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PARABLE:
MEANS OF DEFENSE

Chapter 1

Maple carefully peeked out her window as the growing mob of angry colored men and women gathered in front of her home. The only thing stopping them from reaching her was the militant organization in the colored section of Haven County called the Black Morse Men. Dozens of them stood on guard, waiting for instructions from their leader, Aaru, on how to handle the situation.

Despite her white skin, Maple's presence had been tolerated for many years by the colored community of Haven County, but after the recent beating and killing of two unsuspecting black men in the white borders the night before, they were furious, and Maple represented the easiest outlet to vent their frustrations.

"Just let them have her," Aaru's second-in-command, Leason, said to Aaru when they were in private. "I don't know why it matters so much about Maple anyway. She's just another old white lady that don't care nothing 'bout us!"

"There's history to protect, Leason," Aaru answered.

"Our fathers and mothers wanted her safe. She has nowhere else to go."

"Come on, Aaru! Do you see that growing crowd of people? They *will* turn on us if we don't give up somethin' for what happened last night!"

Aaru walked away from Leason, confused about what to do. He looked at Maple, trapped in her home. Maple stared back at him with worried eyes. She had repeatedly told him the story of how she ended up living on this side of town. Knowing that history, Aaru never imagined this day would come.

Chapter 2

Nearly four decades earlier, the Black Morse Men did not exist. In those days, Maple was a bright, happy and young housewife with two young children, Bradley and William, ages

8 and 6. She had married her high school sweetheart, James, right after they graduated.

James had a very successful construction company and was responsible for much of the work down in the white sections of Haven County.

It was an early evening, no different than any other during the week. Maple set the table for dinner, as James and the kids watched TV in the living room.

Outside, there was suddenly a loud crash. From the kitchen window, Maple could see that a car had driven into a light post and was smoking from the engine.

There were two passengers in the front seat, but from Maple's position, she could not make out their faces. She took off her apron and was about to see if anybody was injured, but James stopped her.

"No! Wait here," he said as he put on his jacket.

James was not the only concerned citizen. Many of the neighbors had gone outside to check out the situation as well. Maple thought nothing of it and returned to set the table, but then she heard her neighbors shouting among each other. She hurried back to the kitchen window to see what was happening.

In the midst of all the commotion was a young black face that had likely escaped the accident with no injury, but had no good sense to be on this side of town at this time of night. Still sitting in the crashed car was a young white girl. Maple thought about running outside to rescue James from the trouble she foresaw about to happen, but it was too late. One of Maple's neighbors, and James' best friend, Sal, was angry that this colored kid had been alone in the car with a white girl, and worse, got them in an accident.

After a heated exchange of words, Sal punched the black boy in the stomach, and pushed him to the ground. If Maple were out there, she would have told the kid to stay down, but that's not what happened. He got up to fight back, and as soon

as he did, it was as if the entire neighborhood of men joined in to beat on the black boy – James included.

Maple's children wanted to watch, but she ordered them to stay in the living room. Had they seen what Maple saw, they might have been left traumatized. The men punched and kicked the boy who unsuccessfully tried to protect his body and head. They took off their belts and beat him with their buckles. Others joined and brought bats and sticks and punished the boy in a way he did not deserve. He eventually lay motionless in the middle of the street; they spit on him and laughed.

The entire neighborhood watched as a few of the men dragged the body out of sight.

It was the grossest display of inhumanity that Maple had ever witnessed. Her heart broke. She would always note those gruesome minutes that passed as the moments she fell out of love.

James slowly walked back to the house. There was blood on his hands and clothes. He walked into the kitchen and glanced at Maple with sorrow in his eyes.

Chapter 3

Police questioned everybody, but Maple's entire community protected itself. Neighbors acted as if nothing had happened; and it was understood that, if asked, nobody had seen anything, heard anything or even cared, because it was a colored boy who was missing. For that reason, it soon became another missing person's case that might soon be forgotten. Yet that colored boy had a name: Lonnie Samuels.

Among the black community, there was an unspoken understanding that somebody in the white section of Haven County knew something. None of Lonnie's family, friends or co-workers had seen him after the morning he went missing, and it seemed too convenient for him to disappear without a trace. Everybody knew that many of the young black men and white young girls often snuck away together despite the tensions

among the adults; so it was probable that Lonnie had been involved with a white girl that gave him more than he could handle. But there was no proof, and generally, because it was a colored boy missing, there was very little faith that the truth would ever be discovered.

Often, over the next weeks, James and Maple would look at each other, and for a second, it would seem like he would want to talk about what happened, but then he would look away. Between them, they stopped talking altogether. There was nothing to say.

For two young, black lawyers, none of this was acceptable. Cain Winter and Jefferson Johnson began a campaign that would seek to stand up and represent their community against such things ever happening again.

It was the first organization of its kind in Haven County. They called themselves the Black Morse Men.

Cain and Jefferson had been friends since they were children, and together they came up with the name and mission. It was not long before they made an official announcement of their existence, welcoming those in their community to join in the fight for their rights. They promised to offer structure, discipline, and most important, justice. They started taking public donations and rented an old office in the heart of the community to use as their headquarters. Drove of volunteers appeared at their door, ready to do whatever was asked of them to make things better.

This all seemed great, but the reality was not as hopeful. They had no leads to know what happened to Lonnie, and they knew that if they could not deliver on this first case, the Black Morse Men would be short-lived.

They sat in one of the rooms of the Morse Men headquarters one afternoon discussing this fact, when one of the men who'd taken on the role of their secretary and assistant, knocked on the door.

“Uh, you guys? We have a visitor,” the assistant said.

“If it’s any media, we’re not talking to anybody right now,” Cain answered.

“No, it’s not media.” Turning to wave the person closer, it was Maple.

Cain and Jefferson sat up in their chairs. They were shocked to see a white face in their office. “She says she has something to tell you,” the assistant concluded.¹

Maple wore a large scarf, dark glasses and brown leather gloves. In public, she needed to hide her skin color. Had anybody known she was visiting the Black Morse Men, she would be in trouble – from both sides of Haven County. She had taken a huge risk to visit, and both Cain and Jefferson acknowledged that fact. They offered Maple a seat. After introductions and pleasantries, Maple began to share.

“I saw the entire thing. That colored boy...Lonnie, and a girl from my neighborhood, named Meagan. They got into a car accident just outside my home. They crashed into a light post. I don’t know who was driving and I don’t know what they was doing together, but when Lonnie got out of the car, there was arguing, and then there was fighting.”

“Who was fighting, Lonnie and Meagan?” Jefferson asked.

“No. It was my neighbor, Sal, and Lonnie. They exchanged punches, and then...everyone just...joined in. With sticks, bats, belts...They just kept hitting and kicking him. He didn’t stand a chance.”

¹ THE BEST SURPRISES: The best types of surprises are the ones that you did not even think possible when you woke up in the morning. Making a discovery or getting help in places that you would have never imagined, and in ways you could never have planned for.

It is good to remember that this is possible when you are doing good work, but appear trapped or logic does not seem to support your success. You may be past due for the best type of surprise.

Never judge a path by the things you expect when you plan it, but in walking that path, the things that actually happen.