.

Horace, where you been?

I been down to the field where they found the dead convict.

Well, Mr. Billy wants you to go into Harrison for Christmas.

I won't leave until

Mr. Soll gets back.

He told me yesterday that he'd pay me today.

And he told you the day before that he'd pay you yesterday.

- Did he do it?

- No.

I wouldn't be wasting my breath waiting on him to pay you today.

I don't want to go until I get my money.

There's still no tombstone on my daddy's grave...

and I want to make a down payment on one.

It worries me to death that there's still no tombstone on my daddy's grave.

- How much do you think one'd cost me?

- I don't know.

Ain't your folks gonna be angry if you don't get home for Christmas Day?

- My folks don't care what I do.

- Yes, they do.

- Sure they do.

- No, they don't.

My daddy cared, but he's dead.

I saw the grave they buried the murdered convict in.

They got no marker on  
it. What was his name?  
I don't know what his name is. I  
don't be studying them convicts.  
Horace!  
Coming, Ben.  
I'm tired of waiting here. Take  
the gun and watch him for a spell...  
while I go inside. It won't be long.  
Stay way over here out  
the reach of his chain.  
Whatever you do, don't let  
him get a hold of that gun.  
I won't.  
What was the name of the  
convict that was killed?  
- I don't know.  
- Think he knows?  
I don't know.  
Was there any prayers  
said over his grave?  
No, now you know Mr. Soll.  
He ain't gonna have no prayer  
said over no dead convict's grave.  
Who'll say them? Mr. Soll?  
Ain't no preacher out  
here. Nobody but Mr. Soll...  
and the Overseer and the guards  
and you and me and the convicts.  
You been out here a  
long time, haven't you?  
I was born out here.  
Right at the end of slavery time.  
My mama and papa are buried out here.  
Our cabin used to  
be right over yonder.  
My mama and papa stayed on to work  
for wages after the slavery time.  
A lot of the old folks did.  
When they commenced to die off...  
Mr. Soll brought in the  
convicts to work the place.  
Can I talk to the convict?  
I guess you can. He may

not want to talk to you.  
Well, they chain us together  
And we started cutting cane  
I wish you were here Way back then...  
Good morning, convicts.  
I said good morning, god damn it.  
Did any of you see Nancy?  
I been looking all over this  
damn plantation. I can't find her.  
I wonder where the  
hell she's gone to.  
I been looking all morning.  
Hey, convict...  
you want a chew of tobacco?  
Convict, you asleep?  
If you're asleep, I won't bother you.  
I ain't asleep.  
It's too cold on this  
ground to go to sleep.  
- You want a chew of tobacco?  
- Pass it along.  
Throw me a knife.  
I ain't got nothing to cut it with.  
You'll have to bite it off.  
I can't give you a knife.  
My name's Horace. What's yours?  
Leroy Kendricks.  
A lot of Kendricks down in Kendleton.  
Ever been to Kendleton?  
No...  
I don't even know where it's at.  
Everyone that lives there is colored.  
I still ain't never been.  
Where do you come from?  
I come from down round Louisiana.  
How'd you get up here?  
I got into a fight with a man.  
Cut him.  
Anyway, they sentenced me to Retrieve  
Prison Plantation on the Coast.  
That's the worst place  
I ever been in my life.  
I heard that you could hire off to  
work on plantations around here...

you know, to work out your fine.

So I asked them if I  
could work out my fine.

And they sent me here.

Well, I hope Mr. Soll pays you.

How much is your fine?

About \$500.

They pay me \$7 a month or they pay  
the State for me to pay off my fine.

- How long you been here?

- About a year.

How long are you gonna have to work  
at \$7 a month to pay off your fine?

- I don't know. They didn't tell me.

- Didn't you figure it out?

Figure it out?

How am I supposed to figure it out?

- Just figure it out.

- I don't know how.

- Didn't you go to school?

- No.

I ain't never been to no school.

Never?

No.

I'm doing some figuring in my head.

Comes to almost six  
years to pay off \$500.

- It's gonna be more than that now.

- What do you mean?

I done killed me a man now.

What was his name?

Jesse.

Jesse what?

Jesse Wilkes.

Got a brother here, too.

Brother say that he gonna kill me  
if the white sheriff don't kill me.

Are you scared of him?

- No.

- What's his name?

Name is Sherman.

Sherman Edwards.

How can they be brothers if  
one's Edwards and one's Wilkes?

They got the same mama, but  
they got a different daddy.

- He got a white man for a Daddy.

- Who does?

Sherman Edwards.

See, now that's why he's so  
mean. It's the white blood in him.

See, now he kill you,  
too, if he had the chance.

Being as he is. He

don't like white people.

I asked him, I say...

"How come you don't like white people  
when you're half white yourself?"

But he didn't answer that.

He just cussed me.

You give me that knife, I  
just might cut my own throat.

Save somebody else the trouble.

Can you give me that knife?

No.

- Give me another chew of tobacco?

- Sure.

Keep it.

If I gave you this knife...

would you really try  
and kill yourself?

Give it to me and see.

I couldn't kill myself.

Well, you ain't waiting in  
chains for no white sheriff.

I couldn't do that.

I'm afraid to die.

You're not afraid of dying?

No.

Where you going?

Just going over there. To say  
a prayer over Jesse's grave.

- Dib, take the sheriff's horse.

- Yes, sir.

The convict's over  
yonder by the tree.

Leroy, do you know the Lord's Prayer?

- No.



