



BAD MAN

by S. Randall COLLEY ©2020

Bad Man

By Randall Colley c 2020

Moses Atwater was a very large and very strong 40-year-old black man who always wore overalls. He worked at what the locals called the Packing House. He stacked 60 pound boxes of oranges and grapefruit 6 days a week.

It was 1948, in the Deep South. Oranges were king in Florida. If you were a black man, you worked in the groves hoeing around trees or picking, packing, and stacking fruit boxes.

White women and their daughters, and granddaughters worked in the packing house sectioning fruit.

Moses's uncle got hurt on a tractor and could not work, so he let Moses use his beat up old pick up truck to go back and forth to work.

He was driving home on an old back road when he caught a glimpse of something running in the swamp. He stopped his truck in the middle of the road.

He heard a little girl screaming and saw something large and black chasing the child.

Moses ran into the swamp toward the tiny blonde child who looked to be about three years old. She was running and screaming in terror.

Moses saw it was not a black dog as he first thought. It was a 10 foot alligator snapping his huge jaws and white teeth just a few feet behind the child.

Moses ran toward the alligator hoping to distract him away from the child. He picked up a wooden limb and hit the snapping alligator who had now turned his attention toward him. He hit the alligator several times until it retreated back into swamp.

Moses scooped up the tiny, terrified, screaming child in his big arms and carried her toward the clearing where there was an old cracker shack.

The little girl had wrapped her arms around his neck so tight that he could hardly breathe.

He heard a loud boom and saw a lady holding a shotgun, who had just fired a warning shot into the ground. Her hands were shaking as she reloaded.

The mother was screaming hysterically, "Turn my baby loose, turn loose my child.

" She was aiming the shotgun at him and kept screaming, "Put my child down, put my child down."

He tried to put the little girl down, but she held onto him.

The little girl kept saying, "Bad man, bad man, bad man" over and over.

He was finally able to put the little girl down.

She ran to her mother saying, "Bad man, bad man."

Moses tried to tell the mother that it was an alligator that was chasing her daughter, but she would have no part of that. She said he was lying and accused him of trying to kidnap her child.

A group of men walked up to the house to see what was going on. And find out why a truck was stopped in the middle of the road.

The mother tells the men that she and the little girl live there and her husband is a truck driver and he will not be back for a week.

The mother tells the men that this black man tried to kidnap her little girl.

Moses pleaded with the men telling them that it was an alligator that was chasing the girl in the swamp.

The mother said, "No, that he must have taken her from the front steps."

The little girl kept saying, "Bad man, bad man, over and over."

One of the men hit Moses in the head with an ax handle. They continued to kick and beat him until he was unconscious.

It took all three of them to lift Moses into the back of the pick up truck. They hogtied his hands and feet and took him to the county jail.

JAILHOUSE

Moses was in the cell at the jail. He had been badly beaten. The sheriff interrogated him about why was he trying to take that young girl.

The deputies were angry with Moses, and they told him that he was going to the electric chair, if the town people don't hang him first.

He kept telling them about the alligator, but no one would believe him.

The Sheriff said, "Ain't nobody.... saw...no alligator.... all they saw was you trying to steal that little girl, for God knows what reason."

LOCAL BAR

A week later the little girl's father came home from truck driving. He was drinking heavily at the local bar, and he was drunk and angry. There were 10 or 12 men with him drinking at the bar, and they soon became an angry, drunken mob.

Someone had already burned down Moses's 75 year old mother's home a few days before. Tension and fear were high in the small black community.

JAILHOUSE

A deputy tells the sheriff, that Bob the bartender just called and said, there is trouble brewing at the bar. He said, a liquored up mob, is coming our way, and they want vengeance.

The Sheriff had political aspirations and did not want to lose a prisoner to a lynch mob.

The sheriff went to Moses's cell with two deputies. They had four white striped Trustee uniforms. The sheriff told Moses and the other three black prisoners to change into the uniforms.

The deputies took the four black men out the back to the side of the building and gave them shovels. The black prisoners are terrified.

The deputy asked the sheriff, "Ain't you going to handcuff them boys? What if they run off?" The sheriff said, "Well... if they run off, then I guess they gonna have to deal with that mob". I don't think them prisoners are going anywhere."

The sheriff told Moses that he better start digging," dig me a hole boy, a big deep hole."

A deputy came up with an arm full of long pipes.

SHERIFF

Lamar "That's irrigation pipe you moron." The deputy said, "but that's all the pipe I could find."

The mob was approaching the Jailhouse with torches and guns. One man was carrying a rope, which was the anchor rope from his fishing boat.

The prisoners started digging a hole. One of the deputies put a water hose in the hole and it was filling up with water as they dug deeper.

SHERIFF

The high Sheriff L. B. Williams was a portly man. He always wore a big, black gun belt, with a pearl handle 45 pistol, that he claimed was given to him by General Patton himself.

He was standing at the top of the steps in front of the Jailhouse as the angry mob came up the street.

He cut a large plug of chewing tobacco with his Barlow knife and shoved it into the side of his mouth. Now he was ready to meet the mob.

THE MOB AND THE LITTLE GIRLS FATHER
Billy Ray, was quite drunk and demanded that the sheriff turn that child molester over to them. He pleads his case to the sheriff. That, "Son of a bitch tried to kidnap my baby girl."

SHERIFF

You boys need to go home. The prisoner ain't here, I sent him to Tallahassee this morning as ordered by the governor.

THE MOB

A man with a rope shouted you're lying. He's in there. Bring him out or we are coming in to get him.

SHERIFF

The sheriff told them that they could send one person inside and they could look for themselves.

