



Hair, William Faulkner

Hair

I

THIS GIRL, THIS Susan Reed, was an orphan. She lived with a family named Burchett, that had some more children, two or three more. Some said that Susan was a niece or a cousin or something; others cast the usual aspersions on the character of Burchett and even of Mrs Burchett: you know. Women mostly, these were.

She was about five when Hawkshaw first came to town. It was his first summer behind that chair in Maxey's barber shop that Mrs Burchett brought Susan in for the first time. Maxey told me about how him and the other barbers watched Mrs Burchett trying for three days to get Susan (she was a thin little girl then, with big scared eyes and this straight, soft hair not blonde and not brunette) into the shop.

And Maxey told how at last it was Hawkshaw that went out into the street and worked with the girl for about fifteen minutes until he got her into the shop and into his chair — him that hadn't never said more than Yes or No to any man or woman in the town that anybody ever saw. "Be durn if it didn't look like Hawkshaw had been waiting for her to come along," Maxey told me.

That was her first haircut. Hawkshaw gave it to her, and her sitting there under the cloth like a little scared rabbit. But six months after that she was coming to the shop by herself and letting Hawkshaw cut her hair, still looking like a little old rabbit, with her scared face and those big eyes and that hair without any special name showing above the cloth. If Hawkshaw was busy, Maxey said she would come in and sit

on the waiting bench close to his chair with her legs sticking straight out in front of her until Hawkshaw got done.

Maxey says they considered her Hawkshaw's client the same as if she had been a Saturday night shaving customer. He says that one time the other barber, Matt Fox, offered to wait on her, Hawkshaw being busy, and that Hawkshaw looked up like a flash. "I'll be done in a minute," he says. "I'll tend to her." Maxey told me that Hawkshaw had been working for him for almost a year then, but that was the first time he ever heard him speak positive about anything.

That fall the girl started to school. She would pass the barber shop each morning and afternoon. She was still shy, walking fast like little girls do, with that yellow-brown head of hers passing the window level and fast like she was on skates. She was always by herself at first, but pretty soon her head would be one of a clump of other heads, all talking, not looking toward the window at all, and Hawkshaw standing there in the window, looking out.

Maxey said him and Matt would not have to look at the clock at all to tell when five minutes to eight and to three o'clock came, because they could tell by Hawkshaw. It was like he would kind of drift up to the window without watching himself do it, and be looking out about the time for the school children to begin to pass. When she would come to the shop for a haircut, Hawkshaw would give her two or three of those peppermints where he would give the other children just one, Maxey told me.

No; it was Matt Fox, the other barber, told me that. He was the one who told me about the doll Hawkshaw gave her on Christmas. I don't know how he found it out. Hawkshaw never told him. But he knew

some way; he knew more about Hawkshaw than Maxey did. He was a married man himself, Matt was.

A kind of fat, flabby fellow, with a pasty face and eyes that looked tired or sad — something. A funny fellow, and almost as good a barber as Hawkshaw. He never talked much either, and I don't know how he could have known so much about Hawkshaw when a talking man couldn't get much out of him. I guess maybe a talking man hasn't got the time to ever learn much about anything except words.

Anyway, Matt told me about how Hawkshaw gave her a present every Christmas, even after she got to be a big girl. She still came to him, to his chair, and him watching her every morning and afternoon when she passed to and from school. A big girl, and she wasn't shy any more.

You wouldn't have thought she was the same girl. She got grown fast. Too fast. That was the trouble. Some said it was being an orphan and all. But it wasn't that. Girls are different from boys. Girls are born weaned and boys don't ever get weaned. You see one sixty years old, and be damned if he won't go back to the perambulator at the bat of an eye.

It's not that she was bad. There's not any such thing as a woman born bad, because they are all born bad, born with the badness in them. The thing is, to get them married before the badness comes to a natural head.

But we try to make them conform to a system that says a woman can't be married until she reaches a certain age. And nature don't pay any attention to systems, let alone women paying any attention to them, or

to anything. She just grew up too fast. She reached the point where the badness came to a head before the system said it was time for her to. I think they can't help it. I have a daughter of my own, and I say that.