- I've forgotten the last part of it.  
- Ben, do you know the Lord's Prayer?  
- Yes, I do.  
What comes after "forgive us our trespasses"?  
No, I can't say it that way.  
Got to start from the beginning.  
"Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth...  
"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those...  
"who trespass against us..."  
- There he is. Sheriff. Right there.  
- You the one? Who got the keys?  
Right here.  
Ben, how many throats did this devil slit last night?  
Only one, sir.  
- But was he colored or white?  
- They all colored, sir.  
Now get up or I'll kill you.  
Mr. Soll?  
You told me yesterday that you'd pay me my wages today, sir.  
You work for me?  
Now you know, Mr. Soll, he works for you.  
- Did I ask you a question?  
- No, sir.  
Then you keep quiet until I do.  
- Shoot.  
- Why do you say that?  
'Cause I'm disgusted.  
This poor boy out here working to get a tombstone for his daddy's grave...  
and he been here six months and you ain't paid him nothing yet.  
Go up to the house in a while. I'll pay you.  
Think he's gonna do it?  
I wouldn't waste holding my breath if I was you.

Lord Jesus, have mercy, God.  
Lord, they killing each other.  
Someday all of them convicts gonna get  
loose and we're gonna all be killed.  
Get your shovel. Go  
dig a grave for him.  
I'll send Jackson  
over there to help you.  
Boy, you go watch the body  
until we get his grave dug.  
- Sir, I wouldn't care to see him right now.  
- Why?  
Because he's dead, sir.  
You never seen a dead man before,  
boy? Nothing to worry yourself about.  
Sir, I just don't want to see him...  
- Suppose I told you, you had to do it, boy.  
- He don't have to do it. I'll do it.  
What're you doing here? You're supposed  
to be cooking my Christmas dinner.  
This ain't Christmas Day yet.  
- What the hell day is it?  
- It's Christmas Eve.  
All right.  
Lord. Jesus.  
That convict tried  
to kill me, you know.  
- Which one?  
- The one the sheriff just shot.  
- He really dead, Martha?  
- Yes, sir.  
- The white one or colored one?  
- You saw him.  
Well, I forget.  
Come see for yourself.  
I forget.  
He tried to kill me, he did.  
He won't have a chance anymore.  
Colored or white. Crazy old fool.  
Lord, you know.  
Martha, you afraid of dying?  
No, I ain't afraid of it.  
Just not ready to go yet.  
- Where is Mr. Soll?

- He's over there by the body.
- He says he tried to kill him.
- Might have.

Jackson, he listens to you.

Tell him to give me my money.

- He don't listen to me.
- Jackson!

Tell Martha to get in the house and start cooking my Christmas dinner.

- You hear that, Martha?
- Tell him today ain't Christmas.

She say today ain't Christmas.

- Did you bury him?
- Yes, I did.

Right next to the other convicts' graves.

Mr. Soll say any convicts that die gets buried out here.

He don't want them next to his peoples' graves.

I don't want them next to mine. In my graveyard.

My mama and papa buried out there.

My sister's buried out there. And her baby.

Howdy, Mr. Billy.

Good morning, Mr. Soll.

- Is he dead?
- Dead drunk.

Who's that on the ground?

Mr. Billy Vaughn. He's drunk.

I thought he was another dead convict.

- Lot of them out here now.
- How many?

God knows. Always room for one more, though, ain't it?

I'm a convict, you know. They made me a trustee so I can walk about free... but I'm still a convict.

- Is that a convict?
- No.
- Who the hell is it?
- Who it look like?

Wake up, Billy.

The son of a bitch is  
drunk. Billy's drunk.

- Where you taking him to?

- Over to the house.

Did Overseer get them convicts back  
out in the field like I told him to?

- All but one.

- Why isn't he out in the fields?

- He's sick.

- What the hell's wrong with him?

I don't know. You have to ask him.

Boy, come here.

Tell that Overseer to get that  
convict out in the field with the rest.

- Yes, sir.

- Don't go over there.

What'd you say, woman?

I told him not to go over  
where them convicts live.

- Let Jackson, Ben go over there.

- I'll go, god damn it.

Then you go over there.

You think I'm scared of  
any goddamn sick convict?

I'm scared of no goddamn convict,  
sick or well. I'll go over there.

- He ain't gonna be sick long now.

- Which one is it?

The brother to the  
one that got killed.

- What if he is sick?

- Ain't gonna help him.

Gonna have to work out in  
the fields just the same.

Mr. Soll didn't bring  
him here to get sick.

- You know Mr. Billy Vaughn's divorced?

- Yes.

What happens if you're not  
divorced, but your first wife dies...  
and then you marry again?

When you go to heaven, which  
woman do you claim as your wife?

I don't know.

Take Sherman Edwards.

He's got a white daddy  
and a colored mama.

Now when they all go to heaven  
together, what's gonna happen?  
How would I know all that, Horace?

I worry about things like this.

'Cause my daddy died and now my  
mama's married to another man.

Got to wondering last night, who's  
gonna be her husband in heaven.

Kept me awake half the night.

Read the Bible. All that's  
in the Bible someplace.

Keep moving.

Gotcha.

I love pecan pie.

There's a boy out here says I owe  
him some money, Ben. You pay him.

What am I gonna pay him  
with? I have no money.

- Take it out of the cash at the store.

- What cash?

You know everybody's been  
buying on credit since October.

- Everybody?

- How else they gonna buy?

- I got a lot of money, you know.

- I know you do.

- Where'd the hell I put my money?

- I don't know, sir.

When you find it, or I find it...

I'm gonna pay the boy.

Now you tell him that.

- You tell him. There he is right there.

- Where?

Right there.

Yeah.

Where's Nancy?

She dead, sir. She been  
dead more than 15 years now.

- Where's Julia?

- She's dead, too. She been dead.

- Where's Sarah?

- She dead, too, sir.

Who the hell's out here?

Just you and me and the boy here

and Martha and the Overseer...

and the guards and the convicts.

- Where's my gun?

- I don't know, sir.

- Get it for me.

- I don't know where it is, sir.

- You got a gun?

- Yes, sir.

- Get it for me.

- Yes, sir.

- I'm going hunting.

- Yes, sir.

I wouldn't go hunting today if

I was you. It's Christmas Eve.

