



Black Music, William Faulkner

## Black Music

I

THIS IS ABOUT Wilfred Midgleston, fortune's favorite, chosen of the gods. For fifty-six years, a clotting of the old gutful compulsions and circumscriptions of clocks and bells, he met walking the walking image of a small, snuffy, nondescript man whom neither man nor woman had ever turned to look at twice, in the monotonous shopwindows of monotonous hard streets. Then his apotheosis soared glaring, and to him at least not brief, across the unfathomed sky above his lost earth like that of Elijah of old.

I found him in Rincon, which is not large; less large even than one swaybacked tanker looming above the steel docks of the Universal Oil Company and longer than the palm- and abode-lined street paved with dust marked by splayed naked feet where the violent shade lies by day and the violent big stars by night.

"He came from the States," they told me. "Been here twenty-five years. He hasn't changed at all since the day he arrived, except that the clothes he came in have wore out and he hasn't learned more than ten words of Spanish."

That was the only way you could tell that he was an old man, that he was getting along: he hadn't learned to speak hardly a word of the language of the people with whom he had lived twenty-five years and among whom it appeared that he intended to die and be buried. Appeared: he had no job: a mild, hopelessly mild man who looked like a

book-keeper in a George Ade fable dressed as a tramp for a Presbyterian social charade in 1890, and quite happy.

Quite happy and quite poor. "He's either poor, or he's putting up an awful front. But they can't touch him now. We told him that a long time ago, when he first come here. We said, 'Why don't you go on and spend it, enjoy it? They've probably forgot all about it by now.' Because if I went to the trouble and risk of stealing and then the hardship of having to live the rest of my life in a hole like this, I'd sure enjoy what I went to the trouble to get."

"Enjoy what?" I said.

"The money. The money he stole and had to come down here. What else do you reckon he would come down here and stay twenty-five years for? just to look at the country?"

"He doesn't act and look very rich," I said.

"That's a fact. But a fellow like that. His face. I don't guess he'd have judgment enough to steal good. And not judgment enough to keep it, after he got it stole. I guess you are right. I guess all he got out of it was the running away and the blame. While somebody back there where he run from is spending the money and singing loud in the choir twice a week."

"Is that what happens?" I said.

"You're damned right it is. Some damn fellow that's too rich to afford to be caught stealing sets back and leaves a durn fool that never saw twenty-five hundred dollars before in his life at one time, pull his chestnuts for him. Twenty-five hundred seems a hell of a lot when somebody else owns it. But when you have got to pick up overnight and

run a thousand miles, paying all your expenses, how long do you think twenty-five hundred will last?”

“How long did it last?” I said.

“Just about two years, by God. And then there I—” He stopped. He glared at me, who had paid for the coffee and the bread which rested upon the table between us. He glared at me. “Who do you think you are, anyway? Wm. J. Burns?”

“I don’t think so. I meant no offense. I just was curious to know how long his twenty-five hundred dollars lasted him.”

“Who said he had twenty-five hundred dollars? I was just citing an example. He never had nothing, not even twenty-five hundred cents. Or if he did, he hid it and it’s stayed hid ever since. He come here sponging on us white men, and when we got tired of it he took to sponging on these Spigs.

And a white man has got pretty low when he’s got so stingy with his stealings that he will live with Spiggotties before he’ll dig up his own money and live like a white man.”

“Maybe he never stole any money,” I said.

“What’s he doing down here, then?”

“I’m down here.”

“I don’t know you ain’t run, either.”

“That’s so,” I said. “You don’t know.”

“Sure I don’t. Because that’s your business. Every man has got his own private affairs, and no man respects them quicker than I do. But I know that a man, a white man, has got to have durn good reason. . . . Maybe he ain’t got it now. But you can’t tell me a white man would come down here to live and die without no reason.”

“And you consider that stealing money is the only reason?”

He looked at me, with disgust and a little contempt. “Did you bring a nurse with you? Because you ought to have, until you learn enough about human nature to travel alone. Because human nature, I don’t care who he is nor how loud he sings in church, will steal whenever he thinks he can get away with it. If you ain’t learned that yet, you better go back home and stay there where your folks can take care of you.”

