



A Courtship, William Faulkner

A Courtship

THIS IS HOW it was in the old days, when old Issetibbeha was still the Man, and Ikkemotubbe, Issetibbeha's nephew, and David Hogganbeck, the white man who told the steamboat where to walk, courted Herman Basket's sister.

The People all lived in the Plantation now. Issetibbeha and General Jackson met and burned sticks and signed a paper, and now a line ran through the woods, although you could not see it. It ran straight as a bee's flight among the woods, with the Plantation on one side of it, where Issetibbeha was the Man, and America on the other side, where General Jackson was the Man.

So now when something happened on one side of the line, it was a bad fortune for some and a good fortune for others, depending on what the white man happened to possess, as it had always been. But merely by occurring on the other side of that line which you couldn't even see, it became what the white men called a crime punishable by death if they could just have found who did it.

Which seemed foolish to us. There was one uproar which lasted off and on for a week, not that the white man had disappeared, because he had been the sort of white man which even other white men did not regret, but because of a delusion that he had been eaten.

As if any man, no matter how hungry, would risk eating the flesh of a coward or thief in this country where even in winter there is always something to be found to eat; — this land for which, as Issetibbeha

used to say after he had become so old that nothing more was required of him except to sit in the sun and criticise the degeneration of the People and the folly and rapacity of politicians, the Great Spirit has done more and man less than for any land he ever heard of.

But it was a free country, and if the white man wished to make a rule even that foolish in their half of it, it was all right with us.

Then Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck saw Herman Basket's sister. As who did not, sooner or later, young men and old men too, bachelors and widowers too, and some who were not even widowers yet, who for more than one reason within the hut had no business looking anywhere else, though who is to say what age a man must reach or just how unfortunate he must have been in his youthful compliance, when he shall no longer look at the Herman Basket's sisters of this world and chew his bitter thumbs too, aihee.

Because she walked in beauty, Or she sat in it, that is, because she did not walk at all unless she had to. One of the earliest sounds in the Plantation would be the voice of Herman Basket's aunt crying to know why she had not risen and gone to the spring for water with the other girls, which she did not do sometimes until Herman Basket himself rose and made her, or in the afternoon crying to know why she did not go to the river with the other girls and women to wash, which she did not do very often either. But she did not need to. Anyone who looks as Herman Basket's sister did at seventeen and eighteen and nineteen does not need to wash.

Then one day Ikkemotubbe saw her, who had known her all his life except during the first two years. He was Issetibbeha's sister's son. One

night he got into the steamboat with David Hogganbeck and went away.

And suns passed and then moons and then three high waters came and went and old Issetibbeha had entered the earth a year and his son Mocketubbe was the Man when Ikkemotubbe returned, named Doom now, with the white friend called the Chevalier Sœur-Blonde de Vitry and the eight new slaves which we did not need either, and his gold-laced hat and cloak and the little gold box of strong salt and the wicker wine hamper containing the four other puppies which were still alive, and within two days Mocketubbe's little son was dead and within three Ikkemotubbe whose name was Doom now was himself the Man.

But he was not Doom yet. He was still just Ikkemotubbe, one of the young men, the best one, who rode the hardest and fastest and danced the longest and got the drunkest and was loved the best, by the young men and the girls and the older women too who should have had other things to think about. Then one day he saw Herman Basket's sister, whom he had known all his life except for the first two years.

After Ikkemotubbe looked at her, my father and Owl-by-Night and Sylvester's John and the other young men looked away. Because he was the best of them and they loved him then while he was still just Ikkemotubbe. They would hold the other horse for him as, stripped to the waist, his hair and body oiled with bear's grease as when racing (though with honey mixed into the bear's grease now) and with only a rope hackamore and no saddle as when racing, Ikkemotubbe would ride on his new racing pony past the gallery where Herman Basket's sister sat shelling corn or peas into the silver wine pitcher which her aunt had inherited from her second cousin by marriage's great-aunt who was old David Colbert's wife, while Log-in-the-Creek (one of the young men too, though nobody paid any attention to him.

He raced no horses and fought no cocks and cast no dice, and even when forced to, he would not even dance fast enough to keep out of the other dancers' way, and disgraced both himself and the others each time by becoming sick after only five or six horns of what was never even his whisky) leaned against one of the gallery posts and blew into his harmonica.