I don't care the hell what

day it is, I'm going hunting.

Yes, sir.

- Where is Jackson?

- I don't know, sir.

I'll put the lazy son of a bitch back on  
the chain gang if he ain't careful, you hear?

Bastard.

Ben, get out here. Martha, come here.

Merry Christmas.

- What's this?

- Christmas gift.

That's Confederate money.

Ain't gonna buy you nothing.

Better hold on to it. Never can tell.

Who the hell are you?

Horace Robedaux, sir.

- How old are you?

- Thirteen, sir.

- Now, whose boy are you?

- Why, you know who he is, Mr. Soll.

- His daddy is dead, sir.

- Let him answer.

- Your daddy's dead?

- Yes, sir.

What was his name?

Paul Horace Robedaux, sir.

I knew the bastard. He  
wasn't worth killing.

He was my brother's lawyer.  
He helped my brother cheat me.

How did you get out here?

Mr. Albert Thornton is his uncle.

He come out here in the fall...  
to help him with the store when  
the crops come in. You know that.

- Where's Albert?

- He's in town.

- What the hell's he doing in town?

- He talked to you about it.

Thing's are so slow in  
the store here now...

and the few customers there  
are, the boy can take care of.

I don't want him here. I don't want  
Paul Horace Robedaux's boy on this place.

Take him to my brother's place. He'll  
take care of him. I don't want him.

- Your brother's in New Orleans.

- Take him back to town, god damn it.

He didn't mean that. He's just drunk.

He say anything when he's drunk.

He be over his drunk tomorrow.

- Now, who the hell are you?

- Horace, sir.

Oh, yes.

What was your daddy's name?

Paul Horace. Paul Horace Robedaux.

- I knew him. He's dead.

- Yes, sir.

- I have a brother. You ever meet him?

- No, sir.

He has a place next to mine,  
only we don't get along here.

Mean, no-good bastard.

You know what my daddy said  
to me just before he died?

No, sir.

He called me and said,

"Everybody else out of the room.

"Soll," he said, "sit down.  
"Now watch out for that  
son of a bitch Tyre.  
"He'll steal you blind.  
He's a rattlesnake.  
"He has venom in his fangs."  
That's what his own  
daddy thought about him.  
- You want some whiskey?  
- No, sir.  
I was just about to come up to  
the house looking for you, sir.  
You said if I come up there  
in a bit, you'd pay me.  
Pay you for what?  
For working for you, sir.  
You work for me?  
Yes, sir. Here in your store.  
- How old are you?  
- Thirteen.  
Then you should pay me for  
letting you work out here.  
You should pay me for letting  
you learn how to run a store.  
Yes, sir. I suppose so.  
But you agreed.  
I agreed to nothing.  
Yes, sir. You did. You said  
you'd pay me 50 cents a week.  
And I've been here six months  
and you ain't paid me nothing yet.  
You owe me \$12.50.  
You said you'd pay me that on  
Christmas Eve. And that's today.  
- Before that you said you'd pay me...  
- Hold on.  
I must've been drunk.  
I remember you now, boy.  
You came out here to earn the money  
for your daddy's tombstone, right?  
Yes, sir.  
Your daddy was no good, Albert says.  
Mistreated your  
mother. Died a drunkard.



"Why does he want to put a tombstone on the bastard's grave?" I asked him.

"That's how the boy is," he says. "He's strange."

"He'll get over that," I says.

"Some woman will help him get over that."

You ever had a woman?

No, sir.

We're gonna have to do something about that.

- Chewing tobacco?

- Yes, sir.

Come on. Give me a chew. Right here.

My daddy, God rest his soul in peace, turned out to be a prophet.

But my brother Tyre is a liar, a thief, and he's a killer.

I hope his soul rots in hell forever.

He got a bitch of a daughter, too.

She's up there at my house now and I know what she wants.

To know how I made out my will.

Every now and then she says, "Who you gonna leave all this to, Uncle Soll?"

- Can you write?

- Yes, sir.

Get a pencil and a piece of paper. Take down what I tell you.

Everything.

All my land. Everything.

- Ready?

- Yeah.

"I, Soll Gauthier...

"on my oath...

"I leave my land, my houses..."

Who am I gonna leave it to?

Everybody who's kin to me is dead except Tyre and two ugly old daughters.

You have a brother?

No, sir. I have a sister.

Get down on your knees, and thank God you got no brother.

'Cause they steal everything you got.

They cut your heart out  
and smile all the while.  
Thank you, God. We thank you, God.  
- Thank you, God.  
- Yeah.  
You're a good boy.  
Come on.  
I'm going hunting. Come on with me.  
Give me the gun. There's  
a damn bear over there.  
- No, sir. There's no bear...  
- Yeah, there is, too.  
And I'm gonna kill  
the son of a bitch.  
- I kill it?  
- I don't know, sir.  
Go see. Go on.  
See.  
I get it?  
Is Sarah Duncan still on the place?  
- Sarah who?  
- Sarah Duncan.  
Is she the one you  
asked Ben about earlier?  
Ben who?  
Ben Johnson. Lives up at the store.  
I don't know if I  
asked him that or not.  
She's a small woman.  
No more than five feet.  
Where's her house? It was  
out this way someplace.  
- Well, it's not out here now.  
- It's not.  
If she's the one you asked  
Ben about, she's dead.  
- She is?  
- Yup.  
Nobody out here now  
but you, me, and Ben...  
and Martha, the convicts  
and the guards...  
and the Overseer and Jackson.  
Who the hell is Jackson?