So there she was. Matt told me they figured up and she couldn't have been more than thirteen when Mrs Burchett whipped her one day for using rouge and paint, and during that year, he said, they would see her with two or three other girls giggling and laughing on the street at all hours when they should have been in school; still thin, with that hair still not blonde and not brunette, with her face caked with paint until you would have thought it would crack like dried mud when she laughed, with the regular simple gingham and such dresses that a thirteen-year-old child ought to wear pulled and dragged to show off what she never had yet to show off, like the older girls did with their silk and crepe and such.

Matt said he watched her pass one day, when all of a sudden he realized she never had any stockings on. He said he thought about it and he said he could not remember that she ever did wear stockings in the summer, until he realized that what he had noticed was not the lack of stockings, but that her legs were like a woman's legs: female. And her only thirteen.

I say she couldn't help herself. It wasn't her fault. And it wasn't Burchett's fault, either. Why, nobody can be as gentle with them, the bad ones, the ones that are unlucky enough to come to a head too soon, as men. Look at the way they — all the men in town — treated Hawkshaw.

Even after folks knew, after all the talk began, there wasn't a man of them talked before Hawkshaw. I reckon they thought he knew too, had

heard some of the talk, but whenever they talked about her in the shop, it was while Hawkshaw was not there. And I reckon the other men were the same, because there was not a one of them that hadn't seen Hawkshaw at the window, looking at her when she passed, or looking at her on the street; happening to kind of be passing the picture show when it let out and she would come out with some fellow, having begun to go with them before she was fourteen. Folks said how she would have to slip out and meet them and slip back into the house again with Mrs Burchett thinking she was at the home of a girl friend.

They never talked about her before Hawkshaw. They would wait until he was gone, to dinner, or on one of those two-weeks' vacations of his in April that never anybody could find out about; where he went or anything. But he would be gone, and they would watch the girl slipping around, skirting trouble, bound to get into it sooner or later, even if Burchett didn't hear something first. She had quit school a year ago. For a year Burchett and Mrs Burchett thought that she was going to school every day, when she hadn't been inside the building even.

Somebody — one of the high-school boys maybe, but she never drew any lines: schoolboys, married men, anybody — would get her a report card every month and she would fill it out herself and take it home for Mrs Burchett to sign. It beats the devil how the folks that love a woman will let her fool them.

So she quit school and went to work in the ten-cent store. She would come to the shop for a haircut, all painted up, in some kind of little flimsy off-color clothes that showed her off, with her face watchful and bold and discreet all at once, and her hair gummed and twisted about her face.

But even the stuff she put on it couldn't change that brown-yellow color. Her hair hadn't changed at all. She wouldn't always go to Hawkshaw's chair. Even when his chair was empty, she would sometimes take one of the others, talking to the barbers, filling the whole shop with noise and perfume and her legs sticking out from under the cloth. Hawkshaw wouldn't look at her then. Even when he wasn't busy, he had a way of looking the same: intent and down-looking like he was making out to be busy, hiding behind the making-out.

That was how it was when he left two weeks ago on that April vacation of his, that secret trip that folks had given up trying to find where he went ten years ago. I made Jefferson a couple of days after he left, and I was in the shop. They were talking about him and her.

"Is he still giving her Christmas presents?" I said.

"He bought her a wrist watch two years ago," Matt Fox said. "Paid sixty dollars for it."

Maxey was shaving a customer. He stopped, the razor in his hand, the blade loaded with lather. "Well, I'll be durned," he said. "Then he must — You reckon he was the first one, the one that—"

Matt hadn't looked around. "He aint give it to her yet," he said.

"Well, durn his tight-fisted time," Maxey said. "Any old man that will fool with a young girl, he's pretty bad. But a fellow that will trick one and then not even pay her nothing—"

Matt looked around now; he was shaving a customer too. "What would you say if you heard that the reason he aint give it to her is that he

thinks she is too young to receive jewelry from anybody that aint kin to her?"

"You mean, he dont know? He dont know what everybody else in this town except maybe Mr and Mrs Burchett has knowed for three years?"

Matt went back to work again, his elbow moving steady, the razor moving in little jerks. "How would he know? Aint anybody but a woman going to tell him. And he dont know any women except Mrs Cowan. And I reckon she thinks he's done heard."

"That's a fact," Maxey says.