Then one of the young men held the racing pony, and on his gaited mare now and wearing his flower-painted weskit and pigeon-tailed coat and beaver hat in which he looked handsomer than a steamboat gambler and richer even than the whisky-trader, Ikkemotubbe would ride past the gallery where Herman Basket's sister shelled another pod of peas into the pitcher and Log-in-the-Creek sat with his back against the post and blew into the harmonica.

Then another of the young men would take the mare too and Ikkemotubbe would walk to Herman Basket's and sit on the gallery too in his fine clothes while Herman Basket's sister shelled another pod of peas perhaps into the silver pitcher and Log-in-the-Creek lay on his back on the floor, blowing into the harmonica. Then the whisky-trader came and Ikkemotubbe and the young men invited Log-in-the-Creek into the woods until they became tired of carrying him.

And although a good deal wasted outside, as usual Log-in-the-Creek became sick and then asleep after seven or eight horns, and Ikkemotubbe returned to Herman Basket's gallery, where for a day or two at least he didn't have to not listen to the harmonica.

Finally Owl-at-Night made a suggestion. "Send Herman Basket's aunt a gift." But the only thing Ikkemotubbe owned which Herman Basket's

aunt didn't, was the new racing pony. So after a while Ikkemotubbe said, "So it seems I want this girl even worse than I believed," and sent Owl-at-Night to tie the racing pony's hackamore to Herman Basket's kitchen door handle.

Then he thought how Herman Basket's aunt could not even always make Herman Basket's sister just get up and go to the spring for water. Besides, she was the second cousin by marriage to the grand-niece of the wife of old David Colbert, the chief Man of all the Chickasaws in our section, and she looked upon Issetibbeha's whole family and line as mushrooms.

"But Herman Basket has been known to make her get up and go to the spring," my father said. "And I never heard him claim that old Dave Colbert's wife or his wife's niece or anybody else's wife or niece or aunt was any better than anybody else. Give Herman the horse."

"I can beat that," Ikkemotubbe said. Because there was no horse in the Plantation or America either between Natchez and Nashville whose tail Ikkemotubbe's new pony ever looked at. "I will run Herman a horse-race for his influence," he said. "Run," he told my father. "Catch Owl-at-Night before he reaches the house." So my father brought the pony back in time.

But just in case Herman Basket's aunt had been watching from the kitchen window or something, Ikkemotubbe sent Owl-at-Night and Sylvester's John home for his crate of gamecocks, though he expected little from this since Herman Basket's aunt already owned the best cocks in the Plantation and won all the money every Sunday morning anyway.

And then Herman Basket declined to commit himself, so a horse-race would have been merely for pleasure and money. And Ikkemotubbe said how money could not help him, and with that damned girl on his mind day and night his tongue had forgotten the savor of pleasure. But the whisky-trader always came, and so for a day or two at least he wouldn't have to not listen to the harmonica.

Then David Hogganbeck also looked at Herman Basket's sister, whom he too had been seeing once each year since the steamboat first walked to the Plantation. After a while even winter would be over and we would begin to watch the mark which David Hogganbeck had put on the landing to show us when the water would be tall enough for the steamboat to walk in. Then the river would reach the mark, and sure enough within two suns the steamboat would cry in the Plantation.

Then all the People — men and women and children and dogs, even Herman Basket's sister because Ikkemotubbe would fetch a horse for her to ride and so only Log-in-the-Creek would remain, not inside the house even though it was still cold, because Herman Basket's aunt wouldn't let him stay inside the house where she would have to step over him each time she passed, but squatting in his blanket on the gallery with an old cooking-pot of fire inside the blanket with him — would stand on the landing, to watch the upstairs and the smokestack moving among the trees and hear the puffing of the smokestack and its feet walking fast in the water too when it was not crying.

Then we would begin to hear David Hogganbeck's fiddle, and then the steamboat would come walking up the last of the river like a race-horse, with the smoke rolling black and its feet flinging the water aside as a running horse flings dirt, and Captain Studenmare who owned the steamboat chewing tobacco in one window and David Hogganbeck playing his fiddle in the other, and between them the head of the boy

slave who turned the wheel, who was not much more than half as big as Captain Studenmare and not even a third as big as David Hogganbeck. And all day long the trading would continue, though David Hogganbeck took little part in this.

And all night long the dancing would continue, and David Hogganbeck took the biggest part in this. Because he was bigger than any two of the young men put together almost, and although you would not have called him a man built for dancing or running either, it was as if that very double size which could hold twice as much whisky as any other, could also dance twice as long, until one by one the young men fell away and only he was left.