But I was watching Midgleston across the street. He was standing beside a clump of naked children playing in the shady dust: a small, snuffy man in a pair of dirty drill trousers which had not been made for him. “Whatever it is,” I said, “it doesn’t seem to worry him.”

“Oh. Him. He ain’t got sense enough to know he needs to worry about nothing.”

Quite poor and quite happy. His turn to have coffee and bread with me came at last. No: that’s wrong. I at last succeeded in evading his other down-at-heel compatriots like my first informant; men a little soiled and usually unshaven, who were unavoidable in the cantinas and coffee shops, loud, violent, maintaining the superiority of the white race and their own sense of injustice and of outrage among the grave white

teeth, the dark, courteous, fatal, speculative alien faces, and had Midgleston to breakfast with me. I had to invite him and then insist.

He was on hand at the appointed hour, in the same dirty trousers, but his shirt was now white and whole and ironed, and he had shaved. He accepted the meal without servility, without diffidence, without eagerness. Yet when he raised the handleless bowl I watched his hands tremble so that for a time he could not make junction with his lips.

He saw me watching his hands and he looked at my face for the first time and I saw that his eyes were the eyes of an old man. He said, with just a trace of apology for his clumsiness: "I ain't et nothing to speak of in a day or so."

"Haven't eaten in two days?" I said.

"This hot climate. A fellow don't need so much. Feels better for not eating so much. That was the hardest trouble I had when I first come here. I was always a right hearty eater back home."

"Oh," I said. I had meat brought then, he protesting. But he ate the meat, ate all of it. "Just look at me," he said. "I ain't et this much breakfast in twenty-five years. But when a fellow gets along, old habits are hard to break. No, sir. Not since I left home have I et this much for breakfast."

"Do you plan to go back home?" I said.

"I guess not; no. This suits me here. I can live simple here. Not all cluttered up with things. My own boss (I used to be an architect's draughtsman) all day long. No. I don't guess I'll go back." He looked at me. His face was intent, watchful, like that of a child about to tell

something, divulge itself. "You wouldn't guess where I sleep in a hundred years."

"No. I don't expect I could. Where do you sleep?"

"I sleep in that attic over that cantina yonder. The house belongs to the Company, and Mrs. Widrington, Mr. Widrington's wife, the manager's wife, she lets me sleep in the attic. It's high and quiet, except for a few rats. But when in Rome, you got to act like a Roman, I say. Only I wouldn't name this country Rome; I'd name it Ratville. But that ain't it." He watched me. "You'd never guess it in the world."

"No," I said. "I'd never guess it."

He watched me. "It's my bed."

"Your bed?"

"I told you you'd never guess it."

"No," I said. "I give up now."

"My bed is a roll of tarred roofing paper."

"A roll of what?"

"Tarred roofing paper." His face was bright, peaceful; his voice quiet, full of gleeful quiet. "At night I just unroll it and go to bed and the next a. m. I just roll it back up and lean it in the corner. And then my room is all cleaned up for the day. Ain't that fine? No sheets, no laundry, no nothing. Just roll up my whole bed like an umbrella and carry it under my arm when I want to move."

"Oh," I said. "You have no family, then."

“Not with me. No.”

“You have a family back home, then?”

He was quite quiet. He did not feign to be occupied with something on the table. Neither did his eyes go blank, though he mused peacefully for a moment. “Yes. I have a wife back home. Likely this climate wouldn’t suit her. She wouldn’t like it here. But she is all right.

I always kept my insurance paid up; I carried a right smart more than you would figure a draughtsman on a seventy-five-dollar salary would keep up. If I told you the amount, you would be surprised. She helped me to save; she is a good woman. So she’s got that. She earned it. And besides, I don’t need money.”

“So you don’t plan to go back home.”

“No,” he said. He watched me; again his expression was that of a child about to tell on itself. “You see, I done something.”

“Oh. I see.”

He talked quietly: “It ain’t what you think. Not what them others—” he jerked his head, a brief embracing gesture— “think. I never stole any money. Like I always told Martha — she is my wife; Mrs. Midgleston — money is too easy to earn to risk the bother of trying to steal it. All you got to do is work. ‘Have we ever suffered for it?’

