



There Was a Queen, William Faulkner

There Was a Queen

I

ELNORA ENTERED THE back yard, coming up from her cabin. In the long afternoon the huge, square house, the premises, lay somnolent, peaceful, as they had lain for almost a hundred years, since John Sartoris had come from Carolina and built it.

And he had died in it and his son Bayard had died in it, and Bayard's son John and John's son Bayard in turn had been buried from it even though the last Bayard didn't die there.

So the quiet was now the quiet of womenfolks. As Elnora crossed the back yard toward the kitchen door she remembered how ten years ago at this hour old Bayard, who was her half-brother (though possibly but not probably neither of them knew it, including Bayard's father), would be tramping up and down the back porch, shouting stableward for the Negro men and for his saddle mare.

But he was dead now, and his grandson Bayard was also dead at twenty-six years old, and the Negro men were gone: Simon, Elnora's mother's husband, in the graveyard too, and Caspey, Elnora's husband, in the penitentiary for stealing, and Joby, her son, gone to Memphis to wear fine clothes on Beale Street.

So there were left in the house only the first John Sartoris' sister, Virginia, who was ninety years old and who lived in a wheel chair

beside a window above the flower garden, and Narcissa, young Bayard's widow, and her son. Virginia Du Pre had come out to Mississippi in '69, the last of the Carolina family, bringing with her the clothes in which she stood and a basket containing a few panes of colored glass from a Carolina window and a few flower cuttings and two bottles of port.

She had seen her brother die and then her nephew and then her great-nephew and then her two great-great-nephews, and now she lived in the unmanned house with her great-great-nephew's wife and his son, Benbow, whom she persisted in calling Johnny after his uncle, who was killed in France. And for Negroes there were Elnora who cooked, and her son Isom who tended the grounds, and her daughter Saddy who slept on a cot beside Virginia Du Pre's bed and tended her as though she were a baby.

But that was all right. "I can take care of her," Elnora thought, crossing the back yard. "I don't need no help," she said aloud, to no one — a tall, coffee-colored woman with a small, high, fine head. "Because it's a Sartoris job. Cunnel knowed that when he died and tole me to take care of her. Tole me. Not no outsiders from town." She was thinking of what had caused her to come up to the house an hour before it was necessary.

This was that, while busy in her cabin, she had seen Narcissa, young Bayard's wife, and the ten-year-old boy going down across the pasture in the middle of the afternoon. She had come to her door and watched them — the boy and the big young woman in white going through the hot afternoon, down across the pasture toward the creek. She had not wondered where they were going, nor why, as a white woman would have wondered.

But she was half black, and she just watched the white woman with that expression of quiet and grave contempt with which she contemplated or listened to the orders of the wife of the house's heir even while he was alive. Just as she had listened two days ago when Narcissa had informed her that she was going to Memphis for a day or so and that Elnora would have to take care of the old aunt alone. "Like I ain't always done it," Elnora thought. "It's little you done for anybody since you come out here. We never needed you."

Don't you never think it. But she didn't say this. She just thought it, and she helped Narcissa prepare for the trip and watched the carriage roll away toward town and the station without comment. "And you needn't to come back," she thought, watching the carriage disappear.

But this morning Narcissa had returned, without offering to explain the sudden journey or the sudden return, and in the early afternoon Elnora from her cabin door had watched the woman and the boy go down across the pasture in the hot June sunlight.

"Well, it's her business where she going," Elnora said aloud, mounting the kitchen steps. "Same as it her business how come she went off to Memphis, leaving Miss Jenny setting yonder in her chair without nobody but niggers to look after her," she added, aloud still, with brooding inconsistency. "I ain't surprised she went."

I just surprised she come back. No. I ain't even that. She ain't going to leave this place, now she done got in here." Then she said quietly, aloud, without rancor, without heat: "Trash. Town trash."

She entered the kitchen. Her daughter Saddy sat at the table, eating from a dish of cold turnip greens and looking at a thumbbed and soiled fashion magazine. "What you doing back here?" she said. "Why ain't you up yonder where you can hear Miss Jenny if she call you?"

"Miss Jenny ain't need nothing," Saddy said. "She setting there by the window."

"Where did Miss Narcissa go?"

"I don't know'm," Saddy said. "Her and Bory went off somewhere. Ain't come back yet."

Elnora grunted. Her shoes were not laced, and she stepped out of them in two motions and left the kitchen and went up the quiet, high-ceiled hall filled with scent from the garden and with the drowsing and myriad sounds of the June afternoon, to the open library door.