And there was horse-racing and eating, and although David Hogganbeck had no horses and did not ride one since no horse could have carried him and run fast too, he would eat a match each year for money against any two of the young men whom the People picked, and David Hogganbeck always won. Then the water would return toward the mark he had made on the landing, and it would be time for the steamboat to leave while there was still enough water in the river for it to walk in.

And then it did not go away. The river began to grow little, yet still David Hogganbeck played his fiddle on Herman Basket's gallery while Herman Basket's sister stirred something for cooking into the silver wine pitcher and Ikkemotubbe sat against a post in his fine clothes and his beaver hat and Log-in-the-Creek lay on his back on the floor with the harmonica cupped in both hands to his mouth, though you couldn't hear now whether he was blowing into it or not.

Then you could see the mark which David Hogganbeck had marked on the landing while he still played his fiddle on Herman Basket's gallery where Ikkemotubbe had brought a rocking chair from his house to sit in until David Hogganbeck would have to leave in order to show the steamboat the way back to Natchez.

And all that afternoon the People stood along the landing and watched the steamboat's slaves hurling wood into its stomach for steam to make it walk; and during most of that night, while David Hogganbeck drank twice as much and danced twice as long as even David Hogganbeck, so that he drank four times as much and danced four times as long as even Ikkemotubbe, even an Ikkemotubbe who at last had looked at Herman Basket's sister or at least had looked at someone else looking at her, the older ones among the People stood along the landing and watched the slaves hurling wood into the steamboat's stomach, not to make it walk but to make its voice cry while Captain Studenmare leaned out of the upstairs with the end of the crying-rope tied to the door-handle. And the next day Captain Studenmare himself came onto the gallery and grasped the end of David Hogganbeck's fiddle.

"You're fired," he said.

"All right," David Hogganbeck said. Then Captain Studenmare grasped the end of David Hogganbeck's fiddle.

"We will have to go back to Natchez where I can get money to pay you off," he said.

"Leave the money at the saloon," David Hogganbeck said. "I'll bring the boat back out next spring."

Then it was night. Then Herman Basket's aunt came out and said that if they were going to stay there all night, at least David Hogganbeck

would have to stop playing his fiddle so other people could sleep. Then she came out and said for Herman Basket's sister to come in and go to bed. Then Herman Basket came out and said, "Come on now, fellows. Be reasonable."

Then Herman Basket's aunt came out and said that the next time she was going to bring Herman Basket's dead uncle's shotgun. So Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck left Log-in-the-Creek lying on the floor and stepped down from the gallery. "Goodnight," David Hogganbeck said.

"I'll walk home with you," Ikkemotubbe said. So they walked across the Plantation to the steamboat. It was dark and there was no fire in its stomach now because Captain Studenmare was still asleep under Issetibbeha's back porch. Then Ikkemotubbe said, "Goodnight."

"I'll walk home with you," David Hogganbeck said. So they walked back across the Plantation to Ikkemotubbe's house. But David Hogganbeck did not have time to say goodnight now because Ikkemotubbe turned as soon as they reached his house and started back toward the steamboat. Then he began to run, because David Hogganbeck still did not look like a man who could run fast.

But he had not looked like a man who could dance a long time either, so when Ikkemotubbe reached the steamboat and turned and ran again, he was only a little ahead of David Hogganbeck. And when they reached Ikkemotubbe's house he was still only a little ahead of David Hogganbeck when he stopped, breathing fast but only a little fast, and held the door open for David Hogganbeck to enter.

“My house is not very much house,” he said. “But it is yours.” So they both slept in Ikkemotubbe’s bed in his house that night. And the next afternoon, although Herman Basket would still do no more than wish him success, Ikkemotubbe sent my father and Sylvester’s John with his saddle mare for Herman Basket’s aunt to ride on, and he and Herman Basket ran the horse-race. And he rode faster than anyone had ever ridden in the Plantation.

He won by lengths and lengths and, with Herman Basket’s aunt watching, he made Herman Basket take all the money, as though Herman Basket had won, and that evening he sent Owl-at-Night to tie the racing pony’s hackamore to the door-handle of Herman Basket’s kitchen. But that night Herman Basket’s aunt did not even warn them.