I said to her. ‘Of course, we don’t live like some. But some is born for one thing and some is born for another thing. And the fellow that is born a tadpole, when he tries to be a salmon all he is going to be is a sucker.’ That’s what I would tell her. And she done her part and we got



along right well; if I told you how much life insurance I carried, you would be surprised. No; she ain't suffered any. Don't you think that."

"No," I said.

"But then I done something. Yes, sir."

"Did what? Can you tell?"

"Something. Something that ain't in the lot and plan for mortal human man to do."

"What was it you did?"

He looked at me. "I ain't afraid to tell. I ain't never been afraid to tell. It was just that these folks—" again he jerked his head slightly—"wouldn't have understood. Wouldn't have knowed what I was talking about. But you will. You'll know." He watched my face. "At one time in my life I was a farn."

"A farn?"

"Farn. Don't you remember in the old books where they would drink the red grape wine, how now and then them rich Roman and Greek senators would up and decide to tear up a old grape vineyard or a wood away off somewheres the gods used, and build a summer house to hold their frolics in where the police wouldn't hear them, and how the gods wouldn't hear them, and how the gods wouldn't like it about them married women running around nekkid, and so the woods god named — named—"

"Pan," I said.

“That’s it. Pan. And he would send them little fellows that was half a goat to scare them out—”

“Oh,” I said. “A faun.”

“That’s it. A farn. That’s what I was once. I was raised religious; I have never used tobacco or liquor; and I don’t think now that I am going to hell. But the Bible says that them little men were myths. But I know they ain’t, and so I have been something outside the lot and plan for mortal human man to be. Because for one day in my life I was a farn.”

II

In the office where Midgleston was a draughtsman they would discuss the place and Mrs. Van Dyming’s unique designs upon it while they were manufacturing the plans, the blue prints. The tract consisted of a meadow, a southern hillside where grapes grew, and a woodland.

“Good land, they said. But wouldn’t anybody live on it.”

“Why not?” I said.

“Because things happened on it. They told how a long time ago a New England fellow settled on it and cleaned up the grape vines to market the grapes. Going to make jelly or something. He made a good crop, but when time came to gather them, he couldn’t gather them.”

“Why couldn’t he gather them?”

“Because his leg was broke. He had some goats, and a old ram that he couldn’t keep out of the grape lot. He tried every way he knew, but he couldn’t keep the ram out. And when the man went in to gather the

grapes to make jelly, the ram ran over him and knocked him down and broke his leg. So the next spring the New England fellow moved away.

“And they told about another man, a Italian lived the other side of the woods. He would gather the grapes and make wine out of them, and he built up a good wine trade. After a while his trade got so good that he had more trade than he did wine. So he began to doctor the wine up with water and alcohol, and he was getting rich.

At first he used a horse and wagon to bring the grapes home on his private road through the woods, but he got rich and he bought a truck, and he doctored the wine a little more and he got richer and he bought a bigger truck. And one night a storm come up while he was away from home, gathering the grapes, and he didn't get home that night. The next a. m. his wife found him.

That big truck had skidded off the road and turned over and he was dead under it.”

“I don't see how that reflected on the place,” I said.

“All right. I'm just telling it. The neighbor folks thought different, anyway. But maybe that was because they were not anything but country folks. Anyway, none of them would live on it, and so Mr. Van Dyming bought it cheap. For Mrs. Van Dyming.

To play with. Even before we had the plans finished, she would take a special trainload of them down there to look at it, and not even a cabin on the place then, not nothing but the woods and that meadow growed

up in grass tall as a man, and that hillside where them grapes grew tangled.

But she would stand there, with them other rich Park Avenue folks, showing them how here would be the community house built to look like the Coliseum and the community garage yonder made to look like it was a Acropolis, and how the grape vine would be grubbed up entire and the hillside terraced to make a outdoors theatre where they could act in one another's plays; and how the meadow would be a lake with one of them Roman barges towed back and forth on it by a gas engine, with mattresses and things for them to lay down on while they et."

"What did Mr. Van Dyming say about all this?"