That was how things were when he went off on his vacation two weeks ago. I worked Jefferson in a day and a half, and went on. In the middle of the next week I reached Division. I didn't hurry. I wanted to give him time. It was on a Wednesday morning I got there.

II

If there had been love once, a man would have said that Hawkshaw had forgotten her. Meaning love, of course. When I first saw him thirteen years ago (I had just gone on the road then, making North Mississippi and Alabama with a line of work shirts and overalls) behind a chair in the barber shop in Porterfield, I said, "Here is a bachelor born. Here is a man who was born single and forty years old."

A little, sandy-complected man with a face you would not remember and would not recognize again ten minutes later, in a blue serge suit and a black bow tie, the kind that snaps together in the back, that you buy already tied in the store. Maxey told me he was still wearing that

serge suit and tie when he got off the south-bound train in Jefferson a year later, carrying one of these imitation leather suitcases.

And when I saw him again in Jefferson in the next year, behind a chair in Maxey's shop, if it had not been for the chair I wouldn't have recognized him at all. Same face, same tie; be damned if it wasn't like they had picked him up, chair, customer and all, and set him down sixty miles away without him missing a lick.

I had to look back out the window at the square to be sure I wasn't in Porterfield myself any time a year ago. And that was the first time I realized that when I had made Porterfield about six weeks back, he had not been there.

It was three years after that before I found out about him. I would make Division about five times a year — a store and four or five houses and a sawmill on the State line between Mississippi and Alabama. I had noticed a house there. It was a good house, one of the best there, and it was always closed. When I would make Division in the late spring or the early summer there would always be signs of work around the house. The yard would be cleaned up of weeds, and the flower beds tended to and the fences and roof fixed.

Then when I would get back to Division along in the fall or the winter, the yard would be grown up in weeds again, and maybe some of the pickets gone off the fence where folks had pulled them off to mend their own fences or maybe for firewood; I dont know. And the house would be always closed; never any smoke at the kitchen chimney. So one day I asked the storekeeper about it and he told me.

It had belonged to a man named Starnes, but the family was all dead. They were considered the best folks, because they owned some land, mortgaged. Starnes was one of these lazy men that was satisfied to be a landowner as long as he had enough to eat and a little tobacco.

They had one daughter that went and got herself engaged to a young fellow, son of a tenant farmer. The mother didn't like the idea, but Starnes didn't seem to object. Maybe because the young fellow (his name was Stribling) was a hard worker; maybe because Starnes was just too lazy to object. Anyway, they were engaged and Stribling saved his money and went to Birmingham to learn barbering. Rode part of the way in wagons and walked the rest, coming back each summer to see the girl.

Then one day Starnes died, sitting in his chair on the porch; they said that he was too lazy to keep on breathing, and they sent for Stribling. I heard he had built up a good trade of his own in the Birmingham shop, saving his money; they told me he had done picked out the apartment and paid down on the furniture and all, and that they were to be married that summer. He came back. All Starnes had ever raised was a mortgage, so Stribling paid for the burial. It cost a right smart, more than Starnes was worth, but Mrs Starnes had to be suited. So Stribling had to start saving again.

But he had already leased the apartment and paid down on the furniture and the ring and he had bought the wedding license when they sent for him again in a hurry. It was the girl this time. She had some kind of fever. These backwoods folks: you know how it is. No doctors, or veterinaries, if they are. Cut them and shoot them: that's all right.

But let them get a bad cold and maybe they'll get well or maybe they'll die two days later of cholera. She was delirious when Stribling got there. They had to cut all her hair off. Stribling did that, being an expert you might say; a professional in the family. They told me she was one of these thin, unhealthy girls anyway, with a lot of straight hair not brown and not yellow.

She never knew him, never knew who cut off her hair. She died so, without knowing anything about it, without knowing even that she died, maybe. She just kept on saying, "Take care of maw.

The mortgage. Paw wont like it to be left so. Send for Henry (That was him: Henry Stribling; Hawkshaw: I saw him the next year in Jefferson. "So you're Henry Stribling," I said). The mortgage. Take care of maw. Send for Henry. The mortgage. Send for Henry." Then she died. There was a picture of her, the only one they had. Hawkshaw sent it, with a lock of the hair he had cut off, to an address in a farm magazine, to have the hair made into a frame for the picture. But they both got lost, the hair and the picture, in the mail somehow. Anyway he never got either of them back.

