



**Dr. Martino, William Faulkner**

Dr. Martino

HUBERT JARROD MET Louise King at a Christmas house party in Saint Louis. He had stopped there on his way home to Oklahoma to oblige, with his aura of oil wells and Yale, the sister of a classmate. Or so he told himself, or so he perhaps believed.

He had planned to stop off at Saint Louis two days and he stayed out the full week, going on to Tulsa overnight to spend Christmas Day with his mother and then returning, “to play around a little more with my swamp angel,” he told himself.

He thought about her quite a lot on the return train — a thin, tense, dark girl. “That to come out of Mississippi,” he thought. “Because she’s got it: a kid born and bred in a Mississippi swamp.”

He did not mean sex appeal. He could not have been fooled by that alone, who had been three years now at New Haven, belonging to the right clubs and all and with money to spend. And besides, Louise was a little on the epicene.

What he meant was a quality of which he was not yet consciously aware: a beyond-looking, a passionate sense for and belief in immanent change to which the rhinoceroslike sufficiency of his Yale and oil-well veneer was a little impervious at first. All he remarked at first was the expectation, the seeking, which he immediately took to himself.

Apparently he was not wrong. He saw her first across the dinner-table. They had not yet been introduced, yet ten minutes after they left the table she had spoken to him, and ten minutes after that they had

slipped out of the house and were in a taxi, and she had supplied the address.

He could not have told himself how it happened, for all his practice, his experience in surreptitiousness. Perhaps he was too busy looking at her; perhaps he was just beginning to be aware that the beyond-looking, the tense expectation, was also beyond him — his youth, his looks, the oil wells and Yale. Because the address she had given was not toward any lights or music apparently, and she sitting beside him, furred and shapeless, her breath vaporizing faster than if she had been trying to bring to life a dead cigarette. He watched the dark houses, the dark, mean streets. “Where are we going?” he said.

She didn’t answer, didn’t look at him, sitting a little forward on the seat. “Mamma didn’t want to come,” she said.

“Your mother?”

“She’s with me. Back there at the party. You haven’t met her yet.”

“Oh. So that’s what you are slipping away from. I flattered myself. I thought I was the reason.” She was sitting forward, small, tense, watching the dark houses: a district half dwellings and half small shops.

“Your mother won’t let him come to call on you?”

She didn’t answer, but leaned forward. Suddenly she tapped on the glass. “Here, driver!” she said. “Right here.” The cab stopped. She turned to face Jarrod, who sat back in his corner, muffled, his face cold. “I’m sorry. I know it’s a rotten trick. But I had to.”

“Not at all,” Jarrod said. “Don’t mention it.”

"I know it's rotten. But I just had to. If you just understood."

"Sure," Jarrod said. "Do you want me to come back and get you? I'd better not go back to the party alone."

"You come in with me."

"Come in?"

"Yes. It'll be all right. I know you can't understand. But it'll be all right. You come in too."

He looked at her face. "I believe you really mean it," he said. "I guess not. But I won't let you down. You set a time, and I'll come back."

"Don't you trust me?"

"Why should I? It's no business of mine. I never saw you before to-night. I'm glad to oblige you. Too bad I am leaving to-morrow. But I guess you can find somebody else to use. You go on in; I'll come back for you."

He left her there and returned in two hours. She must have been waiting just inside the door, because the cab had hardly stopped before the door opened and she ran down the steps and sprang into the cab before he could dismount. "Thank you," she said. "Thank you. You were kind. You were so kind."

When the cab stopped beneath the porte-cochère of the house from which music now came, neither of them moved at once. Neither of them made the first move at all, yet a moment later they kissed. Her mouth was still, cold. "I like you," she said. "I do like you."

Before the week was out Jarrod offered to serve her again so, but she refused, quietly. "Why?" he said. "Don't you want to see him again?" But she wouldn't say, and he had met Mrs. King by that time and he said to himself, "The old girl is after me, anyway."