"I don't reckon he said anything. He was married to her, you know. He just says, one time, 'Now, Mattie—' and she turns on him, right there in the office, before us all, and says, 'Don't you call me Mattie.'" He was quiet for a time. Then he said: "She wasn't born on Park Avenue. Nor Westchester neither. She was born in Poughkeepsie. Her name was Lumpkin.

"But you wouldn't know it, now. When her picture would be in the paper with all them Van Dyming diamonds, it wouldn't say how Mrs. Carleton Van Dyming used to be Miss Mathilda Lumpkin of Poughkeepsie. No, sir. Even a newspaper wouldn't dared say that to her. And I reckon Mr. Van Dyming never either, unless he forgot like the day in the office.

So she says, 'Don't you call me Mattie' and he hushed and he just stood there — a little man; he looked kind of like me, they said — tapping one

of them little highprice cigars on his glove, with his face looking like he had thought about smiling a little and then he decided it wasn't even any use in that.

"They built the house first. It was right nice; Mr. Van Dyming planned it. I guess maybe he said more than just Mattie that time. And I guess that maybe Mrs. Van Dyming never said, 'Don't you call me Mattie' that time. Maybe he promised her he wouldn't interfere with the rest of it.

Anyway, the house was right nice. It was on the hill, kind of in the edge of the woods. It was logs. But it wasn't too much logs. It belonged there, fitted. Logs where logs ought to be, and good city bricks and planks where logs ought not to be. It was there. Belonged there. It was all right. Not to make anybody mad. Can you see what I mean?"

"Yes. I think I can see what you mean."

"But the rest of it he never interfered with; her and her Acropolises and all." He looked at me quite intently. "Sometimes I thought. . . ."

"What? Thought what?"

"I told you him and me were the same size, looked kind of alike." He watched me. "Like we could have talked, for all of him and his Park Avenue clothes and his banks and his railroads, and me a seventy-five a week draughtsman living in Brooklyn, and not young neither.

Like I could have said to him what was in my mind at any time, and he could have said to me what was in his mind at any time, and we would have understood one another. That's why sometimes I thought. . . ." He looked at me, intently, not groping exactly.

“Sometimes men have more sense than women. They know what to leave be, and women don’t always know that. He don’t need to be religious in the right sense or religious in the wrong sense. Nor religious at all.” He looked at me, intently. After a while he said, in a decisive tone, a tone of decisive irrevocation: “This will seem silly to you.”

“No. Of course not. Of course it won’t.”

He looked at me. Then he looked away. “No. It will just sound silly. Just take up your time.”

“No. I swear it won’t. I want to hear it. I am not a man who believes that people have learned everything.” He watched me. “It has taken a million years to make what is, they tell us,” I said. “And a man can be made and worn out and buried in threescore and ten. So how can a man be expected to know even enough to doubt?”

“That’s right,” he said. “That’s sure right.”

“What was it you sometimes thought?”

“Sometimes I thought that, if it hadn’t been me, they would have used him. Used Mr. Van Dyming like they used me.”

“They?” We looked at one another, quite sober, quite quiet.

“Yes. The ones that used that ram on that New England fellow, and that storm on that I-talian.”

“Oh. Would have used Mr. Van Dyming in your place, if you had not been there at the time. How did they use you?”

“That’s what I am going to tell. How I was chosen and used. I did not know that I had been chosen. But I was chosen to do something beyond the lot and plan for mortal human man. It was the day that Mr. Carter (he was the boss, the architect) got the hurryup message from Mrs. Van Dyming. I think I told you the house was already built, and there was a big party of them down there where they could watch the workmen building the Coliseums and the Acropolises.

So the hurryup call came. She wanted the plans for the theatre, the one that was to be on the hillside where the grapes grew. She was going to build it first, so the company could set and watch them building the Acropolises and Coliseums. She had already begun to grub up the grape vines, and Mr. Carter put the theatre prints in a portfolio and give me the weekend off to take them down there to her.”

“Where was the place?”