Beside the window (the sash was raised now, with its narrow border of colored Carolina glass which in the winter framed her head and bust like a hung portrait) an old woman sat in a wheel chair.

She sat erect; a thin, upright woman with a delicate nose and hair the color of a whitewashed wall. About her shoulders lay a shawl of white wool, no whiter than her hair against her black dress. She was looking out the window; in profile her face was high-arched, motionless. When Elnora entered she turned her head and looked at the Negress with an expression immediate and interrogative.

"They ain't come in the back way, have they?" she said.

"Nome," Elnora said. She approached the chair.

The old woman looked out the window again. "I must say I don't understand this at all. Miss Narcissa's doing a mighty lot of traipsing around all of a sudden. Picking up and—"

Elnora came to the chair. "A right smart," she said in her cold, quiet voice, "for a woman lazy as her."

"Picking up—" the old woman said. She ceased. "You stop talking that way about her."

"I ain't said nothing but the truth," Elnora said.

"Then you keep it to yourself. She's Bayard's wife. A Sartoris woman, now."

"She won't never be a Sartoris woman," Elnora said.

The other was looking out the window. "Picking up all of a sudden two days ago and going to Memphis to spend two nights, that hadn't spent a night away from that boy since he was born. Leaving him for two whole nights, mind you, without giving any reason, and then coming home and taking him off to walk in the woods in the middle of the day. Not that he missed her. Do you think he missed her at all while she was gone?"

"Nome," Elnora said. "Ain't no Sartoris man never missed nobody."

"Of course he didn't." The old woman looked out the window. Elnora stood a little behind the chair. "Did they go on across the pasture?"

"I don't know. They went out of sight, still going. Toward the creek."

"Toward the creek? What in the world for?"

Elnora didn't answer. She stood a little behind the chair, erect, still as an Indian. The afternoon was drawing on. The sun was now falling level across the garden below the window, and soon the jasmine in the garden began to smell with evening, coming into the room in slow waves almost palpable; thick, sweet, oversweet.

The two women were motionless in the window: the one leaning a little forward in the wheel chair, the Negress a little behind the chair, motionless too and erect as a caryatid.

The light in the garden was beginning to turn copper-colored when the woman and the boy entered the garden and approached the house. The old woman in the chair leaned suddenly forward.

To Elnora it seemed as if the old woman in the wheel chair had in that motion escaped her helpless body like a bird and crossed the garden to meet the child; moving forward a little herself Elnora could see on the other's face an expression fond, immediate, and oblivious.

So the two people had crossed the garden and were almost to the house when the old woman sat suddenly and sharply back. "Why, they're wet!" she said. "Look at their clothes. They have been in the creek with their clothes on!"

"I reckon I better go and get supper started," Elnora said.

In the kitchen Elnora prepared the lettuce and the tomatoes, and sliced the bread (not honest cornbread, not even biscuit) which the woman whose very name she did not speak unless it was absolutely necessary, had taught her to bake. Isom and Saddle sat in two chairs against the wall.

"I got nothing against her," Elnora said. "I nigger and she white. But my black children got more blood than she got. More behavior."

"You and Miss Jenny both think ain't nobody been born since Miss Jenny," Isom said.

"Who is been?" Elnora said.

"Miss Jenny get along all right with Miss Narcissa," Isom said. "Seem to me like she the one to say. I ain't heard her say nothing about it."

"Because Miss Jenny quality," Elnora said. "That's why. And that's something you don't know nothing about, because you born too late to see any of it except her."

"Look to me like Miss Narcissa good quality as anybody else," Isom said. "I don't see no difference."

Elnora moved suddenly from the table. Isom as suddenly sprang up and moved his chair out of his mother's path. But she only went to the cupboard and took a platter from it and returned to the table, to the tomatoes. "Born Sartoris or born quality of any kind ain't is, it's does." She talked in a level, inflectionless voice above her limber, brown, deft hands.

When she spoke of the two women she used “she” indiscriminately, putting the least inflection on the one which referred to Miss Jenny. “Come all the way here by Herself, and the country still full of Yankees. All the way from Callina, with Her folks all killed and dead except old Marse John, and him two hundred miles away in Mississippi—”

“It’s more’n two hundred miles from here to Cal-lina,” Isom said. “Learnt that in school. It’s nigher two thousand.”