Well, he's the one who stays  
up at the house with you.  
What kind of tombstone you have  
in mind for your daddy's grave?  
Just a small one.  
What the hell you  
want a small one for?  
See the one I put  
on my daddy's grave?  
It's the biggest goddamn  
tombstone ever made.  
It's got angels all over it.  
Two women crying.  
Come here.  
Look. See, there's eight  
tombstones on that graveyard.  
- Now which do you like best?  
- There are no tombstones over there.  
You don't see any tombstones?  
No, sir. There are none there.  
Who the hell took them away?  
Who the hell stole them?  
Damn convicts. They steal everything.  
Even the tombstone  
off my daddy's grave.  
No, sir. That's the convicts'  
grave. That's not your graveyard.  
- Where the hell's my graveyard?  
- That's over yonder.  
Yeah? Then let's go  
find the goddamn place.  
What are you shooting at now, sir?  
Convicts. I'm gonna kill  
all of them convicts.  
I'm gonna have a sure enough  
convict graveyard out here.  
Shoot you a convict?  
Go on.  
Steady.  
- How many we kill?  
- I don't know, sir.  
- A lot?  
- Yeah, I guess so, sir.  
Uncle Soll?

What y'all shooting at?  
First he said he was shooting  
at bears, and then convicts.  
There ain't any bears or convicts.  
Tried to keep him from laying on the  
cold damp ground, but he wouldn't listen.  
Mr. Soll.  
Get up now. You'll catch  
your death, Mr. Soll.  
Damn convicts take all them  
tombstones off the graves.  
Now they're coming to kill me.  
Stay with him while I go get Jackson.  
- Get up, Sherman.  
- He ain't fooling.  
He's sick. He ought to  
go back to the bunkhouse.  
Him go back when we  
go back. Pick him up.  
Who's buried here? Who  
the hell am I sitting on?  
I think that's the convict that  
the Sheriff shot this morning, sir.  
I know who I'm sitting on.  
- Sir?  
- I know.  
I think his name is Leroy, sir.  
I know who it is. It's  
a woman named Verna.  
I know who it is.  
You crazy son of a bitch.  
Where are you hiding?  
Uncle Soll!  
- Where you taking me?  
- Up to the house.  
I'm going hunting.  
How'll you hunt as drunk as you  
are? You're getting put to bed.  
No, I'll be goddamned  
if I'm gonna be.  
Come near me, I'll kill  
you. Get out of here!  
Stay away from me.  
Go on.

I want the white boy to stay. He's the only one around here I trust. Don't cross him when he's drunk. Go ahead. Stay with him.

- I'm scared of him.

- He ain't gonna hurt you. Just go ahead. He's too drunk to pull the trigger on that damn gun. Now go ahead.

- What's your name again?

- Horace, sir.

What are you crying for?

- I'm scared, sir.

- What are you scared of?

I don't know, sir.

You scared the convicts will get loose one night?

Help me up.

Come over there and kill you?

I don't know, sir.

What are you scared of then?

A lot of things, sir.

Come here. You're a good boy.

Merry Christmas!

Tyre's wife is a jackass. "I want my girls to be educated," she said. "Everybody should be educated, no matter what color their skin is."

"What for?" I said. "I ain't educated. Your husband ain't."

"We knew enough to come here... "get a hold of 8,000 acres of the richest land in the whole goddamn world. "We can grow three crops a year here."

Albert says you came out here to work.

So you could buy a tombstone for your daddy's grave.

Yes, sir.

Well, I'm gonna buy it for you. I'm gonna buy the biggest goddamn tombstone in Texas. I'll put angels on it. And two Confederate veterans.

Was your daddy a Confederate veteran?

No, he was born after the war.

I was a veteran. I fought in every goddamn battle they'd let me.

What were we talking about?

- A tombstone for my daddy's grave.

- Yeah.

I'll put "Rest In Peace" on it and three verses from the Bible.

Have you seen the tombstones

I had put up out here?

No, sir.

Tomorrow first thing, I'll take you over to my family graveyard.

You pick out the tombstone you like and I'll have it copied...

put it on your daddy's grave.

Over yonder, that's all my land out there, see. All mine.

Hold this.

- You know my brother Tyre?

- I've seen him.

Accused me of cheating him.

"Why would I cheat you," I said. "I got all the land and money I want."

"Give me half and you take half," he said.

"My wife is against working convicts."

Then I said, "You'll never get the work done."

Took him two years to find out.

Next thing I heard, he

had his own convicts.

Who's that over there crossing the back field?

Nobody.

Merry Christmas.

Uncle!

Uncle, you want any supper?

- No.

- It's Christmas Eve.

I don't give a goddamn what day it is. If I wanted supper, I'd tell you.

- Where you going?

- I'm going hunting.

What are you going hunting  
for this time of day?  
Convicts. There's three  
of them that have escaped.  
- There's no damn convicts loose.  
- And you're a goddamn liar.  
And you're crazy.  
You drunk so much whiskey,  
it finally made you crazy.  
And you're a whore.  
My brother said, "You son of a bitch,  
you're childless. I have two daughters."  
"Two whores," I said. "Two  
no-good, sluttish whores!"  
You! Leave him alone.  
I hope he broke his goddamn  
neck. Did you hear me?  
I hope you broke your goddamn neck.  
You'll get nothing of mine.  
Ben and Martha are to have it  
all. Are there witnesses here?  
Who wants any of your goddamn land?  
I have all the goddamn land I want.  
Ben and Martha.  
Faithful and trustworthy.  
The convicts are all around.  
Hand me my gun, please.  
Allow me to defend myself.  
Don't leave me here alone,  
defenseless, to have my throat cut.  
I sleep with my gun beside me.  
Now, where's that boy?  
Where's that white boy?  
Come here. Don't leave me.  
Tomorrow first thing, we'll  
go to my family graveyard...  
and pick out the tombstone  
you like. I'll have it copied.  
Put on your daddy's grave.  
What's your name, boy?  
- Horace, sir.  
- Oh, yeah.  
You're going to sleep in my room tonight.  
I'll have my gun and you'll have yours.