He saw that at once; he took that also as the meed due his oil wells and his Yale nimbus, since three years at New Haven, leading no classes and winning no football games, had done nothing to dispossess him of the belief that he was the natural prey of all mothers of daughters.

But he didn't flee, not even after he found, a few evenings later, Louise again unaccountably absent, and knew that she had gone, using someone else for the stalking horse, to that quiet house in the dingy street. "Well, I'm done," he said to himself. "I'm through now." But still he didn't flee, perhaps because she had used someone else this time. "She cares that much, anyway," he said to himself.

When he returned to New Haven he had Louise's promise to come to the spring prom. He knew now that Mrs. King would come too. He didn't mind that; one day he suddenly realized that he was glad.

Then he knew that it was because he too knew, believed, that Louise needed looking after; that he had already surrendered unconditionally to one woman of them, he who had never once mentioned love to himself, to any woman. He remembered that quality of beyond-looking and that dark, dingy house in Saint Louis, and he thought, "Well, we have her.

We have the old woman." And one day he believed that he had found the reason if not the answer. It was in class, in psychology, and he

found himself sitting bolt upright, looking at the instructor. The instructor was talking about women, about young girls in particular, about that strange, mysterious phase in which they live for a while.

“A blind spot, like that which racing aviators enter when making a fast turn. When what they see is neither good nor evil, and so what they do is likely to be either one. Probably more likely to be evil, since the very evilness of evil stems from its own fact, while good is an absence of fact. A time, an hour, in which they themselves are victims of that by means of which they victimize.”

That night he sat before his fire for some time, not studying, not doing anything. “We’ve got to be married soon,” he said. “Soon.”

Mrs. King and Louise arrived for the prom. Mrs. King was a gray woman, with a cold, severe face, not harsh, but watchful, alert. It was as though Jarrod saw Louise, too, for the first time. Until then he had not been aware that he was conscious of the beyond-looking quality. It was only now that he saw it by realizing how it had become tenser, as though it were now both dread and desire; as though with the approach of summer she were approaching a climax, a crisis. So he thought that she was ill.

“Maybe we ought to be married right away,” he said to Mrs. King. “I don’t want a degree, anyway.” They were allies now, not yet antagonists, though he had not told her of the two Saint Louis expeditions, the one he knew of and the one he suspected. It was as though he did not need to tell her. It was as though he knew that she knew; that she knew he knew she knew.

“Yes,” she said. “At once.”

But that was as far as it got, though when Louise and Mrs. King left New Haven, Louise had his ring. But it was not on her hand, and on her face was that strained, secret, beyond-looking expression which he now knew was beyond him too, and the effigy and shape which the oil wells and Yale had made. "Till July, then," he said.

"Yes," she said. "I'll write. I'll write you when to come."

And that was all. He went back to his clubs, his classes; in psychology especially he listened. "It seems I'm going to need psychology," he thought, thinking of the dark, small house in Saint Louis, the blank, dark door through which, running, she had disappeared. That was it: a man he had never seen, never heard of, shut up in a little dingy house on a back street on Christmas eve. He thought, fretfully, "And me young, with money, a Yale man. And I don't even know his name."

Once a week he wrote to Louise; perhaps twice a month he received replies — brief, cold notes mailed always at a different place — resorts and hotels — until mid-June, within a week of Commencement and his degree. Then he received a wire. It was from Mrs. King.

It said Come at once and the location was Cranston's Wells, Mississippi. It was a town he had never heard of.

That was Friday; thirty minutes later his roommate came in and found him packing. "Going to town?" the roommate said.

"Yes," Jarrod said.

“I’ll go with you. I need a little relaxation myself, before facing the cheering throngs at the Dean’s altar.”

“No,” Jarrod said. “This is business.”

“Sure,” the roommate said. “I know a business woman in New York, myself. There’s more than one in that town.”

“No,” Jarrod said. “Not this time.”

“Beano,” the roommate said.

