

[Authors' note: The miss-spellings in this text are due to an attempt to capture the 'accent' of this man. I am southern in origin, and am using the accent of the southeastern U.S.]

Report Excerpt

Rainey Woods.

Monologue: Jasper Cotes, Age 75. Date: 10/15/90

"I remember that day...yes sir. T' was a cold day out, kinda strange for Mid-September, and I was walking home through those cussed woods. You've seen th' old burnt out church up from the general store? That's where I was a'comin' from. Back in them days, we used'ta play in it much, young'uns don't know no better."

Mr. Cotes paused, cleared his throat, and took a sip of his lemonade. It was homemade, ice cold, and delicious.

"Anyways, you kin see the woods from here and back when I was young, there weren't no road through there, just a little rough path that was near about grown over. Poison oak, ivy, and skunkweed. Hell, you name it an' it grew on th' side of that damn path."

" I usually cut through there on my way home when I knew I was gonna be late for supper. My mother didn't abide any of us young'uns bein' late. I took off towards home, not payin' any attention to my friends yellin' at me to not go...you see, all of us was afraid of the Rainey Woods, if only for the stories our parents told about the place."

"A' course, I 've always been a foolhardy sort. Never been scairt of nothin'."

Mr.Cotes again paused, and sipped his drink. A look of what might have been fear, a remembered sort, crossed his face, but was gone before I could be sure.

" As I was sayin' , I didn't pay them no mind. Perhaps it was my tryin' to be brave, or just plain foolishness, but I went in laughing. After about a hundret foot into the woods, I stopped laughing, and just walked for home. Was then that I heard the footsteps behind me. I thought it was one of my friends, so I turned around, about to hail them...and stopped short. Weren't no one there."

"Now, this isn't a really thick forest, you can see that from here.... and the trees aren't really more than saplings, even now. What we call a 'strip wood'. Years before, there was a forest, stripped of it's trees, and what you see now is re-growth. I could see

through the trees, and there weren't a soul there."

Another sip of lemonade.

"It was on my mind that one of the boys was trying to scare me, so I just turned and kept on for home. Then, I heard the sound again, and this time, I spun around fast, because it was soundin' a lot closer. I looked as hard as I could.... still not seein' anyone."

"All that bravery ran out of me then. I'd had enough of hearing things, and not seein' no one. Let the other boys laugh, I was goin' home...as fast as I could."

"I lit out of that spot, runnin' hell bent for leather. My Granny, god bless her soul, had told me some damned grisly things about what the Old man Rainey had done to his family, and the spot where I had heard the noises were just about where the barn had stood. Up ahead, and to my right, was the ruin of the house, but I just kept running."

"The sounds of someone running behind me sped me on. Didn't even risk a glimpse backwards, I might miss a step and fall over a log, or old plow part. Whatever it was sounded as if it was right behind me. I heard saplings whipping as if whatever was plowing through them meant business."

"I believe it did."

Again, he stops...and sits, seemingly distracted for a moment, then begins again.

"Finally, I saw the break in the woods and the road beyond. I put some juice on my run and a tree branch caught my jacket. Well, I pulled right off it and jumped out of them woods like an Olympic jumper I seen on TV once and hightailed it home."

"Later on that evenin' my mama came to me, and fussed about mending my coat...See; I had ripped it worse than I thought. On the back, the rips were long and nothing like something a tree branch would do. Looked more like claws."

Sipping of the lemonade, and a deep look into the empty glass.....

"If I hadn't been scared, well, I learnt to be right then."