“I don’t know. It was in the mountains, the quiet mountains where never many lived. It was a kind of green air, chilly too, and a wind. When it blew through them pines it sounded kind of like a organ, only it didn’t sound tame like a organ. Not tame; that’s how it sounded. But I don’t know where it was. Mr. Carter had the ticket all ready and he said it would be somebody to meet me when the train stopped.

“So I telephoned Martha and I went home to get ready. When I got home, she had my Sunday suit all pressed and my shoes shined. I didn’t see any use in that, since I was just going to take the plans and come back. But Martha said how I had told her it was company there.

And you are going to look as nice as any of them,' she says. 'For all they are rich and get into the papers. You're just as good as they are.' That was the last thing she said when I got on the train, in my Sunday suit, with the portfolio: 'You're just as good as they are, even if they do get into the papers.' And then it started."

"What started? The train?"

"No. It. The train had been running already a good while; we were out in the country now. I didn't know then that I had been chosen. I was just sitting there in the train, with the portfolio on my knees where I could take care of it. Even when I went back to the ice water I didn't know that I had been chosen.

I carried the portfolio with me and I was standing there, looking out the window and drinking out of the little paper cup. There was a bank running along by the train then, with a white fence on it, and I could see animals inside the fence, but the train was going too fast to tell what kind of animals they were.

"So I had filled the cup again and I was drinking, looking out at the bank and the fence and the animals inside the fence, when all of a sudden it felt like I had been thrown off the earth. I could see the bank and the fence go whirling away. And then I saw it. And just as I saw it, it was like it had kind of exploded inside my head. Do you know what it was I saw?"

"What was it you saw?"

He watched me. "I saw a face. In the air, looking at me across that white fence on top of the bank. It was not a man's face, because it had



horns, and it was not a goat's face because it had a beard and it was looking at me with eyes like a man and its mouth was open like it was saying something to me when it exploded inside my head."

"Yes. And then what? What did you do next?"

"You are saying 'He saw a goat inside that fence.' I know. But I didn't ask you to believe. Remember that. Because I am twenty-five years past bothering if folks believe me or not. That's enough for me. And I guess that's all anything amounts to."

"Yes," I said. "What did you do then?"

"Then I was laying down, with my face all wet and my mouth and throat feeling like it was on fire. The man was just taking the bottle away from my mouth (there were two men there, and the porter and the conductor) and I tried to sit up. 'That's whiskey in that bottle,' I said.

"'Why, sure not, doc,' the man said. 'You know I wouldn't be giving whiskey to a man like you. Anybody could tell by looking at you that you never took a drink in your life. Did you?' I told him I hadn't. 'Sure you haven't,' he said.

'A man could tell by the way it took that curve to throw you down that you belonged to the ladies' temperance. You sure took a bust on the head, though. How do you feel now? Here, take another little shot of this tonic.'

"'I think that's whiskey,' I said.

"And was it whiskey?"

“I dont know. I have forgotten. Maybe I knew then. Maybe I knew what it was when I took another dose of it. But that didn’t matter, because it had already started then.”

“The whiskey had already started?”

“No. It. It was stronger than whiskey. Like it was drinking out of the bottle and not me. Because the men held the bottle up and looked at it and said, ‘You sure drink it like it ain’t whiskey, anyway. You’ll sure know soon if it is or not, won’t you?’

“When the train stopped where the ticket said, it was all green, the light was, and the mountains. The wagon was there, and the two men when they helped me down from the train and handed me the portfolio, and I stood there and I said, ‘Let her rip.’ That’s what I said: ‘Let her rip’; and the two men looking at me like you are looking at me.”

“How looking at you?”

“Yes. But you dont have to believe. And I told them to wait while I got the whistle—”

“Whistle?”

“There was a store there, too. The store and the depot, and then the mountains and the green cold without any sun, and the dust kind of pale looking where the wagon was standing. Then we—”

“But the whistle,” I said.

“I bought it in the store. It was a tin one, with holes in it. I couldn’t seem to get the hang of it. So I threw the portfolio into the wagon and I said, ‘Let her rip.’ That was what I said. One of them took the portfolio

out of the wagon and gave it back to me and said, 'Say, doc, ain't this valuable?' and I took it and threw it back into the wagon and I said, 'Let her rip.'