She came out the first time with Herman Basket’s dead uncle’s gun, and hardly a moment had elapsed before Ikkemotubbe found out that she meant him too. So he and David Hogganbeck left Log-in-the-Creek lying on the gallery and they stopped for a moment at my father’s house on the first trip between Ikkemotubbe’s house and the steamboat, though when my father and Owl-at-Night finally found Ikkemotubbe to tell him that Herman Basket’s aunt must have sent the racing pony far into the woods and hidden it because they had not found it yet, Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck were both asleep in David Hogganbeck’s bed in the steamboat.

And the next morning the whisky-trader came, and that afternoon Ikkemotubbe and the young men invited Log-in-the-Creek into the woods and my father and Sylvester’s John returned for the whisky-trader’s buckboard and, with my father and Sylvester’s John driving the buckboard and Log-in-the-Creek lying on his face on top of the little house on the back of the buckboard where the whisky-kegs rode and Ikkemotubbe standing on top of the little house, wearing the used

general's coat which General Jackson gave Issetibbeha, with his arms folded and one foot advanced onto Log-in-the-Creek's back, they rode slow past the gallery where David Hogganbeck played his fiddle while Herman Basket's sister stirred something for cooking into the silver wine pitcher.

And when my father and Owl-at-Night found Ikkemotubbe that night to tell him they still had not found where Herman Basket's aunt had hidden the pony, Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck were at Ikkemotubbe's house.

And the next afternoon Ikkemotubbe and the young men invited David Hogganbeck into the woods and it was a long time this time and when they came out, David Hogganbeck was driving the buckboard while the legs of Ikkemotubbe and the other young men dangled from the open door of the little whisky-house like so many strands of vine hay and Issetibbeha's general's coat was tied by its sleeves about the neck of one of the mules.

And nobody hunted for the racing pony that night, and when Ikkemotubbe waked up, he didn't know at first even where he was. And he could already hear David Hogganbeck's fiddle before he could move aside enough of the young men to get out of the little whisky-house, because that night neither Herman Basket's aunt nor Herman Basket and then finally Herman Basket's dead uncle's gun could persuade David Hogganbeck to leave the gallery and go away or even to stop playing the fiddle.

So the next morning Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck squatted in a quiet place in the woods while the young men, except Sylvester's John

and Owl-by-Night who were still hunting for the horse, stood on guard. "We could fight for her then," David Hogganbeck said.

"We could fight for her," Ikkemotubbe said. "But white men and the People fight differently. We fight with knives, to hurt good and to hurt quickly. That would be all right, if I were to lose. Because I would wish to be hurt good. But if I am to win, I do not wish you to be hurt good.

If I am to truly win, it will be necessary for you to be there to see it. On the day of the wedding, I wish you to be present, or at least present somewhere, not lying wrapped in a blanket on a platform in the woods, waiting to enter the earth."

Then my father said how Ikkemotubbe put his hand on David Hogganbeck's shoulder and smiled at him. "If that could satisfy me, we would not be squatting here discussing what to do. I think you see that."

"I think I do," David Hogganbeck said.

Then my father said how Ikkemotubbe removed his hand from David Hogganbeck's shoulder. "And we have tried whisky," he said.

"We have tried that," David Hogganbeck said.

"Even the racing pony and the general's coat failed me," Ikkemotubbe said. "I had been saving them, like a man with two hole-cards."

"I wouldn't say that the coat completely failed," David Hogganbeck said. "You looked fine in it."

"Aihee," Ikkemotubbe said. "So did the mule." Then my father said how he was not smiling either as he squatted beside David Hogganbeck,

making little marks in the earth with a twig. "So there is just one other thing," he said. "And I am already beaten at that too before we start."

So all that day they ate nothing. And that night when they left Log-in-the-Creek lying on Herman Basket's gallery, instead of merely walking for a while and then running for a while back and forth between Ikkemotubbe's house and the steamboat, they began to run as soon as they left Herman Basket's.

And when they lay down in the woods to sleep, it was where they would not only be free of temptation to eat but of opportunity too, and from which it would take another hard run as an appetiser to reach the Plantation for the match.

Then it was morning and they ran back to where my father and the young men waited on horses to meet them and tell Ikkemotubbe that they still hadn't found where under the sun Herman Basket's aunt could have hidden the pony and to escort them back across the Plantation to the race-course, where the People waited around the table, with Ikkemotubbe's rocking chair from Herman Basket's gallery for Issetibbeha and a bench behind it for the judges.