The place was a resort owned by a neat, small, gray spinster who had inherited it, and some of the guests as well, from her father thirty years ago — a rambling frame hotel and a housed spring where old men with pouched eyes and parchment skin and old women dropsical with good living gathered from the neighboring Alabama and Mississippi towns to drink the iron-impregnated waters.

This was the place where Louise had been spending her summers since she was born; and from the veranda of the hotel where the idle old women with their idle magazines and embroidery and their bright shawls had been watching each summer the comedy of which he was just learning, he could see the tips of the crepe myrtle copse hiding the bench on which the man whom he had come to fear, and whose face he had not even seen, had been sitting all day long for three months each summer for more than fifteen years.

So he stood beside the neat, gray proprietress on the top step in the early sunlight, while the old women went to and fro between house and spring, watching him with covert, secret, bright, curious looks.

“Watching Louise’s young man compete with a dead man and a horse,” Jarrod thought.



But his face did not show this. It showed nothing at all, not even a great deal of intelligence as, tall, erect, in flannels and a tweed jacket in the Mississippi June, where the other men wore linen when they wore coats at all, he talked with the proprietress about the man whose face he had not seen and whose name he had just learned.

“It’s his heart,” the proprietress said to Jarrod. “He has to be careful. He had to give up his practice and everything. He hasn’t any people and he has just enough money to come down here every summer and spend the summer sitting on his bench; we call it Doctor Martino’s bench.

Each summer I think it will be the last time; that we shan’t see him again. But each May I get the message from him, the reservation. And do you know what I think? I think that it is Louise King that keeps him alive. And that Alvina King is a fool.”

“How a fool?” Jarrod said.

The proprietress was watching him — this was the morning after his arrival; looking down at her he thought at first, “She is wondering how much I have heard, how much they have told me.” Then he thought, “No. It’s because she stays busy. Not like them, those others with their magazines. She has to stay too busy keeping them fed to have learned who I am, or to have been thinking all this time what the others have been thinking.”

She was watching him. “How long have you known Louise?”

“Not long. I met her at a dance at school.”

“Oh. Well, I think that the Lord has taken pity on Doctor Martino and He is letting him use Louise’s heart, somehow. That’s what I think. And you can laugh if you want to.”

“I’m not laughing,” Jarrod said. “Tell me about him.”

She told him, watching his face, her air bright, birdlike, telling him about how the man had appeared one June, in his crumpled linen and panama hat, and about his eyes. (“They looked like shoe-buttons. And when he moved it was as slow as if he had to keep on telling himself, even after he had started moving, ‘Go on, now; keep on moving, now.’”) And about how he signed the book in script almost too small to read: Jules Martino, Saint Louis, Missouri.

And how after that year he came back each June, to sit all day long on the bench in the crepe myrtle copse, where the old Negro porter would fetch him his mail: the two medical journals, the Saint Louis paper, and the two letters from Louise King — the one in June saying that she would arrive next week, and the one in late August saying that she had reached home.

But the proprietress didn’t tell how she would walk a little way down the path three or four times a day to see if he were all right, and he not aware of it; and watching her while she talked, Jarrod thought, “What rivers has he made you swim, I wonder?”

“He had been coming here for three years,” the proprietress said, “without knowing anybody, without seeming to want to know anybody, before even I found out about his heart. But he kept on coming (I forgot to say that Alvina King was already spending the summer here, right after Louise was born) and then I noticed how he would always be sitting where he could watch Louise playing, and so I thought that

maybe he had lost his child. That was before he told me that he had never married and he didn't have any family at all.

I thought that was what attracted him to Louise. And so I would watch him while he watched Louise growing up. I would see them talking, and him watching her year after year, and so after a while I said to myself. 'He wants to be married. He's waiting for Louise to grow up.' That's what I thought then." The proprietress was not looking at Jarrod now. She laughed a little. "My Lord, I've thought a lot of foolishness in my time."