"We all rode on the seat together, me in the middle. We sung. It was cold, and we went along the river, singing, and came to the mill and stopped. While one of them went inside the mill I began to take off my clothes—"

"Take off your clothes?"

"Yes. My Sunday suit. Taking them off and throwing them right down in the dust, by gummy."

"Wasn't it cold?"

"Yes. It was cold. Yes. When I took off my clothes I could feel the cold on me. Then the one came back from the mill with a jug and we drank out of the jug—"

"What was in the jug?"

"I dont know. I dont remember. It wasn't whiskey. I could tell by the way it looked. It was clear like water."

"Couldn't you tell by the smell?"

"I dont smell, you see. I dont know what they call it. But ever since I was a child, I couldn't smell some things. They say that's why I have stayed down here for twenty-five years.

"So we drank and I went to the bridge rail. And just as I jumped I could see myself in the water.

And I knew that it had happened then. Because my body was a human man's body. But my face was the same face that had gone off inside my head back there on the train, the face that had horns and a beard.

"When I got back into the wagon we drank again out of the jug and we sung, only after a while I put on my underclothes and my pants like they wanted me to, and then we went on, singing.

"When we came in sight of the house I got out of the wagon. 'You dont want to get out here,' they said. 'We are in the pasture where they keep that bull chained up.' But I got out of the wagon, with my Sunday coat and vest and the portfolio, and the tin flute."

III

He ceased. He looked at me, quite grave, quite quiet.

"Yes," I said. "Yes. Then what?"

He watched me. "I never asked you to believe nothing, did I? I will have to say that for you." His hand was inside his bosom. "Well, you had some pretty hard going, so far. But now I will take the strain off of you."

From his bosom he drew out a canvas wallet. It was roughly sewn by a clumsy hand and soiled with much usage. He opened it. But before he drew out the contents he looked at me again. "Do you ever make allowances?"

"Allowances?"

“For folks. For what folks think they see. Because nothing ever looks the same to two different people. Never looks the same to one person, depending on which side of it he looks at it from.”

“Oh,” I said. “Allowances. Yes. Yes.”

From the wallet he drew a folded sheet of newspaper. The page was yellow with age, the broken seams glued carefully with strips of soiled cloth. He opened it carefully, gingerly, and turned it and laid it on the table before me. “Dont try to pick it up,” he said. “It’s kind of old now, and it’s the only copy I have. Read it.”

I looked at it: the fading ink, the blurred page dated twenty-five years ago:

MANIAC AT LARGE IN VIRGINIA MOUNTAINS

PROMINENT NEW YORK SOCIETY WOMAN ATTACKED IN OWN GARDEN

Mrs. Carleton Van Dyming Of New York And Newport Attacked By Half Nude Madman And Maddened Bull In Garden Of Her Summer Lodge.

Maniac Escapes. Mrs. Van Dyming Prostrate

It went on from there, with pictures and diagrams, to tell how Mrs. Van Dyming, who was expecting a man from the office of her New York architect, was called from the dinner table to meet, as she supposed, the architect’s man. The story continued in Mrs. Van Dyming’s own words:

I went to the library, where I had directed that the architect’s man be brought, but there was no one there. I was about to ring for the footman when it occurred to me to go to the front door, since it is a

local custom among these country people to come to the front and refuse to advance further or to retreat until the master or the mistress of the house appears. I went to the door. There was no one there.

I stepped out onto the porch. The light was on, but at first I could see no one. I started to re-enter the house but the footman had told me distinctly that the wagon had returned from the village, and I thought that the man had perhaps gone on to the edge of the lawn where he could see the theatre site, where the workmen had that day begun to prepare the ground by digging up the old grape vines.

So I went in that direction. I had almost reached the end of the lawn when something caused me to turn. I saw, in relief between me and the lighted porch, a man bent over and hopping on one leg, who to my horror I realised to be in the act of removing his trousers.

I screamed for my husband. When I did so, the man freed his other leg and turned and came toward me running, clutching a knife (I could see the light from the porch gleaming on the long blade) in one hand, and a flat, square object in the other. I turned then and ran screaming toward the woods.