He buried the girl too, and the next year (he had to go back to Birmingham and get shut of the apartment which he had engaged and let the furniture go so he could save again) he put a headstone over her grave. Then he went away again and they heard how he had quit the Birmingham shop. He just quit and disappeared, and they all saying how in time he would have owned the shop. But he quit, and next April, just before the anniversary of the girl's death, he showed up again. He came to see Mrs Starnes and went away again in two weeks.

After he was gone they found out how he had stopped at the bank at the county seat and paid the interest on the mortgage. He did that every year until Mrs Starnes died. She happened to die while he was there. He would spend about two weeks cleaning up the place and fixing it so she would be comfortable for another year, and she letting him, being as she was better born than him; being as he was one of these parveynoos. Then she died too. "You know what Sophie said to do," she says. "That mortgage. Mr Starnes will be worried when I see him."

So he buried her too. He bought another headstone, to suit her. Then he begun to pay the principal on the mortgage. Starnes had some kin in Alabama. The folks in Division expected the kin to come and claim the place. But maybe the kin were waiting until Hawkshaw had got the mortgage cleared.

He made the payment each year, coming back and cleaning up the place. They said he would clean up that house inside like a woman, washing and scrubbing it. It would take him two weeks each April. Then he would go away again, nobody knew where, returning each April to make the payment at the bank and clean up that empty house that never belonged to him.

He had been doing that for about five years when I saw him in Maxey's shop in Jefferson, the year after I saw him in a shop in Porterfield, in that serge suit and that black bow tie. Maxey said he had them on when he got off the south-bound train that day in Jefferson, carrying that paper suitcase.

Maxey said they watched him for two days about the square, him not seeming to know anybody or to have any business or to be in any hurry; just walking about the square like he was just looking around.

It was the young fellows, the loafers that pitch dollars all day long in the clubhouse yard, waiting for the young girls to come giggling down to the post office and the soda fountain in the late afternoon, working their hips under their dresses, leaving the smell of perfume when they pass, that gave him his name.

They said he was a detective, maybe because that was the last thing in the world anybody would suspect him to be. So they named him Hawkshaw, and Hawkshaw he remained for the twelve years he stayed in Jefferson, behind that chair in Maxey's shop. He told Maxey he was from Alabama.

"What part?" Maxey said. "Alabama's a big place. Birmingham?" Maxey said, because Hawkshaw looked like he might have come from almost anywhere in Alabama except Birmingham.

"Yes," Hawkshaw said. "Birmingham."

And that was all they ever got out of him until I happened to notice him behind the chair and to remember him back in Porterfield.

"Porterfield?" Maxey said. "My brother-in-law owns that shop. You mean you worked in Porterfield last year?"

"Yes," Hawkshaw said. "I was there."

Maxey told me about the vacation business. How Hawkshaw wouldn't take his summer vacation; said he wanted two weeks in April instead.

He wouldn't tell why. Maxey said April was too busy for vacations, and Hawkshaw offered to work until then, and quit. "Do you want to quit then?" Maxey said that was in the summer, after Mrs Burchett had brought Susan Reed to the shop for the first time.

"No," Hawkshaw said. "I like it here. I just want two weeks off in April."

"On business?" Maxey said.

"On business," Hawkshaw said.

When Maxey took his vacation, he went to Porterfield to visit his brother-in-law; maybe shaving his brother-in-law's customers, like a sailor will spend his vacation in a rowboat on an artificial lake. The brother-in-law told him Hawkshaw had worked in his shop, would not take a vacation until April, went off and never came back. "He'll quit you the same way," the brother-in-law said. "He worked in a shop in Bolivar, Tennessee, and in one in Florence, Alabama, for a year and quit the same way. He wont come back. You watch and see."

Maxey said he came back home and he finally got it out of Hawkshaw how he had worked for a year each in six or eight different towns in Alabama and Tennessee and Mississippi. "Why did you quit them?" Maxey said. "You are a good barber; one of the best children's barbers. I ever saw. Why did you quit?"

"I was just looking around," Hawkshaw said.