No damn convicts will  
get near us, right?  
Mr. Soll wants you up at the house.  
- Is he gonna give him his money?  
- Jackson didn't say.  
He just said that he wouldn't give him  
any peace until he got him up there.  
Better go on, Horace.  
- Well, let him finish his supper first.  
- Come on now.  
What happened? Did he die on you?  
Horace, over here!  
Coming, Jackson.  
Come on.  
He's asleep now.  
Every time he wakes up, he  
ask for you to come over.  
He's driving me crazy asking  
for you to come over here.  
He says he wants a white  
person with him when he dies.  
Where are Miss Asa and Mr. Billy?  
They went over to her daddy's place.  
Is he dying?  
That's what he says.  
But I don't believe him.  
I've heard it all before.  
Don't leave, Jackson. I don't  
wanna be here alone when he dies.  
He's not gonna die.  
He just talks about it.  
Too mean to die.  
- I don't want to die, do you?  
- No.  
I was thinking coming up here...  
of that convict, Leroy,  
dying this morning.  
He said it meant nothing to him.  
I was thinking, when I die, maybe  
I can go to Heaven and see my daddy.  
But as much as I would like to see him,  
I wouldn't want to have to die to do it.  
Here's another one for you, Ben.  
Billy, wake up. We're at papa's.



Lena!  
There. Cobb!  
Ya'll come on and help me  
get Billy into the house.  
He's passed out again, Cobb.  
You got him there?  
Jackson?  
That white boy's here.  
Tell him to come in  
where I can see him.  
Did they tell you I was dying?  
Yes, sir.  
Has anyone sent for a  
doctor to come see me?  
Miss Asa said she's gonna send a  
doctor when she got back to town.  
She's a damn liar. She  
won't send nobody out here.  
She wants to see me dead so she  
can claim all this for herself...  
and her no-good father.  
There were three of us  
Gauthier boys, you know.  
There was Tyre, Melvin and me.  
Tyre poisoned Melvin, you know.  
At least, he had him poisoned.  
Paid a man to mix some jimsonweed  
in his food and he poisoned him.  
He denied it of course, up  
and down. But I know he did it.  
'Cause I have it carved  
right on Melvin's tombstone.  
"Poisoned by his brother Tyre...  
"whose motive was greed."  
Come closer, boy. Come  
over here. Sit here.  
I'm dying. Did they tell you that?  
Yes, sir.  
You ever watch an old man die?  
No, sir.  
Promise you won't leave me alone after  
I die till they get me in my coffin.  
'Cause there are wild  
varmints out here.

I knew a man that died out here.  
They went off and  
left his body alone...  
while they went for the coffin  
or the preacher or something.  
Then they came back to the body...  
and the varmints had come  
and tore it all apart.  
What kind of varmints?  
I don't know. Wildcats.  
Wolves. God knows what all.  
Don't let that happen to me.  
No, sir.  
If I fall asleep, don't leave  
me, you hear? Don't leave me.  
No, sir.  
- Jackson.  
- Yes, sir.  
- Convicts all quiet?  
- Yes, sir. Been quiet.  
Before daybreak, go down there and tell  
the Overseer I want them convicts...  
to make a coffin for  
me, if I'm dead or not.  
Yes, sir.  
When you reach my time of life,  
you better have your coffin handy.  
And when it's made, I want  
you to put it under my bed.  
And if you can't get it under  
my bed, I want it beside it.  
Yes, sir.  
Jackson, you were a  
convict, weren't you?  
Yes, sir. You know that.  
- What'd they send you to the pen for?  
- Killed a man.  
- Wasn't a white man, I hope.  
- No, sir.  
- Was it a nigger, a colored man?  
- Yes, sir.  
What'd you kill him for?  
'Cause he killed my only brother.  
Took a club and clubbed him to death.

Then took his body into  
the house and burned it up.

- The house, too?

- Yes, sir.

Whose house was it? His  
house or your brother's house?

My brother's house.

- How long they give you for?

- Life.

- Well, how old were you at the time?

- Nineteen.

- Well, how old are  
you now? - Fifty-five.

You know how old I am?

No, sir.

How old were you when you  
came to work on this place?

Thirty-two.

How long have you been a trustee?

Eight years. Ever since you killed  
that convict in the closet over there.

You said you wanted someone you could  
trust to guard you while you slept.

And can I trust you?

Yes, sir. I hope so. I believe so.

I believe so, too.

I'll tell you what.

- I'm gonna leave everything I got to you.

- Thank you.

I don't want you to wait till dawn.

I want you to go out there now and get  
the convicts to make my coffin for me.

Now, wait, Jackson. Is that  
your first name or your last?

- My first name.

- What's your last name?

Hall.

Here.

- This is my will.

- Thank you.

Why'd that man kill your brother?

- I don't know.

- Well, how'd you kill him?

Shot him.

What, from an ambush or did you just walk right up to him and kill him?

- I walked right up to him.

- Did you give him any warning?

I hollered for him to run. I was gonna kill him.

Did he run?

No, sir. He tried to take the gun from me.

- And you shot him then?

- Yes, sir.

- Did he have a gun on him?

- No, sir. Just a knife.

- You ever regret killing him?

- No, sir.

And you would kill him again if you had it all to do over again?

- Yes, sir.

- You were fond of your brother?

Yes, sir.

Were you here...

when I shot that convict who was hiding in the closet?

I was here on the place. But I wasn't working directly for you then.

What was the name of the convict I shot?

- Which one?

- The one in the closet.

Yes, sir.

What was his name?

Tucker. I'm not sure about that.

But I remember what he looked like.

He was crippled 'cause he had run away once before.

Got caught in a bear trap and broke his leg. It never healed right.

So he limp walked around here from then on.

Well, I walked.

What do you think he was doing in that closet there?

You think he was waiting in there to kill me?