Elnora’s hands did not cease. She did not seem to have heard him. “With the Yankees done killed Her paw and Her husband and burned the Cal-lina house over Her and Her mammy’s head, and She come all the way to Mississippi by Herself, to the only kin She had left.

Getting here in the dead of winter without nothing in this world of God’s but a basket with some flower seeds and two bottles of wine and them colored window panes old Marse John put in the library window so She could look through it like it was Callina.

She got here at dusk-dark on Christmas Day and old Marse John and the chillen and my mammy waiting on the porch, and Her setting high-headed in the wagon for old Marse John to lift Her down.

They never even kissed then, out where folks could see them. Old Marse John just said, ‘Well, Jenny,’ and she just said, ‘Well, Johnny,’ and they walked into the house, him leading Her by the hand, until they was inside the house where the commonalty couldn’t spy on them. Then She begun to cry, and old Marse John holding Her, after all them four thousand miles—”

“It ain’t four thousand miles from here to Cal-lina,” Isom said. “Ain’t but two thousand. What the book say in school.”

Elnora paid no attention to him at all; her hands did not cease. “It took Her hard, the crying did. ‘It’s because I ain’t used to crying,’ she said. ‘I got out of the habit of it. I never had the time. Them goddamn Yankees,’ she said. ‘Them goddamn Yankees.’” Elnora moved again, to the cupboard. It was as though she walked out of the sound of her voice on her silent, naked feet, leaving it to fill the quiet kitchen though the voice itself had ceased.

She took another platter down and returned to the table, her hands busy again among the tomatoes and lettuce, the food which she herself could not eat. “And that’s how it is that she” (she was now speaking of Narcissa; the two Negroes knew it) “thinks she can pick up and go to Memphis and frolic, and leave Her alone in this house for two nights without nobody but niggers to look after Her. Move out here under a Sartoris roof and eat Sartoris food for ten years, and then pick up and go to Memphis same as a nigger on a excursion, without even telling why she was going.”

“I thought you said Miss Jenny never needed nobody but you to take care of her,” Isom said. “I thought you said yesterday you never cared if she come back or not.”

Elnora made a sound, harsh, disparaging, not loud. “Her not come back? When she worked for five years to get herself married to Bayard? Working on Miss Jenny all the time Bayard was off to that war? I watched her.

Coming out here two or three times a week, with Miss Jenny thinking she was just coming out to visit like quality. But I knowed. I knowed what she was up to all the time. Because I knows trash. I knows the way trash goes about working in with quality. Quality can't see that, because it quality. But I can."

"Then Bory must be trash, too," Isom said.

Elnora turned now. But Isom was already out of his chair before she spoke. "You shut your mouth and get yourself ready to serve supper." She watched him go to the sink and prepare to wash his hands. Then she turned back to the table, her long hands brown and deft among the red tomatoes and the pale absinth-green of the lettuce. "Needings," she said. "It ain't Bory's needings and it ain't Her needings. It's dead folks' needings.

Old Marse John's and Cunnel's and Mister John's and Bayard's that's dead and can't do nothing about it. That's where the needings is. That's what I'm talking about. And not nobody to see to it except Her yonder in that chair, and me, a nigger, back here in this kitchen. I ain't got nothing against her. I just say to let quality consort with quality, and unquality do the same thing. You get that coat on, now. This here is all ready."

III

It was the boy who told her. She leaned forward in the wheel chair and watched through the window as the woman and the child crossed the garden and passed out of sight beyond the angle of the house. Still leaning forward and looking down into the garden, she heard them enter the house and pass the library door and mount the stairs.

She did not move, nor look toward the door. She continued to look down into the garden, at the now stout shrubs which she had fetched from Carolina as shoots not much bigger than matches.

It was in the garden that she and the younger woman who was to marry her nephew and bear a son, had become acquainted. That was back in 1918, and young Bayard and his brother John were still in France. It was before John was killed, and two or three times a week Narcissa would come out from town to visit her while she worked among the flowers.

“And she engaged to Bayard all the time and not telling me,” the old woman thought. “But it was little she ever told me about anything,” she thought, looking down into the garden which was beginning to fill with twilight and which she had not entered in five years.

“Little enough about anything. Sometimes I wonder how she ever got herself engaged to Bayard, talking so little. Maybe she did it by just being, filling some space, like she got that letter.” That was one day shortly before Bayard returned home. Narcissa came out and stayed for two hours, then just before she left she showed the letter.

