

1-1-2015

The Match

Marcus Hines

Recommended Citation

Hines, Marcus, "The Match" (2015). *Slave Narrative - Short Stories*. 5.
http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/special_collections_slave_narrative/5

This Short Story is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Collections at Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Slave Narrative - Short Stories by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact repository.library@miami.edu.

The Match

By Marcus Hines

As the sun was rising on Sunday morning, Black Jesse sat staring out of the window, having been awake for hours, unable to sleep. This day was no ordinary day for Black Jesse; as a matter of fact, it was the most important day of his life.

Black Jesse was born a mulatto, having never known his mother, who died while giving birth to him. His father Jesse Bland, was a married, locally respected slave owner with a large plantation. Black Jesse was not treated as a slave, as his father developed a strong bond with his son. He was taught to read and write at an early age, and he was quite an intelligent and well spoken child. Before Black Jesse was born, his father and his mother were deeply in love; however, could not express their companionship openly, for obvious reasons. Black Jesse's father wanted to name his son Jesse Bland Jr., but decided against it because he did not want to draw further attention to his infidelity. He instead named him Black Jesse. His wife, Lettes Bland never expressed her anger to her husband for the pain he obviously caused her but instead kept a daily journal that she carried around at all times.

"I'm sorry Mrs. Bland, but Mr. Bland is not going to make it. We have no idea as to what could cause him to die so suddenly," said Doctor Walker.

"Well, I guess God wanted to call him home," whimpered Mrs. Bland, who was visually shaken up by the loss of her husband. The doctor packed his bag and left the house.

When he was gone, Mrs. Bland stood, walked out of her husband's large bedroom, and down the hall into Black Jesse's room. Black Jesse was unaware of his father's passing, and said to Mrs. Bland, "Have you seen my father? He said he would bring me some mangos from town this afternoon."

Mrs. Bland ignored Black Jesse's question, replying with a stern look on her face, "What the hell is you doing in this house boy?" Confused, Black Jesse stared at Mrs. Bland, waiting for some sign of a smile as an indicator of a joke; however, a smile never came. "Do you hear me talking to you boy? Is you stupid? I said, what the hell is you doing in this house?"

Black Jesse replied softly, "Why, this is my room Mrs. Bland. I was waiting for my father."

Mrs. Bland paused, then slapped Black Jesse across the mouth. She stared him right in the eye and said, "Listen here Black Jesse, you don't have a father no more, and you for damn sure don't have a room, and I say you belong out in the field with the rest of the niggers." She shouted, "You ain't no different than none of them! Mr. Bland is dead and you will soon be too, if you don't leave this house and get out in the field with your kind."

A tear rolled down Black Jesse's cheek, as he stood in total disbelief of the what was happening. He left the house and headed to the field, drying his eyes on his way out of the door. He thought to himself that perhaps Mrs. Bland was just very upset at the passing of Mr. Bland and she would calm down later.

Shortly after venturing into the field, Black Jesse saw a horse cantering down the long drive towards the house. He walked back toward the house to see who was arriving, hoping deep in his heart that it was his father, but knowing that it couldn't be. It was Mr. Richardson, the neighbor. Mr. Richardson was a very short, frail, peculiar looking white man. He wore huge glasses and overalls that always appeared to be two sizes too big for him. From the field, Black Jesse could see Mrs. Bland greet Mr. Richardson with a kiss. She looked up and noticed Black Jesse staring and the two of them with his eyes wide and mouth open.

"Well just what the hell are you looking at boy?" asked Mr. Richardson. He quickly walked over to Black Jesse, who easily stood 10 inches taller than him. Before Mr. Richardson could say another word, Black Jesse struck him in his face with all of his might, knocking Mr. Richardson out cold.

Mrs. Bland ran over frantically shouting at Black Jesse, "leave him alone!."

Enraged, Black Jesse ignored her and continued to pound his fist into Mr. Richardson's bloody face. "I'll kill you," mumbled Black Jesse, with a burning glow of hatred in his eyes.

Mrs. Bland struggled to pull Black Jesse off of Mr. Richardson, but was only successful when Black Jesse's complied. "Have you lost your mind boy?" she said in a frightened tone with the fear of God in her eyes.

The spectacle had drawn the other slaves from their work at the sound of shouting. They stood at the edges of the field and stared out in amazement. They had never seen a colored man strike a white man before.