- I don't know, sir.  
- What's your opinion?  
- Yes, sir.  
- Yes, sir, what?  
I think he was waiting  
in there to kill you.  
I think he was, too. I think he was.  
Yes, sir.  
You hear something in  
that closet over there?  
- No, sir.  
- Well, I do.  
Come out of there, you dirty  
son of a bitch, you hear me?  
I'll give you one more  
chance. Come on out of there.  
I warned you.  
Go see if I killed anything in there.  
I don't see nothing, sir.  
How can you tell?  
Go in there and look.  
- There's nothing here, sir.  
- Look again.  
God help me.  
Thank you, Lena.  
Where are you from?  
I'm from Harrison.  
What are you doing out here?  
Working for you, sir, at the store.  
You're white, aren't you?  
Yes, sir.  
Who's that old man?  
That's you, sir.  
We're the only two white people  
between here and Harrison.  
The only other ones are the  
Overseer and the two guards.  
The rest are convicts.  
No, Ben and Martha aren't convicts.  
- Where are they?  
- Down at the store.  
Are you the one I  
promised a tombstone?  
- Yes, sir.

- I haven't forgotten.

And I owe you money.

Yes, sir.

Soon as Jackson gets back I'm gonna pay you what I owe you.

How much is it?

\$12.50.

- \$12.50?

- Yes, sir.

I'm gonna pay you \$100, maybe even \$1,000...

for all your kindness to an old man.

You know how much my daddy's tombstone cost?

\$5,000. I brought it by boat from New Orleans.

Used to be a woman out here named Sarah.

You seen her lately?

No, sir. I believe she's dead.

How do you know that?

I heard Ben say it.

- Ben who?

- Ben Johnson.

He was born on this place.

- Talk up.

- No, sir! Jackson!

- Wasn't anything in the closet.

- No?

I swore I heard something in there.

Yes, sir.

Go get them to make my coffin right now.

Go on.

Yes, sir.

I had a dream one night last week.

I had a dream that the convicts got loose and they came over here...

and they caught me

here in this very chair.

And they shot Jackson,

and they bound me.

I don't remember if

they shot Jackson or not.

Part of the time it seemed  
like Jackson was one of them.  
Did you hear anything in  
that closet over there?  
No, sir.  
Well, I did.  
Come out of there, you  
son of a bitch! I hear you!  
I'll give you one more  
chance to come out of there.  
I warned you.  
That got whoever was in there.  
Go see who it was. Go on.  
No, sir.  
Are you scared?  
Well, I'll go. Help me up.  
I knew there was somebody in  
here. I'll kill the son of a bitch.  
There's blood every place.  
Cripple.  
He's a cripple.  
What were we talking about?  
Oh, yeah, about my dream.  
I was sitting here and Jackson  
came in with all them convicts.  
I never saw so many.  
And they grabbed me and Jackson  
had a club and he began to club me.  
I said, "Jackson, you're killing me."  
Then all the convicts grabbed  
clubs and began to beat me.  
And Jackson set fire to the house.  
I said, "Why did you do that?"  
I swear, I said it.  
He said, "We're gonna burn you  
and all you got to the ground."  
Get out of my damn chair. Get up. Go.  
Buttermilk.  
Here, that'll put hair on your chest.  
- Where you been?  
- I went to tell them about your coffin.  
- Have they started?  
- Yes, sir.  
They making it out of cypress wood?

I don't know, sir.

- When it's finished will they bring it here?

- Yes, sir.

How long will that be?

They'll have it done in an hour.

I killed a man in the closet. It's full of blood, so you go clean it up.

- Get Ben to help you bury the body.

- Yes, sir.

That was a convict.

So you bury him in the convict's graveyard, you hear?

Yes, sir.

- He's a cripple.

- Yes, sir.

How many convicts we have out here?

I don't know, sir.

If I live, tomorrow I'm gonna go out there and count them.

If I live.

- Nobody in that closet, sir.

- No?

No, sir.

- You see any blood?

- No, sir.

I saw a crippled convict lying there.

Blood over the walls and on the floor. So, don't tell me.

This is my mama.

There's nothing in there.

- Who's that singing in there?

- I am.

Jackson, come here.

Sit down there.

What was my mama's name?

Any you all remember?

No, sir.

No, sir.

I think it was Erna.

She died when I was born.

My daddy raised me and my two brothers.

It was my daddy's idea to get convicts.



We tried after slavery  
to have tenants out here.  
We had 300 at one time  
living on the place.  
But we had a series of bad crop years  
and we all nearly starved. So papa said...  
"Get rid of the tenants  
and hire yourself convicts."  
And I did.  
Now where is my mama buried?  
Is she buried out here?  
I don't know, sir.  
I don't think she is.  
I think one of them  
convicts got loose...  
and took a club, clubbed her to death  
and burned her body up in the house.  
The house we used to live  
in burned to the ground.  
That's why we never had  
a picture of my mama.  
'Cause all her letters and  
pictures were burned in the fire.  
Except this one.  
Could somebody please tell  
me where my mama's buried?  
I don't know.  
What's the boy's name?  
Horace, sir.  
Horace, come here to me. Come here.  
Sit down here.  
When I was your age...  
this was all dense forest.  
So thick a man or boy couldn't  
get through without a cane knife...  
to cut his way through, you see.  
Besides the forest, there's something  
out here I've seen no other place.  
Miles of cane.  
Cane that grew 10 and 12 feet high.  
And so thick, you couldn't make  
your way through without a knife.  
And a cold spell would come...  
kill the cane and it would lie rotting

on the ground until the spring...  
and then a new crop would start up.  
That's why they call this Cane Land.

- Did you know that?

- No, sir.

- Did you know that, Jackson?

- Yes, sir.

- Do you know any songs, Jackson?

- Yes, sir. I know some.

Do you know Golden Slippers?

- That's what I been humming.

- Get up here and sing it.

Golden slippers, golden slippers

Oh, them golden slippers

Oh, golden slippers Golden slippers

I don't remember the rest

of it. I know some hymns.

Don't sing them around

me. I can't bear.

Yes, sir.

