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EDITED BY

DAVID MARTIN

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Trade

DESHAE E. LOTT

Despite night's darkness, Charlie's bare feet rapidly pounded the path to Craven Hole, a private natural swimming pool in the woods 200 yards from the white-washed wooden farm house he called home. Eluding stumbles over twigs and vines or collisions into imposing trees, he had cultivated perfect muscle memory for propelling himself from home to the bluff — banked pool and back. Sometimes, his run would extend a mile past Craven Hole, as he retrieved, per parental directives, something like a bag of flour or a sack of sugar from the trading place. Those dutiful races for supplies only heightened his muscle memory to and from one of his favorite places, Craven Hole, where he regularly disrobed and jumped into its 5-feet deep water. The water comforted him both during his swim, as well as, after, when his damp skin and the night air created a natural air conditioner when he raced back home. Charlie, habitually, ran full speed toward Craven Hole and, whenever he could, made a full stop there: pausing his private race and resting from family responsibilities to commune with God and Self and Nature and any family members joining him. At 90, Charlie still returns to Craven Hole, and so do the others, following familial footsteps.

My paternal great-grandmother and Lott-family matriarch, Dale, married and child-bearing by 13, in her 90s still visited Craven Hole playground and school ground with her ten children. Before the pump-well and bathtub arrived in the farmhouse, the nature-fresh-scent in Dale's laundry never came from powders or sprays or pods or pacs or dryer sheets. She'd waddle down the front porch steps, holding a basket of clothes, washboard, and soap all piled so high that in her arms it rose above her full height, 5 feet. Placing the basket on

the ground, she returned up the steps and then back down again: this time with an infant in her arms. Basket, baby, and momma were enroute to Craven Hole where clothes and bodies would be soaped up, scrubbed down, and rinsed off. In a monotonous quotidian survival rhythm, she'd carry the youngest baby a few feet, backtrack for the basket of laundry supplies, carry the basket a few feet, and backtrack for the child. Part calisthenics, such repetitions in Dale's task-laden, pre-sunrise to post-sundown routines afforded her rare respites when she could sit a spell (apron still on) reading "true stories" in pulp magazines. The children, adhering to their mother's model, learned not to deem their efforts in nature as too perilous or too arduous or too troublesome. Albeit, the boys sometimes mumbled about garden duties, ill-favored among chores compared to hunting near or fishing at Craven Hole. For this farming family of modest financial means, life involved adhering to schedules with the discipline that survival demanded, adapting to one's environment innovatively, and unearthing various forms of nourishment from even its more meager returns.

For Dale Lott's family, Craven Hole served both as a haven from duties and a welcome conduit for completing them. There the children felt great joy cultivating their skills for cooperative and careful engagement with the landscape: simple joys like skinny dipping and those harder won, like discovering between house and hole their nature-made candy, honey. Swiftly, each of Dale Lott's sons mastered adeptness for the meticulous, risky, and reward-driven process of finding and collecting honey. They noted how bees arrived to water at the creek that fed the Craven Hole, Bluff Hole, and Middle Hole. Afterward, the bees would wing their way over hills and through valleys from the creek to their beehive. By foot, the boys followed their flight path. Sometimes, the bees entered the tree harboring their hive through a high hole, sometimes a low one. Either way, when a thirst-quenched bee entered a tree, the boys identified their target. To deter any swarming attacks, near the honeybees' nest, they built

a fire whose smoke sedated any bees that did not flee the fumes. Next, pulling a cross-cut saw back-and-forth and thrusting an axe, the children carved on the tree to locate and extract the honeycomb. They subsequently and immediately chewed pieces of the honeycomb, as if it were bubble gum. That treat would be followed by a sweeter indulgence. Momma Dale would bake hot biscuits and present butter churned from the cow's milk, the perfect bottom layer to the newly collected raw honey.