It was anonymous and obscene; it sounded mad, and at the time she had tried to get Narcissa to let her show the letter to Bayard’s grandfather and have him make some effort to find the man and punish him, but Narcissa refused. “I’ll just burn it and forget about it,” Narcissa said. “Well, that’s your business,” the older woman said.

“But that should not be permitted. A lady should not be at the mercy of a man like that, even by mail. Any gentleman will believe that, act upon it. Besides, if you don’t do something about it, he’ll write you again.”

“Then I’ll show it to Colonel Sartoris,” Narcissa said. She was an orphan, her brother also in France. “But can’t you see I just can’t have any man know that anybody thought such things about me.”

“Well, I’d rather have the whole world know that somebody thought that way about me once and got horsewhipped for it, than to have him keep on thinking that way about me, unpunished. But it’s your affair.”

“I’ll just burn it and forget about it,” Narcissa said. Then Bayard returned, and shortly afterward he and Narcissa were married and Narcissa came out to the house to live.

Then she was pregnant, and before the child was born Bayard was killed in an airplane, and his grandfather, old Bayard, was dead and the child came, and it was two years before she thought to ask her niece if any more letters had come; and Narcissa told her no.

So they had lived quietly then, their women’s life in the big house without men. Now and then she had urged Narcissa to marry again. But the other had refused, quietly, and they had gone on so for years, the two of them and the child whom she persisted in calling after his dead uncle.

Then one evening a week ago, Narcissa had a guest for supper; when she learned that the guest was to be a man, she sat quite still in her chair for a time. “Ah,” she thought, quietly. “It’s come. Well. But it had to; she is young. And to live out here alone with a bedridden old woman. Well. But I wouldn’t have her do as I did.

Would not expect it of her. After all, she is not a Sartoris. She is no kin to them, to a lot of fool proud ghosts." The guest came. She did not see him until she was wheeled in to the supper table. Then she saw a bald, youngish man with a clever face and a Phi Beta Kappa key on his watch chain.

The key she did not recognize, but she knew at once that he was a Jew, and when he spoke to her her outrage became fury and she jerked back in the chair like a striking snake, the motion strong enough to thrust the chair back from the table. "Narcissa," she said, "what is this Yankee doing here?"

There they were, about the candle-lit table, the three rigid people. Then the man spoke: "Madam," he said, "there'd be no Yankees left if your sex had ever taken the field against us."

"You don't have to tell me that, young man," she said. "You can thank your stars it was just men your grandfather fought."

Then she had called Isom and had herself wheeled from the table, taking no supper. And even in her bedroom she would not let them turn on the light, and she refused the tray which Narcissa sent up. She sat beside her dark window until the stranger was gone.

Then three days later Narcissa made her sudden and mysterious trip to Memphis and stayed two nights, who had never before been separated overnight from her son since he was born. She had gone without explanation and returned without explanation, and now the old woman had just watched her and the boy cross the garden, their garments still damp upon them, as though they had been in the creek.

It was the boy who told her. He came into the room in fresh clothes, his hair still damp, though neatly combed now. She said no word as he entered and came to her chair. "We been in the creek," he said. "Not swimming, though. Just sitting in the water. She wanted me to show her the swimming hole. But we didn't swim. I don't reckon she can. We just sat in the water with our clothes on. All evening. She wanted to do it."

"Ah," the old woman said. "Oh. Well. That must have been fun. Is she coming down soon?"

"Yessum. When she gets dressed."

"Well. . . . You'll have time to go outdoors a while before supper, if you want to."

"I just as soon stay in here with you, if you want me to."

"No. You go outdoors. I'll be all right until Saddle comes."

"All right." He left the room.

The window faded slowly as the sunset died. The old woman's silver head faded too, like something motionless on a sideboard. The sparse colored panes which framed the window dreamed, rich and hushed. She sat there and presently she heard her nephew's wife descending the stairs. She sat quietly, watching the door, until the young woman entered.

She wore white: a large woman in her thirties, within the twilight something about her of that heroic quality of statuary. "Do you want the light?" she said.

“No,” the old woman said. “No. Not yet.” She sat erect in the wheel chair, motionless, watching the young woman cross the room, her white dress flowing slowly, heroic, like a caryatid from a temple façade come to life. She sat down.

“It was those let—” she said.

“Wait,” the old woman said. “Before you begin. The jasmine. Do you smell it?”

“Yes. It was those—”

“Wait. Always about this time of day it begins. It has begun about this time of day in June for fifty-seven years this summer. I brought them from Carolina, in a basket. I remember how that first March I sat up all one night, burning newspapers about the roots. Do you smell it?”