I had lost all sense of direction. I simply ran for my life. I found that I was inside the old vineyard, among the grape vines, running directly away from the house. I could hear the man running behind me and suddenly I heard him begin to make a strange noise. It sounded like a child trying to blow upon a penny whistle, then I realised that it was the sound of his breath whistling past the knifeblade clinched between his teeth.

Suddenly something overtook and passed me, making a tremendous uproar in the shrubbery. It rushed so near me that I could see its glaring eyes and the shape of a huge beast with horns, which I recognised a moment later as Carleton's — Mr. Van Dyming's — prize Durham bull; an animal so dangerous that Mr. Dyming is forced to keep it locked up. It was now free and it rushed past and on ahead, cutting off my advance, while the madman with the knife cut off my retreat. I was at bay; I stopped with my back to a tree, screaming for help.

"How did the bull get out?" I said.

He was watching my face while I read, like I might have been a teacher grading his school paper. "When I was a boy, I used to take subscriptions to the Police Gazette, for premiums. One of the premiums was a little machine guaranteed to open any lock. I don't use it anymore, but I still carry it in my pocket, like a charm or something, I guess.

Anyway, I had it that night." He looked down at the paper on the table. "I guess folks tell what they believe they saw. So you have to believe what they think they believe. But that paper don't tell how she kicked off her slippers (I nigh broke my neck over one of them) so she could run better, and how I could hear her going wump-wump-wump inside like a dray horse, and how when she would begin to slow up a little I would let out another toot on the whistle and off she would go again.

"I couldn't even keep up with her, carrying that portfolio and trying to blow on that whistle too; seemed like I never would get the hang of it, somehow. But maybe that was because I had to start trying so quick, before I had time to kind of practice up, and running all the time too.

So I threw the portfolio away and then I caught up with her where she was standing with her back against the tree, and that bull running round and round the tree, not bothering her, just running around the tree, making a right smart of fuss, and her leaning there whispering 'Carleton. Carleton' like she was afraid she would wake him up."

The account continued:

I stood against the tree, believing that each circle which the bull made, it would discover my presence. That was why I ceased to scream. Then the man came up where I could see him plainly for the first time. He stopped before me; for one both horrid and joyful moment I thought he was Mr. Van Dyming. "Carleton!" I said.

He didn't answer. He was stooped over again; then I saw that he was engaged with the knife in his hand. "Carleton!" I cried.

" 'Dang if I can get the hang of it, somehow,' he kind of muttered, busy with the murderous knife.

"Carleton!" I cried. "Are you mad?"

He looked up then. I saw that it was not my husband, that I was at the mercy of a madman, a maniac, and a maddened bull. I saw the man raise the knife to his lips and blow again upon it that fearful shriek. Then I fainted.

IV

And that was all. The account merely went on to say how the madman had vanished, leaving no trace, and that Mrs. Van Dyming was under the care of her physician, with a special train waiting to transport her



and her household, lock, stock, and barrel, back to New York; and that Mr. Van Dyming in a brief interview had informed the press that his plans about the improvement of the place had been definitely rescinded and that the place was now for sale.

I folded the paper as carefully as he would have. "Oh," I said. "And so that's all."

"Yes. I waked up about daylight the next morning, in the woods. I didn't know when I went to sleep nor where I was at first. I couldn't remember at first what I had done. But that aint strange. I guess a man couldn't lose a day out of his life and not know it. Do you think so?"

"Yes," I said. "That's what I think too."

"Because I know I aint as evil to God as I guess I look to a lot of folks. And I guess that demons and such and even the devil himself aint quite as evil to God as lots of folks that claim to know a right smart about His business would make you believe. Dont you think that's right?" The wallet lay on the table, open. But he did not at once return the newspaper to it.

Then he quit looking at me; at once his face became diffident, childlike again. He put his hand into the wallet; again he did not withdraw it at once.

"That aint exactly all," he said, his hand inside the wallet, his eyes downcast, and his face: that mild, peaceful, nondescript face across which a mild moustache straggled. "I was a powerful reader, when I was a boy. Do you read much?"

"Yes. A good deal."