"I don't know that that was so foolish," Jarrod said.

"Maybe not. Louise would make anybody a wife to be proud of. And him being all alone, without anybody to look after him when he got old." The proprietress was beyond fifty herself. "I reckon I've passed the time when I believe it's important whether women get married or not.

I reckon, running this place single-handed this way, I've come to believe it ain't very important what anybody does, as long as they are fed good and have a comfortable bed." She ceased. For a time she seemed to muse upon the shade-dappled park, the old women clotting within the marquee above the spring.

"Did he make her do things, then?" Jarrod said.

"You've been listening to Alvina King," the proprietress said. "He never made her do anything. How could he? He never left that bench. He never leaves it. He would just sit there and watch her playing, until she began to get too old to play in the dirt.

Then they would talk, sitting on the bench there. How could he make her do things, even if he had wanted to?"

"I think you are right," Jarrod said. "Tell me about when she swam the river."

"Oh, yes. She was always afraid of water. But one summer she learned to swim, learned by herself, in the pool. He wasn't even there. Nor at the river either. He didn't know about that until we knew it. He just told her not to be afraid, ever. And what's the harm in that, will you tell me?"

"None," Jarrod said.

"No," the proprietress said, as though she were not listening, had not heard him. "So she came in and told me, and I said, 'With the snakes and all, weren't you afraid?' And she said:

"Yes. I was afraid. That's why I did it.'

"Why you did it?' I said. And she said:

"When you are afraid to do something you know that you are alive. But when you are afraid to do what you are afraid of you are dead.'

"I know where you got that,' I said. 'I'll be bound he didn't swim the river too.' And she said:

"He didn't have to. Every time he wakes up in the morning he does what I had to swim the river to do. This is what I got for doing it: see?' And she took something on a string out of the front of her dress and showed it to me. It was a rabbit made out of metal or something, about an inch tall, like you buy in the ten-cent stores. He had given it to her.

“‘What does that mean?’ I said.

“‘That’s my being afraid,’ she said. ‘A rabbit: don’t you see? But it’s brass now; the shape of being afraid, in brass that nothing can hurt. As long as I keep it I am not even afraid of being afraid.’

“‘And if you are afraid,’ I said, ‘then what?’

“‘Then I’ll give it back to him,’ she said. And what’s the harm in that, pray tell me? even though Alvina King always has been a fool. Because Louise came back in about an hour. She had been crying. She had the rabbit in her hand. ‘Will you keep this for me?’ she said. ‘Don’t let anybody have it except me. Not anybody. Will you promise?’

“‘And I promised, and I put the rabbit away for her. She asked me for it just before they left. That was when Alvina said they were not coming back the next summer. ‘This foolishness is going to end,’ she said. ‘He will get her killed; he is a menace.’

“‘And, sure enough, next summer they didn’t come. I heard that Louise was sick, and I knew why. I knew that Alvina had driven her into sickness, into bed. But Doctor Jules came in June. ‘Louise has been right sick,’ I told him.

“‘Yes,’ he said; ‘I know.’ So I thought he had heard, that she had written to him. But then I thought how she must have been too sick to write, and that that fool mother of hers anyway . . .” The proprietress was watching Jarrod. “‘Because she wouldn’t have to write him.’”

“Wouldn’t have to?”

“He knew she was sick. He knew it. She didn’t have to write him. Now you’ll laugh.”

“I’m not laughing. How did he know?”

“He knew. Because I knew he knew; and so when he didn’t go on back to Saint Louis, I knew that she would come. And so in August they did come. Louise had grown a lot taller, thinner, and that afternoon I saw them standing together for the first time. She was almost as tall as he was. That was when I first saw that Louise was a woman. And now Alvina worrying about that horse that Louise says she’s going to ride.”

“It’s already killed one man,” Jarrod said.

“Automobiles have killed more than that. But you ride in an automobile, yourself. You came in one. It never hurt her when she swam that river, did it?”