“Yes.”

“If it’s marriage, I told you. I told you five years ago that I wouldn’t blame you. A young woman, a widow. Even though you have a child, I told you that a child would not be enough. I told you I would not blame you for not doing as I had done. Didn’t I?”

“Yes. But it’s not that bad.”

“Not? Not how bad?” The old woman sat erect, her head back a little, her thin face fading into the twilight with a profound quality. “I won’t blame you. I told you that. You are not to consider me. My life is done; I need little; nothing the Negroes can’t do. Don’t you mind me, do you hear?”

The other said nothing, motionless too, serene; their voices seemed to materialize in the dusk between them, unsourced of either mouth, either still and fading face. "You'll have to tell me, then," the old woman said.

"It was those letters. Thirteen years ago: don't you remember? Before Bayard came back from France, before you even knew that we were engaged. I showed you one of them and you wanted to give it to Colonel Sartoris and let him find out who sent it and I wouldn't do it and you said that no lady would permit herself to receive anonymous love letters, no matter how badly she wanted to."

"Yes. I said it was better for the world to know that a lady had received a letter like that, than to have one man in secret thinking such things about her, unpunished. You told me you burned it."

"I lied. I kept it. And I got ten more of them. I didn't tell you because of what you said about a lady."

"Ah," the old woman said.

"Yes. I kept them all. I thought I had them hidden where nobody could ever find them."

"And you read them again. You would take them out now and then and read them again."

"I thought I had them hidden. Then you remember that night after Bayard and I were married when somebody broke into our house in town; the same night that book-keeper in Colonel Sartoris' bank stole that money and ran away? The next morning the letters were gone, and then I knew who had sent them."

“Yes,” the old woman said. She had not moved, her fading head like something inanimate in silver.

“So they were out in the world. They were somewhere. I was crazy for a while. I thought of people, men, reading them, seeing not only my name on them, but the marks of my eyes where I had read them again and again. I was wild. When Bayard and I were on our honeymoon, I was wild. I couldn’t even think about him alone. It was like I was having to sleep with all the men in the world at the same time.

“Then it was almost twelve years ago, and I had Bory, and I supposed I had got over it. Got used to having them out in the world. Maybe I had begun to think that they were gone, destroyed, and I was safe. Now and then I would remember them, but it was like somehow that Bory was protecting me, that they couldn’t pass him to reach me. As though if I just stayed out here and was good to Bory and you — And then, one afternoon, after twelve years, that man came out to see me, that Jew. The one who stayed to supper that night.”

“Ah,” the old woman said. “Yes.”

“He was a Federal agent. They were still trying to catch the man who had robbed the bank, and the agent had got hold of my letters. Found them where the book-keeper had lost them or thrown them away that night while he was running away, and the agent had had them twelve years, working on the case.

At last he came out to see me, trying to find out where the man had gone, thinking I must know, since the man had written me letters like

that. You remember him: how you looked at him and you said, 'Narcissa, who is this Yankee?'"

"Yes. I remember."

"That man had my letters. He had had them for twelve years. He—"

"Had had?" the old woman said. "Had had?"

"Yes. I have them now. He hadn't sent them to Washington yet, so nobody had read them except him. And now nobody will ever read them." She ceased; she breathed quietly, tranquil. "You don't understand yet, do you?"

He had all the information the letters could give him, but he would have to turn them in to the Department anyway and I asked him for them but he said he would have to turn them in and I asked him if he would make his final decision in Memphis and he said why Memphis and I told him why.

I knew I couldn't buy them from him with money, you see. That's why I had to go to Memphis. I had that much regard for Bory and you, to go somewhere else. And that's all.

Men are all about the same, with their ideas of good and bad. Fools." She breathed quietly. Then she yawned, deep, with utter relaxation. Then she stopped yawning. She looked again at the rigid, fading silver head opposite her. "Don't you understand yet?" she said. "I had to do it.

They were mine; I had to get them back. That was the only way I could do it. But I would have done more than that. So I got them. And now they are burned up. Nobody will ever see them. Because he can't tell, you see. It would ruin him to ever tell that they even existed. They might even put him in the penitentiary. And now they are burned up."

"Yes," the old woman said. "And so you came back home and you took Johnny so you and he could sit together in the creek, the running water. In Jordan. Yes, Jordan at the back of a country pasture in Mississippi."