And another thing. If I die, I  
don't want any preacher near me.

Yes, sir. But who gonna pray over  
you if you don't have a preacher?

I don't want anybody praying over me.

And I don't want my brother  
here or any of his children.

Who you want then?

Just you and Ben and Martha.

And this boy here. And Sarah.

- Sarah can't be there.

- Why?

She's dead.

Don't you want any white  
people there except Horace?

- Is the Overseer white?

- Yeah.

- And the two guards?

- Yeah.

They can come.

It'll not be much of a funeral.

You won't have a preacher...

you don't like hymns, what

kind of funeral will it be?

It's the kind I want.

Now go see how they getting  
along with my coffin. Go on.

Yes, sir.

- That coffin about ready?

- Almost.

Did you know that boy Mr.

Albert Thornton brought out here?

Yes, sir.

- It was me.

- Was it?

- Yes, sir.

- You're the one whose daddy died?

My daddy's dead, too. Stroke.

He got so mad at them

convicts he had a stroke.

Fell over dead.

You think them bastards would

call out and tell us? No.

They went on working, left him lying  
dead there in the cotton fields.

My daddy was 84 when he died.

How old was your daddy?

He was just 32.

Well, we all have to go sometime.

Is it daylight yet?

No, sir.

What time is it?

I don't know, sir.

I got a watch. Look and see there.

**It says it's 11:**

I think it's later than that, though.

Get out of the damn chair.

You hear something in  
that closet in there?

- No, sir.

- I did.

Come out of there,  
you son of a bitch.

You hear me? Give  
you one more chance.

- You got a gun?

- No, sir.

What'll protect us now?  
I need bullets for my gun.  
Got your coffin.  
Where do you want it?  
Put it down here. Right here.  
Jackson says that you worried  
about this being mere cypress wood.  
Well, it's made of  
cypress wood all right.  
Grab hold of the top of it, Jackson.  
- Let me try it out, see if it fits.  
- It's bound to fit.  
Let me be the judge of that, Jackson.  
My Confederate coat. Hold it.  
Help me in there.  
- Don't you want your trousers, too?  
- No.  
- Horace, you got a chew of tobacco?  
- Sure.  
I learned a long time ago.  
Wait for your pillow.  
Here. I got a knife.  
- So what?  
- Thanks.  
You know the convict  
that died last night?  
The one that said he was too sick to  
work? I guess he was telling the truth.  
Was his name Sherman Edwards?  
That's his name. Just  
finished burying him.  
Mr. Soll gone to  
sleep in that coffin.  
Maybe he's dead.  
No, he just asleep.  
He had a lot to drink, you know.  
Well, I'm gonna go.  
I'm wore out.  
- Did you know Sherman Edwards?  
- Sure. I know them all.  
Ain't you sleepy?  
Yes, I am.  
Mr. Soll, can the boy  
go on to sleep now?

You better come on back up here.  
Mr. Soll is dead in his coffin.  
He was all alone in  
his coffin when he died.  
He was. He better get used  
to being alone in there.  
He gonna be alone in  
there for a long time.  
- He dead. Old devil is dead.  
- Is he?  
He sure is. He gone.  
I'm gonna have to go  
get word to Miss Asa.  
But he say he don't  
want her at the funeral.  
Nor his brother.  
And he don't want a  
preacher. Give me a hand here.  
You gonna be the  
one to tell her that?  
Not me. I'm scared of her.  
- I wonder what will happen to me.  
- What do you mean?  
I was paroled to him. They can  
send me back to the pen now.  
- Why don't you take off?  
- Where am I gonna go?  
I'm too old to run.  
He was right and I was wrong.  
He said he was gonna die and he did.  
What time do you think  
we ought to bury him?  
I guess as soon as it's daylight.  
Can't have much of a funeral cause he  
don't want no hymns and no preacher.  
I can say the Lord's Prayer.  
- He didn't say I couldn't do that.  
- No.  
And you could testify.  
- He didn't say you couldn't do that.  
- No.  
I could say that he always  
worked hard. I can say that.  
And I could say he let me be

a trustee. I could say that.  
And he drank a lot of whiskey.  
- You hear something?  
- That was rats, I think.  
This old house full of rats.  
I heard something...  
in that coffin.  
Oh, my God. He's risen from the dead.  
- We thought you was dead.  
- I wasn't dead. I wasn't.  
Maybe you thought I  
was. I'm not dead yet.  
Hand me my gun.  
Sherman Edwards is dead.  
Who the hell is Sherman Edwards?  
Brother of that convict  
got his throat cut.  
- Somebody kill him?  
- No, sir. He just died.  
He told you he was too sick to  
work, but you wouldn't believe him.  
- Who buried him?  
- I did. I bury them all.  
- You thought you were going to bury me.  
- Yes, sir. I did.  
You think I was dead? I wasn't dead.  
I'm never gonna die.  
Tell them to take that  
damn coffin out of here.  
I changed my mind about  
dying. Take it out.  
Yes, sir.  
I knew he wasn't dead.  
I might outlive all of them people.  
Asa and my devilish brother.  
Ben and Jackson. All the damn  
convicts. I might outlive them all.  
- How old are you?  
- Thirteen.  
Maybe I ain't gonna outlive you.  
Let me look at you.  
I never married. I didn't have  
no children I know of anyways.  
- You got a daddy?