“But this is different. How do you know it won’t hurt her?”

“I just know.”

“How know?”

“You go out there where you can see that bench. Don’t bother him; just go and look at him. Then you’ll know too.”

“Well, I’d want a little more assurance than that,” Jarrod said.

He had returned to Mrs. King. With Louise he had had one interview, brief, violent, bitter. That was the night before; to-day she had disappeared. “Yet he is still sitting there on that bench,” Jarrod thought.

“She’s not even with him. They don’t even seem to have to be together: he can tell all the way from Mississippi to Saint Louis when she is sick. Well, I know who’s in the blind spot now.”

Mrs. King was in her room. “It seems that my worst competitor is that horse,” Jarrod said.

“Can’t you see he is making her ride it for the same reason he made her swim that snake-filled river? To show that he can, to humiliate me?”

“What can I do?” Jarrod said. “I tried to talk to her last night. But you saw where I got.”

“If I were a man, I shouldn’t have to ask what to do. If I saw the girl I was engaged to being ruined, ruined by a man, any man, and a man I never saw before and don’t even know who he is — old or not old; heart or no heart . . .”

“I’ll talk to her again.”

“Talk?” Mrs. King said. “Talk? Do you think I sent you that message to hurry down here just to talk to her?”

“You wait, now,” Jarrod said. “It’ll be all right. I’ll attend to this.”

He had to do a good bit of waiting, himself. It was nearly noon when Louise entered the empty lobby where he sat. He rose. “Well?”

They looked at each other. “Well?”

“Are you still going to ride that horse this afternoon?” Jarrod asked.

“I thought we settled this last night. But you’re still meddling. I didn’t send for you to come down here.”

“But I’m here. I never thought, though, that I was being sent for to compete with a horse.” She watched him, her eyes hard. “With worse than a horse. With a damned dead man. A man that’s been dead for twenty years; he says so himself, they tell me. And he ought to know, being a doctor, a heart specialist.

I suppose you keep him alive by scaring him — like strychnine, Florence Nightingale.” She watched him, her face quite still, quite cold. “I’m not jealous,” he went on. “Not of that bird. But when I see him making you ride that horse that has already killed . . .” He looked down at her cold face. “Don’t you want to marry me, Louise?”

She ceased to look at him. “It’s because we are young yet. We have so much time, all the rest of time. And maybe next year even, this very day next year, with everything pretty and warm and green, and he will be . . .

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You don’t understand. I didn’t at first, when he first told me how it was to live day after day with a match box full of dynamite caps in your breast pocket. Then he told me one day, when I was big enough to understand, how there is nothing in the world but living, being alive, knowing you are alive. And to be afraid is to know you are alive, but to do what you are afraid of, then you live.

He says it’s better even to be afraid than to be dead. He told me all that while he was still afraid, before he gave up the being afraid and he knew he was alive without living. And now he has even given that up, and now he is just afraid. So what can I do?”



“Yes. And I can wait, because I haven’t got a match box of dynamite caps in my shirt. Or a box of conjuring powder, either.”

“I don’t expect you to see. I didn’t send for you. I didn’t want to get you mixed up in it.”

“You never thought of that when you took my ring. Besides, you had already got me mixed up in it, the first night I ever saw you. You never minded then. So now I know a lot I didn’t know before. And what does he think about that ring, by the way?”

She didn’t answer. She was not looking at him; neither was her face averted. After a time he said, “I see. He doesn’t know about the ring. You never showed it to him.” Still she didn’t answer, looking neither at him nor away. “All right,” he said “I’ll give you one more chance.”

She looked at him. “One more chance for what?” Then she said, “Oh. The ring. You want it back.” He watched her, erect, expressionless, while she drew from inside her dress a slender cord on which was suspended the ring and a second object which he recognized in the flicking movement which broke the cord, to be the tiny metal rabbit of which the proprietress had told him.

Then it was gone, and her hand flicked again, and something struck him a hard, stinging blow on the cheek. She was already running toward the stairs. After a time he stooped and picked up the ring from the floor.

