

## **The Gods of Men**

Frank knelt next to the body and pressed his fingers to the man's neck.

"Dead?" asked Clyde. Frank nodded. The man had been alive when they left. Beat pretty bad, but alive.

*"Dead dead?"* asked Clyde.

"Dead dead," said Frank. He stood and wiped his hand on his jeans. Had it been a good man at their feet, there might have been a different conversation. Had a good man lain beaten, his face in cornmeal lumps, his limbs askew, the men would have removed their caps and bowed their heads and called on the mercy of their Lord and Savior.

But the dead man was not a good man — or at least these men did not believe him to have been a good man. These men believed this dead man to have been the worst kind of man. A pervert. A predator. So the men felt little guilt over the death of this bad man to begin with, and guilt dilutes when shared. Which one of them had landed the fatal blow? Whose boot or fist had demanded too much of flesh and bone? It was impossible to tell. It was everyone's fault, and therefore it was no one's.

"Right. Soooo . . . What do we do now?" asked Clyde, and both he and Frank looked at Teddy. Why they thought he was the man who would know, they could not have said, except that he had worked as a mudhand in the Texas oilfields, and there had always been an edge to his quiet, even before the asbestos took his voice box and a