Then April came, and he took his two weeks. He shaved himself and packed up that paper suitcase and took the north-bound train.

"Going on a visit, I reckon," Maxey said.

"Up the road a piece," Hawkshaw said.

So he went away, in that serge suit and black bow tie. Maxey told me how, two days later, it got out how Hawkshaw had drawn from the bank his year's savings. He boarded at Mrs Cowan's and he had joined the church and he spent no money at all. He didn't even smoke. So Maxey and Matt and I reckon everybody else in Jefferson thought that he had saved up steam for a year and was now bound on one of these private sabbaticals among the fleshpots of Memphis.

Mitch Ewing, the depot freight agent, lived at Mrs Cowan's too. He told how Hawkshaw had bought his ticket only to the junction-point. "From there he can go to either Memphis or Birmingham or New Orleans," Mitch said.

"Well, he's gone, anyway," Maxey said. "And mark my words, that's the last you'll see of that fellow in this town."

And that's what everybody thought until two weeks later. On the fifteenth day Hawkshaw came walking into the shop at his regular time, like he hadn't even been out of town, and took off his coat and begun to hone his razors. He never told anybody where he had been. Just up the road a piece.

Sometimes I thought I would tell them. I would make Jefferson and find him there behind that chair. He didn't change, grow any older in the face, any more than that Reed girl's hair changed, for all the gum and dye she put on it.

But there he would be, back from his vacation "up the road a piece," saving his money for another year, going to church on Sunday, keeping that sack of peppermints for the children that came to him to be

barbered, until it was time to take that paper suitcase and his year's savings and go back to Division to pay on the mortgage and clean up the house.

Sometimes he would be gone when I got to Jefferson, and Maxey would tell me about him cutting that Reed girl's hair, snipping and snipping it and holding the mirror up for her to see like she was an actress. "He dont charge her," Matt Fox said. "He pays the quarter into the register out of his own pocket."

"Well, that's his business," Maxey said. "All I want is the quarter. I dont care where it comes from."

Five years later maybe I would have said, "Maybe that's her price." Because she got in trouble at last. Or so they said. I dont know, except that most of the talk about girls, women, is envy or retaliation by the ones that dont dare to and the ones that failed to. But while he was gone one April they were whispering how she had got in trouble at last and had tried to doctor herself with turpentine and was bad sick.

Anyhow, she was off the streets for about three months; some said in a hospital in Memphis, and when she came into the shop again she took Matt's chair, though Hawkshaw's was empty at the time, like she had already done before to devil him, maybe. Maxey said she looked like a painted ghost, gaunt and hard, for all her bright dress and such, sitting there in Matt's chair, filling the whole shop with her talking and her laughing and her perfume and her long, naked-looking legs, and Hawkshaw making out he was busy at his empty chair.

Sometimes I thought I would tell them. But I never told anybody except Gavin Stevens. He is the district attorney, a smart man: not like the usual pedagogue lawyer and office holder. He went to Harvard, and

when my health broke down (I used to be a bookkeeper in a Gordonville bank and my health broke down and I met Stevens on a Memphis train when I was coming home from the hospital) it was him that suggested I try the road and got me my position with this company.

I told him about it two years ago. "And now the girl has gone bad on him, and he's too old to hunt up another one and raise her," I said. "And some day he'll have the place paid out and those Alabama Starnes can come and take it, and he'll be through. Then what do you think he will do?"

"I dont know," Stevens said.

"Maybe he'll just go off and die," I said.

"Maybe he will," Stevens said.

"Well," I said, "he wont be the first man to tilt at windmills."

"He wont be the first man to die, either," Stevens said.

III

So last week I went on to Division. I got there on a Wednesday. When I saw the house, it had just been painted. The storekeeper told me that the payment Hawkshaw had made was the last one; that Starnes' mortgage was clear. "Them Alabama Starnes can come and take it now," he said.

"Anyway, Hawkshaw did what he promised her, promised Mrs Starnes," I said.

“Hawkshaw?” he said. “Is that what they call him? Well, I’ll be durned. Hawkshaw. Well, I’ll be durned.”