He looked about the lobby. “They’re all down at the spring,” he thought, holding the ring on his palm. “That’s what people come here for: to drink water.”

They were there, clotting in the marquee above the well, with their bright shawls and magazines.

As he approached, Mrs. King came quickly out of the group, carrying one of the stained tumblers in her hand. "Yes?" she said. "Yes?" Jarrod extended his hand on which the ring lay. Mrs. King looked down at the ring, her face cold, quiet, outraged. "Sometimes I wonder if she can be my daughter. What will you do now?"

Jarrold, too, looked down at the ring, his face also cold, still. "At first I thought I just had to compete with a horse," he said. "But it seems there is more going on here than I knew of, than I was told of."

"Fiddlesticks," Mrs. King said. "Have you been listening to that fool Lily Cranston, to these other old fools here?"

"Not to learn any more than everybody else seems to have known all the time. But then, I'm only the man she was engaged to marry." He looked down at the ring. "What do you think I had better do now?"

"If you're a man that has to stop to ask advice from a woman in a case like this, then you'd better take the advice and take your ring and go on back to Nebraska or Kansas or wherever it is."

"Oklahoma," Jarrod said sullenly. He closed his hand on the ring. "He'll be on that bench," he said.

"Why shouldn't he?" Mrs. King said. "He has no one to fear here."

But Jarrod was already moving away. "You go on to Louise," he said. "I'll attend to this."

Mrs. King watched him go on down the path. Then she turned herself and flung the stained tumbler into an oleander bush and went to the hotel, walking fast, and mounted the stairs. Louise was in her room, dressing. "So you gave Hubert back his ring," Mrs. King said.

"That man will be pleased now. You will have no secret from him now, if the ring ever was a secret. Since you don't seem to have any private affairs where he is concerned; don't appear to desire any—"

"Stop," Louise said. "You can't talk to me like that."

"Ah. He would be proud of that, too, to have heard that from his pupil."

"He wouldn't let me down. But you let me down. He wouldn't let me down." She stood thin and taut, her hands clenched at her sides. Suddenly she began to cry, her face lifted, the tears rolling down her cheeks. "I worry and I worry and I don't know what to do. And now you let me down, my own mother."

Mrs. King sat on the bed. Louise stood in her underthings, the garments she had removed scattered here and there, on the bed and on the chairs. On the table beside the bed lay the little metal rabbit; Mrs. King looked at it for a moment. "Don't you want to marry Hubert?" she said.

"Didn't I promise him, you and him both? Didn't I take his ring? But you won't let me alone. He won't give me time, a chance. And now you let me down, too. Everybody lets me down except Doctor Jules."

Mrs. King watched her, cold, immobile. "I believe that fool Lily Cranston is right. I believe that man has some criminal power over you. I just

thank God he has not used it for anything except to try to make you kill yourself, make a fool of yourself. Not yet, that is—”

“Stop,” Louise said; “stop!” She continued to say “Stop. Stop,” even when Mrs. King walked up and touched her. “But you let me down! And now Hubert has let me down. He told you about that horse after he had promised me he wouldn’t.”

“I knew that already. That’s why I sent for him. I could do nothing with you. Besides, it’s anybody’s business to keep you from riding it.”

“You can’t keep me. You may keep me locked up in this room to-day, but you can’t always. Because you are older than I am. You’ll have to die first, even if it takes a hundred years. And I’ll come back and ride that horse if it takes a thousand years.”

“Maybe I won’t be here then,” Mrs. King said. “But neither will he. I can outlive him. And I can keep you locked up in this room for one day, anyway.”

Fifteen minutes later the ancient porter knocked at the locked door. Mrs. King went and opened it. “Mr. Jarrod wants to see you downstairs,” the porter said.

She locked the door behind her. Jarrod was in the lobby. It was empty. “Yes?” Mrs. King said. “Yes?”