PRISONERS

Prisoners were digging a hole next to the building, piling mud and dirt as high as they could trying to not be seen in the darkness.

One of the men came out of the jail and said, "Ain't no black prisoners in there."

SHERIFF

I told you I sent him to Tallahassee this morning by order of the governor. You ain't hanging nobody today, because there ain't nobody to hang.

Some of the men had spotted the black prisoners who were now up to their waist in a hole and knee deep in water.

"What about them sheriff, how do we know he ain't one of them?"

"Because they are Trustees. See those white striped uniforms. That means they are trusted prisoners they've been here a long time. They ain't him, I told you, I sent him to Tallahassee."

SHERIFF

The sheriff spit tobacco juice in front of the two men who were walking toward the prisoners. They turned back.

One man shouted, "Why do you have prisoners digging a hole in the middle of the night?"

SHERIFF

"Them boys over there are fixing the plumbing to the Jailhouse. Don't go messing with them. I want to flush my toilet tomorrow, unless you want to hang one of them and then you boys can get down there in that septic tank water and finish digging that hole."

See that pipe over there, they got to dig that hole and fix my septic tank tonight. Now, you need to pack up, and go home.

The prisoners were digging as fast as they could throwing muddy water everywhere. Their white uniforms were covered in mud.

THE MOB

Johnny looked over at the pile of pipe and questioned the sheriff, "That looks like irrigation pipe, I don't think that's plumbing pipe."

The sheriff said, "Johnny I'm using the pipe that we have right now, I'll send a deputy over tomorrow with a purchase order to your hardware store and you can sell us the pipe that we need, but right now, I'm going to use what I have, unless you want me to take the county's business somewhere else."

Johnny did not want to make the sheriff too angry and lose the jail business.

The men were drunk and getting tired and it was getting late in the evening, they had lost the enthusiasm for a hanging, and they all left.

THE TRIAL

The jury was an all-white jury. It was the middle of summer and no air conditioning. The courthouse was very hot and the people were using hand fans and handkerchiefs to dab and wipe the sweat.

MOTHER

The mother was on the witness stand and told her story about what happened. She explained how she heard her daughter scream, and she came out the front door and found Moses had picked up her daughter and was taking her to his truck.

When asked, to identify the man that tried to kidnap her daughter. She pointed at Moses and said, without hesitation, "That man right there, he tried to steal my little baby."

DEFENSE

The defense attorney asked the mother, how did her 3 year old daughter get outside? She said, "He must have taken her from the porch steps where she was sitting."

She said, that she went inside to stir her beans and was only gone for a few minutes.

He asked her, if she was drunk and asleep when your daughter went into the swamp. She denied that she was drunk, she stated, that she had drunk some elderberry wine, that her husband had made, but was not drunk.

The defense brought up an incident when a deputy had found her daughter in the middle of the road six months earlier and then found her passed out on the floor. She blamed it on the medication she was taking.

The prosecutor was grandstanding and he wanted to inflame the jury by letting them see the little tiny blonde haired girl. He let the father bring her into the courtroom.

To everyone's surprise she ran straight to Moses, jumped in his lap and wrapped her arms around his neck giving him a big hug.

She kept repeating, "Bad man, bad man, bad man."

The mother's expression was puzzled by her daughter's reaction.

The Prosecutor demanded that they remove the child from the courtroom and asked the judge to instruct the jury to disregard what they had seen.

"Obviously the little girl has been traumatized and is in shock."

The prosecutor was trying to make the jury un-see, what they had just seen with their own eyes.

The jurors gasp at first and then began talking among themselves.

The judge had to use his gavel. Calling, "Order in the court, order in the court."

The jury deliberated for just 30 minutes and found Moses guilty of kidnapping a child.

The judge sentenced him to the electric chair and placed him on death row in Raiford State prison.



RAIFORD PRISON DEATH ROW

One year later.

Raiford prison housed the inmates that were sentenced to die, in a secure section of the prison called "Death Row." There were 6 men on death row, 5 black and one white. The white prisoner was sentenced to die for killing both his parents with a hammer.

The warden came to Moses's cell and gave him his divorce papers.

RAIFORD PRISON DEATH ROW

Two years later.

The warden came to Moses's cell to inform him that his mother had died; that he would not be able to attend her funeral.

RAIFORD PRISON DEATH ROW

Moses was scheduled to be executed in 2 weeks. He would be taken to the "Death House," the place where they kept the electric chair called "Old Sparky." Moses was reading his Bible when his cell door opened and the warden told him to pack up his things with no explanation.

FRONT GATE AT THE PRISON

The jailer handed Moses a paper bag with the rest of his belongings and told him he was free to go.

Moses walked out of the front gate of the prison not knowing what happened.

LITTLE GIRL'S MOTHER

The little girl's mother was standing by a car with Moses's defense attorney. She had tears in her eyes. Moses always had faith and knew that some day the truth would set him free.

The mother was sobbing and crying, she said, "It was her birthday, she was 6 years old. She got a puppy." The puppy wandered into the swamp. She has been afraid of the swamp since that day and she never went near it. But she went into the swamp to find her puppy."

"Oh Lord, no, not your little girl..." Moses began to cry.

I should have believed you that day. But I was drinking and couldn't let people know I was a bad mother, but I knew... I knew when I saw her run to you in the courtroom.

And I knew she was saying, "Black man, black man" not "bad man". I knew then you were telling the truth, but that prosecutor told me that she was confused and she must have thought you were someone else.

The hunters found her shoe in the swamp, three days later. "She's gone." The End.

MAKE A POEM
WRITE A STORY
MAKE A DRAWING
MAKE A ZINE
EVERYDAY