"I had to get them back. Don't you see that?"

"Yes," the old woman said. "Yes." She sat bolt upright in the wheel chair. "Well, my Lord. Us poor, fool women — Johnny!" Her voice was sharp, peremptory.

"What?" the young woman said. "Do you want something?"

"No," the other said. "Call Johnny. I want my hat." The young woman rose. "I'll get it."

"No. I want Johnny to do it."

The young woman stood looking down at the other, the old woman erect in the wheel chair beneath the fading silver crown of her hair. Then she left the room. The old woman did not move. She sat there in the dusk until the boy entered, carrying a small black bonnet of an ancient shape.

Now and then, when the old woman became upset, they would fetch her the hat and she would place it on the exact top of her head and sit there by the window. He brought the bonnet to her. His mother was

with him. It was full dusk now; the old woman was invisible save for her hair. "Do you want the light now?" the young woman said.

"No," the old woman said. She set the bonnet on the top of her head. "You all go on to supper and let me rest awhile. Go on, all of you." They obeyed, leaving her sitting there: a slender, erect figure indicated only by the single gleam of her hair, in the wheel chair beside the window framed by the sparse and defunctive Carolina glass.

IV

Since the boy's eighth birthday, he had had his dead grandfather's place at the end of the table. Tonight however his mother rearranged things. "With just the two of us," she said. "You come and sit by me." The boy hesitated. "Please. Won't you? I got so lonesome for you last night in Memphis. Weren't you lonesome for me?"

"I slept with Aunt Jenny," the boy said. "We had a good time."

"Please."

"All right," he said. He took the chair beside hers.

"Closer," she said. She drew the chair closer. "But we won't ever again, ever. Will we?" She leaned toward him, taking his hand.

"What? Sit in the creek?"

"Not ever leave one another again."

"I didn't get lonesome. We had a good time."

"Promise. Promise, Bory." His name was Benhow, her family name.

“All right.”

Isom, in a duck jacket, served them and returned to the kitchen.

“She ain’t coming to supper?” Elnora said.

“Nome,” Isom said. “Setting yonder by the window, in the dark. She say she don’t want no supper.”

Elnora looked at Saddle. “What was they doing last time you went to the library?”

“Her and Miss Narcissa talking.”

“They was still talking when I went to ‘nounce supper,” Isom said. “I tole you that.”

“I know,” Elnora said. Her voice was not sharp. Neither was it gentle. It was just peremptory, soft, cold. “What were they talking about?”

“I don’t know’m,” Isom said. “You the one taught me not to listen to white folks.”

“What were they talking about, Isom?” Elnora said. She was looking at him, grave, intent, commanding.

“‘Bout somebody getting married. Miss Jenny say ‘I tole you long time ago I ain’t blame you. A young woman like you. I want you to marry. Not do like I done,’ what she say.”

“I bet she fixing to marry, too,” Saddle said.

“Who marry?” Elnora said. “Her marry? What for? Give up what she got here? That ain’t what it is. I wished I knowed what been going on here this last week. . . .” Her voice ceased; she turned her head toward the

door as though she were listening for something. From the dining-room came the sound of the young woman's voice.

But Elnora appeared to listen to something beyond this. Then she left the room. She did not go hurriedly, yet her long silent stride carried her from sight with an abruptness like that of an inanimate figure drawn on wheels, off a stage.

She went quietly up the dark hall, passing the dining-room door unremarked by the two people at the table. They sat close. The woman was talking, leaning toward the boy. Elnora went on without a sound: a converging of shadows upon which her lighter face seemed to float without body, her eyeballs faintly white. Then she stopped suddenly.

She had not reached the library door, yet she stopped, invisible, soundless, her eyes suddenly quite luminous in her almost-vanished face, and she began to chant in faint sing-song: "Oh, Lawd; oh, Lawd," not loud.

Then she moved, went swiftly on to the library door and looked into the room where beside the dead window the old woman sat motionless, indicated only by that faint single gleam of white hair, as though for ninety years life had died slowly up her spare, erect frame, to linger for a twilit instant about her head before going out, though life itself had ceased.

Elnora looked for only an instant into the room. Then she turned and retraced her swift and silent steps to the dining-room door. The woman still leaned toward the boy, talking. They did not remark Elnora at once. She stood in the doorway, tall, not touching the jamb on either side.

Her face was blank; she did not appear to be looking at, speaking to, any one.

“You better come quick, I reckon,” she said in that soft, cold, peremptory voice.

The end