“He said that if Louise would tell him herself she wants to marry me. Send him a sign.”

“A sign?” They both spoke quietly, a little tensely, though quite calm, quite grave.

“Yes. I showed him the ring, and him sitting there on that bench, in that suit looking like he had been sleeping in it all summer, and his eyes watching me like he didn’t believe she had ever seen the ring. Then he said, ‘Ah. You have the ring. Your proof seems to be in the hands of the wrong party.’

If you and Louise are engaged, she should have the ring. Or am I just old fashioned?’ And me standing there like a fool and him looking at the ring like it might have come from Woolworth’s. He never even offered to touch it.”

“You showed him the ring? The ring? You fool. What—”

“Yes. I don’t know. It was just the way he sat there, the way he makes her do things, I guess. It was like he was laughing at me, like he knew all the time there was nothing I could do, nothing I could think of doing about it he had not already thought about; that he knew he could always get between us before — in time. . . .”

“Then what? What kind of a sign did he say?”

“He didn’t say. He just said a sign, from her hand to his. That he could believe, since my having the ring had exploded my proof. And then I caught my hand just before it hit him — and him sitting there. He didn’t move; he just sat there with his eyes closed and the sweat popping out on his face. And then he opened his eyes and said, ‘Now, strike me.’”

“Wait,” Mrs. King said. Jarrod had not moved. Mrs. King gazed across the empty lobby, tapping her teeth with her fingernail. “Proof,” she said. “A sign.” She moved. “You wait here.” She went back up the stairs; a heavy woman, moving with that indomitable, locomotivelike celerity.

She was not gone long. “Louise is asleep,” she said, for no reason that Jarrod could have discerned, even if he had been listening. She held her closed hand out. “Can you have your car ready in twenty minutes?”

“Yes. But what — ?”

“And your bags packed. I’ll see to everything else.”

“And Louise — You mean—”

“You can be married in Meridian; you will be there in an hour.”

“Married? Has Louise — ?”

“I have a sign from her that he will believe. You get your things all ready and don’t you tell anyone where you are going, do you hear?”

“Yes. Yes. And Louise has — ?”

“Not a soul. Here” — she put something into his hand. “Get your things ready, then take this and give it to him. He may insist on seeing her. But I’ll attend to that. You just be ready. Maybe he’ll just write a note, anyway. You do what I told you.” She turned back toward the stairs, fast, with that controlled swiftness, and disappeared.

Then Jarrod opened his hand and looked at the object which she had given him. It was the metal rabbit. It had been gilded once, but that was years ago, and it now lay on his palm in mute and tarnished oxidation.

When he left the room he was not exactly running either. But he was going fast.

But when he re-entered the lobby fifteen minutes later, he was running. Mrs. King was waiting for him.

“He wrote the note,” Jarrod said. “One to Louise, and one to leave here for Miss Cranston. He told me I could read the one to Louise.” But Mrs. King had already taken it from his hand and opened it. “He said I could read it,” Jarrod said. He was breathing hard, fast.

“He watched me do it, sitting there on that bench; he hadn’t moved even his hands since I was there before, and then he said, ‘Young Mr. Jarrod, you have been conquered by a woman, as I have been. But with this difference: it will be a long time yet before you will realize that you have been slain.’

And I said, ‘If Louise is to do the slaying, I intend to die every day for the rest of my life or hers.’ And he said, ‘Ah; Louise. Were you speaking of Louise?’ And I said, ‘Dead.’ I said, ‘Dead.’ I said, ‘Dead.’”

But Mrs. King was not there. She was already half way up the stairs. She entered the room. Louise turned on the bed, her face swollen, with tears or with sleep. Mrs. King handed her the note. “There, honey. What did I tell you? He was just making a fool of you. Just using you to pass the time with.”

The car was going fast when it turned into the highroad. “Hurry,” Louise said. The car increased speed; she looked back once toward the hotel,

the park massed with oleander and crepe myrtle, then she crouched still lower in the seat beside Jarrod. "Faster," she said.