Mrs. Bland helped Mr. Richardson to his feet, and she unknowingly dropped her diary to the ground. As she walked Mr. Richardson's almost lifeless body into the house, she screamed at Black Jesse, "I will deal with you when I return. You're a dead nigger when I return, you hear me!" Black Jesse stood there motionless, with tears of rage in his eyes and blood on his fist from the beating he just delivered to the clearly outmatched white man.

One of the eldest field slaves, Uncle Toby, walked over to Black Jesse and said, "What's the matter with you, boy? They is gon' kill you for what you done to that white man!" Uncle Toby was almost 70 years old and still picked cotton in the fields. He believed that as soon as he was no longer able to pick cotton his master would kill him, as he would no longer be of any use. Out of fear for his life, everyday he worked the fields, sun up to sun down.

"Listen to me boy, I don't know what's gotten into you, but you stay away from the rest of the good niggers over here. Don't bring that trouble on to nobody else but you."

Black Jesse ignored the old man, noticing the diary that Mrs. Bland has dropped. He picked it up and began to read. As he read through the last few pages of the diary, he quickly realized that his father was indeed dead, and that Mrs. Bland had poisoned his father with the assistance of Mr. Richardson. Shocking Uncle Toby and the rest of the slaves, he ran all the way to the end of the field and behind the shed that was behind the barn. Black Jesse wrapped the diary in a rag and hid it underneath his father's old tools.

Infuriated, Black Jesse grabbed a hammer and a couple of screwdrivers and walked back to the field with the rest of the slaves. When he arrived, none of the slaves would talk to him, out of fear of being disciplined along with Black Jesse for the actions he committed earlier.

Black Jesse walked over to a shaded tree and sat down underneath it. This was the same shaded tree that he and his father used to sit under, where they had many talks about manhood and what the journey of life would one day bring Black Jesse. He recalled that his father told him that no matter what situation life threw at him, he could always think his way into positive circumstances. He recalled his father once saying, "To them you're my slave, but to me, you're my son."

Meanwhile, inside of the house Mrs. Bland frantically paced back and forth. "That nigger is dead. No, I'm gon' keep him alive and make him suffer for what he did to you."

Mr. Richardson could barely speak after the beating he had just received. He just nodded in approval of Mrs. Bland's statements. Mr. Richardson sat up, his face continuing to swell.

"We might need to get medical attention," uttered Mr. Richardson. Mrs. Bland agreed, and started to gather their belongings. As she walked into the kitchen to tell one of the slaves to hitch up the wagon, the door burst open!

Black Jesse, along with a slave named Little Joe, armed with a hammer and screwdrivers, grabbed Mrs. Bland and Mr. Richardson. Little Joe was a young slave who would often get beaten more than the other slaves. He stood about six feet tall, but got the nickname little because of his small frame.

"Get your hands off me, nigger!" shouted Mrs. Bland.

Mr. Richardson whimpered, "Please don't kill me boy!"

Black Jesse shouted in a baritone voice, "Both of you, shut your mouths and be quiet if you want to live."

The room became silent quickly. Little Joe, looked proudly at Black Jesse and flashed a smile, excited by the power that he and Black Jesse possessed at this moment.

Black Jesse said, "My friend here and I would like to be free."

Mrs. Bland laughed, "Nigger, you two are crazy, get back in the field now and I will forget that this ever happened. If you don't, I promise you there will be hell to pay."

Black Jesse slapped her across the mouth, just as she had done to him earlier. "Listen to me, Ms. Bland. My father is dead. It makes no difference to me whether anyone in this room lives, including myself. I will kill you and not think twice about it."

"Now, I don't have the money to buy my freedom, but I do have the ability to earn the money to buy my freedom. I need you to sign this here paper and allow me to work for money. I need you to state that I will pay you \$40 for this good deed of yours at the end of this contract."

Little Joe was confused. He had not asked Black Jesse what his plan was before he agreed to accompany him. Black Jesse had simply walked over to him in the field and said, "Come with me if you want to be free today." Little Joe did not think twice before following Black Jesse.

Little Joe asked, "Why is you gon' pay her?"

Black Jesse replied, "I'm not. But if I walk around with this paper, it has to look believable. No white folk is going to believe that Mrs. Bland here just gonna let some nigger work for money without getting nothing out of it."

Mr. Richardson shouted, "You'll never get away with this, boy. Just stop and we will forget about everything."

Black Jesse held the screwdriver to Mr. Richardson's throat. "You will do as I say white man. You are my slave now."

He thrust the paper at Mrs. Bland, who quickly threw the pen down in an act of refusal.

Mr. Richardson shouted, "My God, do as the nigger says!"