My paternal grandfather, Alton, was the premature second son of Dale, her third oldest child, and an elder brother to aforementioned Charlie. As the other Lott progeny would do wherever their commitments situated them, Alton transplanted his beloved Alabama "roots" when work took him two states over. Although he abstained from alcohol, gaming, and the belligerent language in which some kin indulged, Alton cultivated in his own son a passion for his cherished Cullman County, Alabama, traditions. For example, on his house's lot in a Louisiana neighborhood, he set up beehives and a garden. He located new hunting and fishing spots a short car drive rather than an overland romp away. He loved his family deeply and worked diligently — just as his mother modeled. And, by car or by train, as often as Alton could, he, his wife, and their children visited Dale of Cullman County at the family farm, Crane Hill, and enjoyed together there its surrounding woods with valleys and bluffs and Craven Hole.

Locating Craven Hole using Lott family muscle-memory is easy. Finding it on a map is much more difficult. Trade, Alabama, so named for a small shack at which the fairly penniless farmers convened to trade goods, the same shack barefoot Charlie ran to for flour, only rarely makes it onto maps. But it was there. Years ago, "Trade, Alabama" and the family patriarch's name were all that the government envelope needed for an address when the family received a photo of Willie, killed in the Korean War. Today, on Google Maps and the United States Geological Survey Map, "Trade" appears on "Crane Hill" in Cullman County, Alabama (at latitude 34.066 and longitude

-87.091, "approximate" address as "110 County Road 933, Crane Hill, Alabama, United States"). While recognized as a community or populated place by the government, the government-designated Class-Code-U6 area does not have a census designation or an official, federally-recognized name. Generations of Lotts, whose families originated in Trade, Alabama, often will claim "Crane Hill" as their family home. Craven Hole, however, always lovingly will be called Craven Hole.

As Willie's combat casualty indicates, it'd be inaccurate to proclaim the idyllic Craven Hole impervious to wounds of the world. No matter which map you consulted, heartache found its way to Trade and to the people who loved and lived near Craven Hole. But the people there — strong and resilient, full of humor, intelligence, creativity, and good character — defined with dignity the place that defined their days. The family members rooted in Trade life were well-acquainted with what we'd now deem hardships of economics and living off the land, and they seemed to take such things in stride. Grief for them came when the cuts were far harder and deeper– like when son and brother died — not over stubbed toes or putting in prodigious overtime, all of it hard manual labor. And when life relocated them from Trade, they brought the dignity bred in that one point and time, into another. Pilgrimages to Trade revivified those efforts.

Relatives for decades chose the Craven Hole for baptisms and the bluff beside it for weddings and reunions. Accordingly, for one side of my family that place became synonymous with living and being in the world: it was a locus for both the day-to-day events and the benchmark ones. The energy Craven Hole infused into our lives, or that our lives imbued into it, hovers almost palpably both in our minds and at the geographic locale.

Now, Craven Hole is smaller and the bluff more overgrown. Yet, the place still gives pause to visitors, real and virtual. When my father returned from the latest family reunion, he brought into my home a recent but pre-April-2011-tornado photograph of Crane Hill that his

Aunt Cleo gave him. All who saw the image asked where it was and noted its beauty. Even pictorially and in a single-dimension, this space seemed to beckon to them as it did to Charlie. They lacked Charlie's and Dale's and Alton's and other Lotts' muscle memories guiding them to the precise place, yet they still sensed its sacredness and heard its call. It whispers to us to find peace within, to live in harmony, to put forth effort wherever we find ourselves, and to accept dangers as sometimes inescapable. It prods us to claim that, whatever hardships befall us, we always can find moments to celebrate. It reassures us that love of a place and its people binds us into communities that can support healing and goodness, if we want to participate, if we will see and feel it, if we will embrace the gifts at hand. Trade may not appear on many maps, but Charlie and others sought out Craven Hole — and still do. For our family, Craven Hole might seem akin to the miracles of faith referenced in scriptures: a testament to how the sacred invisible materializes to those who will see it and feel it.