But he was not listening. "I would read about pirates and cowboys, and I would be the head pirate or cowboy — me, a durn little tyke that never saw the ocean except at Coney Island or a tree except in Washington Square day in and out. But I read them, believing like every boy, that some day . . . that living wouldn't play a trick on him like getting him alive and then. . . .

When I went home that morning to get ready to take the train, Martha says, 'You're just as good as any of them Van Dymings, for all they get into the papers. If all the folks that deserved it got into the papers, Park Avenue wouldn't hold them, or even Brooklyn,' she says." He drew his hand from the wallet. This time it was only a clipping, one column wide, which he handed me, yellow and faded too, and not long:

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

FOUL PLAY SUSPECTED

Wilfred Middleton, New York Architect, Disappears From Millionaire's Country House

POSSE SEEKS BODY OF ARCHITECT BELIEVED SLAIN BY

MADMAN IN VIRGINIA MOUNTAINS

May Be Coupled With Mysterious Attack

On Mrs. Van Dyming

Mountain Neighborhood In State Of Terror

. . . . ., Va. April 8, . . . . . Wilfred Middleton, 56, architect, of New York City, mysteriously disappeared sometime on April 6th, while en route to the country house of Mr. Carleton Van Dyming near here. He had in his possession some valuable drawings which were found this morning near the Van Dyming estate, thus furnishing the first clue. Chief of Police Elmer Harris has taken charge of the case, and is now awaiting the arrival of a squad of New York detectives, when he

promises a speedy solution if it is in the power of skilled criminologists to do so.

#### MOST BAFFLING IN ALL HIS EXPERIENCE

“When I solve this disappearance,” Chief Harris is quoted, “I will also solve the attack on Mrs. Van Dyming on the same date.”

Middleton leaves a wife, Mrs. Martha Middleton, . . . . .st., Brooklyn.

He was watching my face. “Only it’s one mistake in it,” he said.

“Yes,” I said. “They got your name wrong.”

“I was wondering if you’d see that. But that’s not the mistake. . . .” He had in his hand a second clipping which he now extended. It was like the other two; yellow, faint. I looked at it, the fading, peaceful print through which, like a thin, rotting net, the old violence had somehow escaped, leaving less than the dead gesture fallen to quiet dust. “Read this one.

Only that’s not the mistake I was thinking about. But then, they couldn’t have known at that time. . . .”

I was reading, not listening to him. This was a reprinted letter, an ‘agony column’ letter:

New Orleans, La.

April 10, . . . .

To the Editor, New York Times

New York, N. Y.

Dear Sir

In your issue of April 8, this year you got the name of the party wrong. The name is Midgleston not Middleton. Would thank you to correct this error in local and metropolitan columns as the press a weapon of good & evil into every American home. And a power of that weight cannot afford mistakes even about people as good as any man or woman even if they dont get into the papers every day.

Thanking you again, beg to remain

A Friend

“Oh,” I said. “I see. You corrected it.”

“Yes. But that’s not the mistake. I just did that for her. You know how women are. Like as not she would rather not see it in the papers at all than to see it spelled wrong.”

“She?”

“My wife. Martha. The mistake was, if she got them or not.”

“I dont — Maybe you’d better tell me.”

“That’s what I am doing. I got two of the first one, the one about the disappearance, but I waited until the letter come out. Then I put them both into a piece of paper with A Friend on it, and put them into a envelope and mailed them to her. But I dont know if she got them or not. That was the mistake.”

“The mistake?”

“Yes. She moved. She moved to Park Avenue when the insurance was paid. I saw that in a paper after I come down here. It told about how Mrs. Martha Midgleston of Park Avenue was married to a young fellow he used to be associated with the Maison Payot on Fifth Avenue. It didn’t say when she moved, so I dont know if she got them or not.”

“Oh,” I said. He was putting the clippings carefully back into the canvas wallet.

“Yes, sir. Women are like that. It dont cost a man much to humor them now and then. Because they deserve it; they have a hard time. But it wasn't me. I didn't mind how they spelled it. What's a name to a man that's done and been something outside the lot and plan for mortal human man to do and be?”

The End