- No, sir.  
- What happened to him?  
- He died.  
- You an orphan?  
- No, sir. I have a mama.  
Where the hell is she?  
She's in Houston.  
Be my boy.  
A desert born.  
One minute I think I'm gonna live.  
The next minute, I'm gonna die.  
Come closer to me now. Come here.  
I got money.  
Hidden in the back of  
that closet in a suitcase.  
Now go get it for me so I  
can pay you what I owe you.  
Reward you handsomely besides  
for your kindness to an old man.  
Which one?  
The small one.  
Bring it here.  
- How much money you think I have here?  
- I don't know, sir.  
More than \$10,000 last I  
counted and you're to get half.  
Now reach in there  
and hand me the money.  
There's no money in here, sir.  
Don't lie to me, boy.  
Don't try to fool me.  
- I'm not lying to you, sir.  
- Hand me that goddamn suitcase.  
My God, I've been robbed.  
Call Ben. Call Jackson.  
Call the goddamn Overseer.  
I want all of them  
goddamn convicts searched.  
Someone's robbed me of my  
money. Come here! Boy, come here!  
Don't leave me. Don't ever leave me.  
I don't care about the goddamn money.  
You don't leave me.  
Anyway, the money wasn't

in the goddamn suitcase.

I just remembered

I buried that money.

Out there in one of  
them convict's graves.

Call Ben.

Ben, do you know which convict's  
grave I hid the money in?

I'm gonna pay this  
boy what I owe him.

No, sir.

- Do you read?

- Yes, sir.

Get that paper over there.

Read me the news.

This is an old paper.

It's dated 1865.

It says "Texas can't  
come back into the Union."

Why?

- Because it was in the Confederacy.

- Oh, yes.

Read it to me.

"Yesterday, Gen. Gordon Granger of  
the Union Army took possession...

"of Texas from Confederate  
Lt. Gov. Fletcher Stockdale."

Come closer to me.

Don't let them bury  
me with my own family.

Because my brother and his daughter  
are going to be buried there.

And I don't want to be  
buried by them or near them.

I'd rather have convicts near  
me than that stinking bunch.

"The General, speaking to a subdued  
crowd at Galveston's City Hall said...

"'Texas can't come  
back into the Union.'

"Rights of the citizenship are  
offered only to those individuals...

"who do not own property  
exceeding the value of \$20,000..."



"or possessing more  
than 100 bales of cotton.  
"Meanwhile, 52,000 troops under  
the command of Gen. Sheridan...  
"dispersed throughout the state and along  
the border to enforce martial order...  
"and to restore the authority of the  
United States over the territory of Texas.  
"Gen. Granger..."

Mr. Soll.

He dead.

He dead for sure.

There'll be no more hollering  
and cussing from him now.

Is that all there is to  
dying? Your breath just stops?

Yes. When you go like that.

Do you think Mr. Soll minded dying?

I don't know.

- Do you think my daddy minded dying?

- I don't know.

Ben, he won't let me go.

He minded dying.

I think he minded  
it in the worst way.

I think he did, too.

And I think my daddy did.

That's what worries me.

- Go get Jackson.

- No. I think you better go.

I promised Mr. Soll to sit by  
him with the gun after he died...

- till we got him in his coffin.

- Don't let that bother you.

Look at all the things he promised  
you. He didn't keep one of them.

No. But I'd like to keep  
mine. It'd make me feel better.

How much did the devil owe you?

\$12.50.

One time he said he'd pay me  
\$500, then \$1,000, then \$5,000...  
and a tombstone for my daddy's grave.  
He said a lot of things.

He was always making promises.  
And Miss Asa gonna  
get it all. You'll see.  
Miss Asa!  
They upstairs, sleeping  
off their drunk.  
- Tell Miss Asa I need to see her.  
- Why?  
Mr. Soll is dead.  
I need to know where  
she want him buried at.  
I hope we're doing right, burying him  
out here instead of with his people.  
Well, he said he want  
to be buried here.  
That's all we have to go on.  
He sure has a pretty  
day for his funeral.  
- Anybody else coming, you think?  
- No. This is all there's gonna be.  
Miss Asa, she wouldn't want to come.  
She don't care what we do  
with him. Bury him here...  
or throw him in the  
creek. She don't care.  
Mr. Billy's still drunk.  
Overseer don't want to come.  
It's just us.  
And he don't want no hymns,  
no prayers, and no preachers.  
And he won't have no tombstone.  
Unless she puts one up  
and you know she won't.  
Martha and I went over to his  
family graveyard yesterday evening.  
He said his daddy's tombstone had angels  
all over it and it came from New Orleans.  
- But I couldn't find it.  
- He was lying.  
There wasn't nothing on it. Just a slab  
of marble sticking up with his name on it.  
If the convicts didn't  
keep it weeded over there...  
you wouldn't find it

for the weeds in a week.  
I told her that you were still here,  
stayed all night with him till he died...  
and he still owed you money.  
She said that's your hard luck.  
She'll pay none of his debts.  
I asked her why? How  
would you get back to town?  
She said "walk."  
We'll all be walking, I guess,  
cause she's gonna close the store...  
and take the convicts  
over to her daddy's place.  
She said weeds, the trees and  
the cane can take this land.  
Six months from now you won't even  
be able to tell who was buried here.  
Not my people. Not the  
convicts. Not Mr. Soll.  
The weeds, the trees and  
the cane take everything.  
"Cane Land" it was called once.  
Cane Land it will be again.  
The house will go, the store  
will go, and the graves will go.  
Those with tombstones  
and those without.  
I could sing Golden  
Slippers. He liked that.  
He asked me to sing it once but I  
couldn't remember. But now I can.  
Go ahead. Sing it then.  
Oh, my golden slippers are laid away  
I don't expect to wear  
them till my wedding day  
and my long-tailed  
coat that I love so well  
I'll wear it on the  
chariot in the morning  
And my long white robe  
that I bought last June  
I'm gonna get it changed  
'cause it fit too soon  
And the old gray horse that I used to ride

I'll hitch it to the chariot in the morning  
Oh, dem golden slippers  
Oh, dem golden  
slippers Golden slippers  
Yes, sir.  
The house will go, the store  
will go, and the graves will go.  
Those with tombstones  
and those without.  
So it's goodbye children  
I will have to go where the rain  
don't fall Or the wind don't blow  
And the Ulster coats  
Why you will not need  
When you ride up in the  
chariot In the morning