It was three months before I made Jefferson again. When I passed the barber shop I looked in without stopping. And there was another fellow behind Hawkshaw’s chair, a young fellow. “I wonder if Hawk left his sack of peppermints,” I said to myself. But I didn’t stop. I just thought, ‘Well, he’s gone at last,’ wondering just where he would be when old age got him and he couldn’t move again; if he would probably die behind a chair somewhere in a little three-chair country shop, in his shirt sleeves and that black tie and those serge pants.

I went on and saw my customers and had dinner, and in the afternoon I went to Stevens’ office. “I see you’ve got a new barber in town,” I said. “Yes,” Stevens said. He looked at me a while, then he said, “You haven’t heard?”

“Heard what?” I said. Then he quit looking at me.

“I got your letter,” he said, “that Hawkshaw had paid off the mortgage and painted the house. Tell me about it.”

So I told him how I got to Division the day after Hawkshaw had left. They were talking about him on the porch of the store, wondering just when those Alabama Starnes would come in. He had painted the house himself, and he had cleaned up the two graves; I dont reckon he wanted to disturb Starnes by cleaning his. I went up to see them. He had even scrubbed the headstones, and he had set out an apple shoot over the girl’s grave.

It was in bloom, and what with the folks all talking about him, I got curious too, to see the inside of that house. The storekeeper had the key, and he said he reckoned it would be all right with Hawkshaw.

It was clean inside as a hospital. The stove was polished and the woodbox filled. The storekeeper told me Hawkshaw did that every year, filled the woodbox before he left. "Those Alabama kinsfolk will appreciate that," I said. We went on back to the parlor. There was a melodeon in the corner, and a lamp and a Bible on the table.

The lamp was clean, the bowl empty and clean too; you couldn't even smell oil on it. That wedding license was framed, hanging above the mantel like a picture. It was dated April 4, 1905.

"Here's where he keeps that mortgage record," the storekeeper (his name is Bidwell) said. He went to the table and opened the Bible. The front page was the births and deaths, two columns. The girl's name was Sophie. I found her name in the birth column, and on the death side it was next to the last one. Mrs Starnes had written it. It looked like it might have taken her ten minutes to write it down. It looked like this:

Sofy starnes Dide april 16 th 1905

Hawkshaw wrote the last one himself; it was neat and well written, like a bookkeeper's hand:

Mrs Will Starnes. April 23, 1916.

"The record will be in the back," Bidwell said.

We turned to the back. It was there, in a neat column, in Hawkshaw's hand. It began with April 16, 1917, \$200.00. The next one was when he

made the next payment at the bank: April 16, 1918, \$200.00; and April 16, 1919, \$200.00; and April 16, 1920, \$200.00; and on to the last one: April 16, 1930, \$200.00. Then he had totaled the column and written under it:

“Paid in full. April 16, 1930.”

It looked like a sentence written in a copy book in the old-time business colleges, like it had flourished, the pen had, in spite of him. It didn't look like it was written boastful; it just flourished somehow, the end of it, like it had run out of the pen somehow before he could stop it.

“So he did what he promised her he would,” Stevens said.

“That's what I told Bidwell,” I said.

Stevens went on like he wasn't listening to me much.

“So the old lady could rest quiet. I guess that's what the pen was trying to say when it ran away from him: that now she could lie quiet. And he's not much over forty-five. Not so much anyway. Not so much but what, when he wrote 'Paid in full' under that column, time and despair rushed as slow and dark under him as under any garlanded boy or crownless and crestless girl.”

“Only the girl went bad on him,” I said. “Forty-five's pretty late to set out to find another. He'll be fifty-five at least by then.”

Stevens looked at me then. “I didn't think you had heard,” he said.

“Yes,” I said. “That is, I looked in the barber shop when I passed. But I knew he would be gone. I knew all the time he would move on, once he

had that mortgage cleared. Maybe he never knew about the girl, anyway. Or likely he knew and didn't care."

"You think he didn't know about her?"

"I dont see how he could have helped it. But I dont know. What do you think?"

"I dont know. I dont think I want to know. I know something so much better than that."

"What's that?" I said. He was looking at me. "You keep on telling me I haven't heard the news. What is it I haven't heard?"

"About the girl," Stevens said. He looked at me.

"On the night Hawkshaw came back from his last vacation, they were married. He took her with him this time."

The End