Mrs. Bland thought to herself, "*As soon as these niggers leave, I will just send out the slavecatchers. They will be picked up and hung within an hour.*" She picked up the pen. "Ok, I will do it." She wrote the contract just as instructed by Black Jesse.

As soon as she signed it, he jammed the screwdriver into the eye of Mr. Richardson. As Mr. Richardson screamed, he dug the tool deeper and deeper into Richardson's skull.

Mrs. Bland screamed, "Oh my God you've killed him!"

Little Joe stood motionless, as if he were frozen stiff. He could not believe what he just witnessed, and suddenly, he was no longer excited by the power that the two of them possessed. In fact, he was deeply afraid.

"What have you done man?" Little Joe cried with tears of fear pouring from his eyes..
"We ain't gon' get away with this! They's gon' hang us for this. No. They gon' hang you for this.
You did this. I ain't have nothing to do with this; you hear me Mrs. Bland. I's a good nigger!"

Black Jesse grabbed the weeping Little Joe by the throat and struck him in the head with the hammer. "Fine. You die too," said Black Jesse, as he continued to bash Little Joe's crushed skull. Mrs. Bland watched in horror. Black Jesse grabbed her by the wrist and tells her, "Come with me." He walked her all the way to the back of the shed where he hid her diary.

He picked up the diary, opened it, and turned to the last page. He handed it to her and told her, "Write here that you are thinking about killing yourself because of what you did to my father."

Mrs. Bland shouted, "I will not!"

Black Jesse slapped her to the ground and grabbed the gun that his father kept in the shed, picking up a can of gasoline with the other hand. As he pointed the gun at Mrs. Bland, he doused her in gasoline and said, "Bitch, you are going to die here today, one way or the other. How you die is up to you."

Mrs. Bland screeched, "No please! No!"

Black Jesse replied very calmly, "We are going to play a little game. You have 15 seconds to make a choice, or I will choose for you. Write in the diary, and I will bless your soul with a bullet to your head. But if you refuse, I will burn you, put you out with water, rip your teeth out with pliers, cut your fingers off, then burn you again, in no particular order." Mrs. Bland knew he was serious. As Black Jesse began counting down from 15, she picked up the pen and wrote as he instructed on the last page.

Black Jesse spoke in a whimpering tone, "You killed the only man I've ever loved. When I was young, just a boy, I believed that because I was half Black, that I would be better off 100% White. I was confused, because I was green with envy for those who had a White, untainted bloodline. But my father looked me in the eyes and told me that I was wrong. He told me, *Son, it is I who should be ashamed of himself; not because I am White, but because I let myself believe that there was ever a difference between the humanity of race.*"

Mrs. Bland continued to write, ignoring Black Jesse. The air in the room became very chilly. Black Jesse could no longer hold in his tears. He burst out in anguish, "My father has only beaten me one time in my entire life! It was the day I told him that I wished I was White like him. He beat me and told me if he ever heard me say that again, that he would kill me! The nicest man in the world, who had never even raised his voice at me, beat me. I was too young to understand why at the time, but now I see. My father was not perfect. After all, he owned all these slaves on this here plantation. He wasn't perfect, but he was a good man, and you took him from me."

Black Jesse dried his eyes and said, "My father taught me how to read, write and most importantly how to be a man. Not a Black man, but a man! He told me that everyone would not see me as their equal, and unfortunately it was my job to prove I was equal in every way. He told me that one day, my struggles would pave the way for other negroes to not have to deal with people like you, Mrs. Bland. Even though you were an evil woman, my father still loved you dearly. He still loved you as though you loved him too. He loved you just as he loved me! I have no family, no life outside of this plantation! You ended my life when you ended his!"

Black Jesse lowered his tone. "And here I am, in the position to end your life, but I won't. Just as my father would still love you, I too still love you, despite the evil that you done Mrs. Bland."

In the blink of an eye, Mrs. Bland stabbed Black Jesse in the leg with the pen. Black Jesse dropped the gun, and Mrs. Bland charged at him, screaming, "I'm gonna kill you nigger." She stabbed Black Jesse in the shoulder and bent over to pick up the gun that Black Jesse dropped.

In an act of desperation Black Jesse struck the match and threw it at Mrs. Bland.

Mrs. Bland screamed, as did Black Jesse. He watched her burn, watched as the fire spread to the dry leaves and wood in the shed. As it became fully engulfed, Black Jesse walked very slowly back to the house and neatly placed the diary on Mr. and Mrs. Bland's bed. He walked down the long drive with the contract for his labor in his pocket with Mrs. Bland's screams still echoing across the fields.