"I say faster, too," Jarrod said. He glanced down at her; then he looked down at her again. She was crying. "Are you that glad?" he said.

"I've lost something," she said, crying quietly. "Something I've had a long time, given to me when I was a child. And now I've lost it. I had it just this morning, and now I can't find it."

"Lost it?" he said. "Given to you . . ." His foot lifted; the car began to slow. "Why, you sent . . ."

"No, no!" Louise said. "Don't stop! Don't turn back! Go on!"

The car was coasting now, slowing, the brakes not yet on. "Why, you . . . She said you were asleep." He put his foot on the brakes.

"No, no!" Louise cried. She had been sitting forward; she did not seem to have heard him at all. "Don't turn back! Go on! Go on!"

"And he knew," Jarrod thought. "Sitting there on the bench, he knew. When he said what he said that I would not know that I had been slain."

The car was almost stopped. "Go on!" Louise cried. "Go on!" He was looking down at her. Her eyes looked as if they were blind; her face was pale, white, her mouth open, shaped to an agony of despair and a surrender in particular which, had he been older, he would have realized that he would never see again on any face.

Then he watched his hand set the lever back into gear, and his foot come down again on the throttle. "He said it himself," Jarrod thought:



“to be afraid, and yet to do. He said it himself: there’s nothing in the world but being alive, knowing you are alive.”

“Faster!” Louise cried. “Faster!” The car rushed on; the house, the broad veranda where the bright shawls were now sibilant, fell behind.

In that gathering of wide summer dresses, of sucked old breaths and gabbling females staccato, the proprietress stood on the veranda with the second note in her hand. “Married?” she said. “Married?” As if she were someone else, she watched herself open the note and read it again. It did not take long:

Lily:

Don’t worry about me for a while longer. I’ll sit here until supper time. Don’t worry about me.

J.M.

“Don’t worry about me,” she said. “About me.” She went into the lobby, where the old Negro was pottering with a broom. “And Mr. Jarrod gave you this?”

“Yessum. Give it to me runnin’ and tole me to git his bags into de cyar, and next I know, here Miss Louise and him whoosh! outen de drive and up de big road like a patter-roller.”

“And they went toward Meridian?”

“Yessum. Right past de bench whar Doctor Jules settin’.” “Married,” the proprietress said. “Married.” Still carrying the note, she left the house and followed the path until she came in sight of the bench on which sat a motionless figure in white. She stopped again and re-read the note; again she looked up the path toward the bench which faced the road.

Then she returned to the house. The women had now dispersed into chairs, though their voices still filled the veranda, sibilant, inextricable one from another; they ceased suddenly as the proprietress approached and entered the house again. She entered the house, walking fast. That was about an hour to sundown.

Dusk was beginning to fall when she entered the kitchen. The porter was now sitting on a chair beside the stove, talking to the cook. The proprietress stopped in the door. "Uncle Charley," she said, "Go and tell Doctor Jules supper will be ready soon."

The porter rose and left the kitchen by the side door. When he passed the veranda, the proprietress stood on the top step. She watched him go on and disappear up the path toward the bench. A woman passed and spoke to her, but she made no reply; it was as though she had not heard, watching the shubbery beyond which the Negro had disappeared.

And when he reappeared, the guests on the veranda saw her already in motion, descending the steps before they were even aware that the Negro was running, and they sat suddenly hushed and forward and watched her pass the Negro without stopping, her skirts lifted from her trim, school-mistress ankles and feet, and disappear up the path herself, running too.

They were still sitting forward, hushed, when she too reappeared; they watched her come through the dusk and mount the porch, with on her face also a look of having seen something which she knew to be true but which she was not quite yet ready to believe.

Perhaps that was why her voice was quite quiet when she addressed one of the guests by name, calling her “honey”:

“Doctor Martino has just died. Will you telephone to town for me?”

The End