First there was a recess while a ten-year-old boy ran once around the race-track, to let them recover breath. Then Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck took their places on either side of the table, facing each other across it, and Owl-at-Night gave the word.

First, each had that quantity of stewed bird chitterlings which the other could scoop with two hands from the pot. Then each had as many wild turkey eggs as he was old, Ikkemotubbe twenty-two and David

Hogganbeck twenty-three, though Ikkemotubbe refused the advantage and said he would eat twenty-three too.

Then David Hogganbeck said he was entitled to one more than Ikkemotubbe so he would eat twenty-four, until Issetibbeha told them both to hush and get on, and Owl-at-Night tallied the shells. Then there was the tongue, paws and melt of a bear, though for a little while Ikkemotubbe stood and looked at his half of it while David Hogganbeck was already eating.

And at the half-way he stopped and looked at it again while David Hogganbeck was finishing. But it was all right; there was a faint smile on his face such as the young men had seen on it at the end of a hard running when he was going from now on not on the fact that he was still alive but on the fact that he was Ikkemotubbe.

And he went on, and Owl-at-Night tallied the bones, and the women set the roasted shote on the table and Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck moved back to the tail of the shote and faced one another across it and Owl-at-Night had even given the word to start until he gave another word to stop.

“Give me some water,” Ikkemotubbe said. So my father handed him the gourd and he even took a swallow. But the water returned as though it had merely struck the back of his throat and bounced, and Ikkemotubbe put the gourd down and raised the tail of his shirt before his bowed face and turned and walked away as the People opened aside to let him pass.

And that afternoon they did not even go to the quiet place in the woods. They stood in Ikkemotubbe's house while my father and the others stood quietly too in the background. My father said that Ikkemotubbe was not smiling now. "I was right yesterday," he said.

"If I am to lose to thee, we should have used the knives. You see," he said, and now my father said he even smiled again, as at the end of the long hard running when the young men knew that he would go on, not because he was still alive but because he was Ikkemotubbe; " — you see, although I have lost, I still cannot reconcile."

"I had you beat before we started," David Hogganbeck said. "We both knew that."

"Yes," Ikkemotubbe said. "But I suggested it."

"Then what do you suggest now?" David Hogganbeck said. And now my father said how they loved David Hogganbeck at that moment as they loved Ikkemotubbe; that they loved them both at that moment while Ikkemotubbe stood before David Hogganbeck with the smile on his face and his right hand flat on David Hogganbeck's chest, because there were men in those days.

"Once more then, and then no more," Ikkemotubbe said. "The Cave." Then he and David Hogganbeck stripped and my father and the others oiled them, body and hair too, with bear's grease mixed with mint, not just for speed this time but for lasting too, because the Cave was a hundred and thirty miles away, over in the country of old David Colbert — a black hole in the hill which the spoor of wild creatures merely approached and then turned away and which no dog could even be beaten to enter and where the boys from among all the People would go to lie on their first Night-away-from-Fire to prove if they had the

courage to become men, because it had been known among the People from a long time ago that the sound of a whisper or even the disturbed air of a sudden movement would bring parts of the roof down and so all believed that not even a very big movement or sound or maybe none at all at some time would bring the whole mountain into the cave. Then Ikkemotubbe took the two pistols from the trunk and drew the loads and reloaded them. "Whoever reaches the Cave first can enter it alone and fire his pistol," he said.

"If he comes back out, he has won."

"And if he does not come back out?" David Hogganbeck said.

"Then you have won," Ikkemotubbe said.

"Or you," David Hogganbeck said.

And now my father said how Ikkemotubbe smiled again at David Hogganbeck. "Or me," he said. "Though I think I told you yesterday that such as that for me will not be victory."

Then Ikkemotubbe put another charge of powder, with a wadding and bullet, into each of two small medicine bags, one for himself and one for David Hogganbeck, just in case the one who entered the Cave first should not lose quick enough, and, wearing only their shirts and shoes and each with his pistol and medicine bag looped on a cord around his neck, they emerged from Ikkemotubbe's house and began to run.

It was evening then. Then it was night, and since David Hogganbeck did not know the way, Ikkemotubbe continued to set the pace. But after a time it was daylight again and now David Hogganbeck could run by the

sun and the landmarks which Ikkemotubbe described to him while they rested beside a creek, if he wished to go faster.

