



The Hanging Party

THE CROWD OF MEN MOVED SLOWLY AND STEADILY TOWARD SHERBURN'S house, shouting and screaming, "Hang him! Hang him!" Children were pushed out of the way. Women's faces appeared at every window, eager to see what the crowd would do. Many women and girls were crying, frightened by the thought of what would happen next.

The men stood shoulder to shoulder in front of the fence surrounding Sherburn's front yard. "Tear down the fence! Tear down the fence!" they shouted. Then came the sound of broken wood as the fence was torn apart, and the crowd moved into the front yard.

At that moment, Sherburn stepped out onto the roof of his front porch with a large gun in his hand. He stood perfectly calm and still. He spoke not a word. The crowd was suddenly silent, and those in the front slowly began to move back.

Sherburn never said a word—just stood there looking down. The stillness made every man in the crowd look uncomfortable. Sherburn moved his eyes slowly along the faces in the crowd, and whenever he stopped to look a man directly in the eye that man quickly looked down at the ground. No man could look directly into Sherburn's face. Then

Sherburn laughed; not a pleasant laugh but the kind of laugh that makes you feel like you've been eating bread with sand in it.

Finally, Sherburn spoke. "The idea of *you* hanging anyone! This makes me laugh. The idea of any of you thinking that you had the courage to hang a *man*! A *man* is perfectly safe in the hands of ten thousand of your kind—at least in the daytime.

"Do I know you? I know you very well. I was born and raised in the South and I've lived in the North, so I know both kinds of people. The average man has no courage. Your newspapers call you a brave people so often that you think that you are brave. Why don't your courts of law hang men for murder? Because they're afraid that the man's friends will shoot them in the back, in the dark—and this is just what they *would* do.

"The courts always allow murderers to go free. Then a *man* goes in the night, with one hundred cowards at his back, and hangs the murderer. Your mistake is that you didn't bring a *man* with you; that's one mistake. Your second mistake is that you didn't come in the dark. You brought *part* of a man—Buck Harkness, there—without him, you wouldn't have come at all.

"You didn't want to come. The average man doesn't like trouble and danger. *You* don't like trouble and danger. But if only half a man—like Buck Harkness, there—shouts, 'Hang him! Hang him!' you're afraid not to follow him, afraid you'll be seen as the cowards you are. So you follow behind this half a man, shouting about the big things that you're going to do. The pitiful thing about men in an angry crowd is that they don't fight with the courage that's born in them, but with courage that's borrowed from a leader. But a crowd without a real man as a leader is beneath pitifulness. Now the thing for you to do is to go home and hide in a hole. If any hanging is to be done, it will be done in the dark. Now *leave*—and take your half-a-man with you." With these words he lifted his gun and aimed it at the crowd.

The crowd moved away from him suddenly. Men began to run in all directions. Buck Harkness turned and ran after the others. I could have stayed if I wanted but I didn't want to.

That night we gave our show, but only about twelve people came to see it. The people didn't understand the show and laughed all the time. That made the duke very angry. Everyone left before the show had ended, except for one boy who was asleep. The duke said that the people were not smart enough for Shakespeare. He said that he knew the type of show that would please them. The next morning he got some large sheets of paper and some black paint and made new signs. This is what he wrote on the signs:

AT THE COURT HOUSE
for 3 nights only
World-Famous Actors
David Garrick, the Younger,
and
Edmund Kean, the Elder
In the Exciting Play
"The King's Cameleopard"
Charge 50 cents
WOMEN AND CHILDREN NOT ADMITTED

"There," said the duke, "if that last line doesn't bring them to the show, I don't know Arkansas!"