So sometimes David Hogganbeck would run in front and sometimes Ikkemotubbe, then David Hogganbeck would pass Ikkemotubbe as he sat beside a spring or a stream with his feet in the water and Ikkemotubbe would smile at David Hogganbeck and wave his hand.

Then he would overtake David Hogganbeck and the country was open now and they would run side by side in the prairies with his hand lying lightly on David Hogganbeck's shoulder, not on the top of the shoulder but lightly against the back of it until after a while he would smile at David Hogganbeck and draw ahead.

But then it was sundown, and then it was dark again so Ikkemotubbe slowed and then stopped until he heard David Hogganbeck and knew that David Hogganbeck could hear him and then he ran again so that David Hogganbeck could follow the sound of his running.

So when David Hogganbeck fell, Ikkemotubbe heard it and went back and found David Hogganbeck in the dark and turned him onto his back and found water in the dark and soaked his shirt in it and returned and wrung the water from the shirt into David Hogganbeck's mouth.

And then it was daylight and Ikkemotubbe waked also and found a nest containing five unfledged birds and ate and brought the other three to David Hogganbeck and then he went on until he was just this side of where David Hogganbeck could no longer see him and sat down again until David Hogganbeck got up onto his feet.

And he gave David Hogganbeck the landmarks for that day too, talking back to David Hogganbeck over his shoulder as they ran, though David Hogganbeck did not need them because he never overtook Ikkemotubbe again. He never came closer than fifteen or twenty paces, although it looked at one time like he was. Because this time it was Ikkemotubbe who fell.

And the country was open again so Ikkemotubbe could lie there for a long time and watch David Hogganbeck coming. Then it was sunset again, and then it was dark again, and he lay there listening to David Hogganbeck coming for a long time until it was time for Ikkemotubbe to get up and he did and they went on slowly in the dark with David Hogganbeck at least a hundred paces behind him, until he heard David Hogganbeck fall and then he lay down too.

Then it was day again and he watched David Hogganbeck get up onto his feet and come slowly toward him and at last he tried to get up too but he did not and it looked like David Hogganbeck was going to come up with him.

But he got up at last while David Hogganbeck was still four or five paces away and they went on until David Hogganbeck fell, and then Ikkemotubbe thought he was just watching David Hogganbeck fall until he found that he had fallen too but he got up onto his hands and knees and crawled still another ten or fifteen paces before he too lay down.

And there in the sunset before him was the hill in which the Cave was, and there through the night, and there still in the sunrise.

So Ikkemotubbe ran into the Cave first, with his pistol already cocked in his hand. He told how he stopped perhaps for a second at the entrance, perhaps to look at the sun again or perhaps just to see where David Hogganbeck had stopped. But David Hogganbeck was running too and he was still only that fifteen or twenty paces behind, and besides, because of that damned sister of Herman Basket's, there had been no light nor heat either in that sun for moons and moons.

So he ran into the Cave and turned and saw David Hogganbeck also running into the Cave and he cried, "Back, fool!" But David Hogganbeck still ran into the Cave even as Ikkemotubbe pointed his pistol at the roof and fired. And there was a noise, and a rushing, and a blackness and a dust, and Ikkemotubbe told how he thought, Aihee.

It comes. But it did not, and even before the blackness he saw David Hogganbeck cast himself forward onto his hands and knees, and there was not a complete blackness either because he could see the sunlight and air and day beyond the tunnel of David Hogganbeck's arms and legs as, still on his hands and knees, David Hogganbeck held the fallen roof upon his back. "Hurry," David Hogganbeck said. "Between my legs. I can't—"

"Nay, brother," Ikkemotubbe said. "Quickly thyself, before it crushes thee. Crawl back."

"Hurry," David Hogganbeck said behind his teeth. "Hurry, damn you." And Ikkemotubbe did, and he remembered David Hogganbeck's buttocks and legs pink in the sunrise and the slab of rock which supported the fallen roof pink in the sunrise too across David Hogganbeck's back.

But he did not remember where he found the pole nor how he carried it alone into the Cave and thrust it into the hole beside David Hogganbeck and stooped his own back under it and lifted until he knew that some at least of the weight of the fallen roof was on the pole.

“Now,” he said. “Quickly.”

“No,” David Hogganbeck said.

“Quickly, brother,” Ikkemotubbe said. “The weight is off thee.”

“Then I can’t move,” David Hogganbeck said. But Ikkemotubbe couldn’t move either, because now he had to hold the fallen roof up with his back and legs. So he reached one hand and grasped David Hogganbeck by the meat and jerked him backward out of the hole until he lay face-down upon the earth.

And maybe some of the weight of the fallen roof was on the pole before, but now all of the weight was on it and Ikkemotubbe said how he thought, This time surely aihee. But it was the pole and not his back which snapped and flung him face-down too across David Hogganbeck like two flung sticks, and a bright gout of blood jumped out of David Hogganbeck’s mouth.

But by the second day David Hogganbeck had quit vomiting blood, though Ikkemotubbe had run hardly forty miles back toward the Plantation when my father met him with the horse for David Hogganbeck to ride. Presently my father said, “I have a news for thee.”

“So you found the pony,” Ikkemotubbe said. “All right. Come on. Let’s get that damned stupid fool of a white man—”

“No, wait, my brother,” my father said. “I have a news for thee.”

And presently Ikkemotubbe said, “All right.”

But when Captain Studenmare borrowed Issetibbeha’s wagon to go back to Natchez in, he took the steamboat slaves too. So my father and the young men built a fire in the steamboat’s stomach to make steam for it to walk, while David Hogganbeck sat in the upstairs and drew the crying-rope from time to time to see if the steam was strong enough yet, and at each cry still more of the People came to the landing until at last all the People in the Plantation except old Issetibbeha perhaps stood along the bank to watch the young men hurl wood into the steamboat’s stomach: — a thing never before seen in our Plantation at least.

Then the steam was strong and the steamboat began to walk and then the People began to walk too beside the steamboat, watching the young men for a while then Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck for a while as the steamboat walked out of the Plantation where hardly seven suns ago Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck would sit all day long and half the night too until Herman Basket’s aunt would come out with Herman Basket’s dead uncle’s gun, on the gallery of Herman Basket’s house while Log-in-the-Creek lay on the floor with his harmonica cupped to his mouth and Log-in-the-Creek’s wife shelled corn or peas into old Dave Colbert’s wife’s grand-niece’s second cousin by marriage’s wine pitcher.

Presently Ikkemotubbe was gone completely away, to be gone a long time before he came back named Doom, with his new white friend whom no man wished to love either and the eight more slaves which we had no use for either because at times someone would have to get up and walk somewhere to find something for the ones we already

owned to do, and the fine gold-trimmed clothes and the little gold box of salt which caused the other four puppies to become dead too one after another, and then anything else which happened to stand between Doom and what he wanted.

But he was not quite gone yet. He was just Ikkemotubbe yet, one of the young men, another of the young men who loved and was not loved in return and could hear the words and see the fact, yet who, like the young men who had been before him and the ones who would come after him, still could not understand it.

“But not for her!” Ikkemotubbe said. “And not even because it was Log-in-the-Creek. Perhaps they are for myself: that such a son as Log-in-the-Creek could cause them to wish to flow.”

“Don’t think about her,” David Hogganbeck said.

“I don’t. I have already stopped. See?” Ikkemotubbe said while the sunset ran down his face as if it had already been rain instead of light when it entered the window. “There was a wise man of ours who said once how a woman’s fancy is like a butterfly which, hovering from flower to flower, pauses at the last as like as not where a horse has stood.”

“There was a wise man of ours named Solomon who often said something of that nature too,” David Hogganbeck said. “Perhaps there is just one wisdom for all men, no matter who speaks it.”

“Aihee.

At least, for all men one same heart-break,” Ikkemotubbe said. Then he drew the crying-rope, because the boat was now passing the house

where Log-in-the-Creek and his wife lived, and now the steamboat sounded like it did the first night while Captain Studenmare still thought David Hogganbeck would come and show it the way back to Natchez, until David Hogganbeck made Ikkemotubbe stop. Because they would need the steam because the steamboat did not always walk.

Sometimes it crawled, and each time its feet came up there was mud on them, and sometimes it did not even crawl until David Hogganbeck drew the crying-rope as the rider speaks to the recalcitrant horse to remind it with his voice just who is up.

Then it crawled again and then it walked again, until at last the People could no longer keep up, and it cried once more beyond the last bend and then there was no longer either the black shapes of the young men leaping to hurl wood into its red stomach or even the sound of its voice in the Plantation or the night. That's how it was in the old days.

The End