



These 13, William Faulkner

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Victory, William Faulkner

Victory

I

THOSE WHO SAW him descend from the Marseilles express in the Gare de Lyon on that damp morning saw a tall man, a little stiff, with a bronze face and spike-ended moustaches and almost white hair. "A milord," they said, remarking his sober, correct suit, his correct stick correctly carried, his sparse baggage; "a milord military.

But there is something the matter with his eyes." But there was something the matter with the eyes of so many people, men and women too, in Europe since four years now. So they watched him go on, a half head above the French people, with his gaunt, strained eyes, his air strained, purposeful, and at the same time assured, and vanish into a cab, thinking, if they thought about him any more at all: "You will see him in the Legation offices or at a table on the Boulevards, or in a carriage with the fine English ladies in the Bois." That was all.

And those who saw him descend from the same cab at the Gare du Nord, they thought: "This milord returns home by haste"; the porter who took his bag wished him good morning in fair English and told him that he was going to England, receiving for reply the English glare which the porter perhaps expected, and put him into a first-class carriage of the boat train.

And that was all, too. That was all right, too, even when he got down at Amiens. English milords even did that.

It was only at Rozières that they began to look at him and after him when he had passed.

In a hired car he jounced through a gutted street between gutted walls rising undooed and unwindowed in jagged shards in the dusk. The street was partially blocked now and then by toppled walls, with masses of masonry in the cracks of which a thin grass sprouted, passing empty and ruined courtyards, in one of which a tank, mute and tilted, rusted among rank weeds.

This was Rozières, but he didn't stop there because no one lived there and there was no place to stop.

So the car jounced and crept on out of the ruin. The muddy and unpaved street entered a village of harsh new brick and sheet iron and tarred paper roofs made in America, and halted before the tallest house. It was flush with the street: a brick wall with a door and one window of American glass bearing the word RESTAURANT. "Here you are, sir," the driver said.

The passenger descended, with his bag, his ulster, his correct stick. He entered a biggish, bare room chill with new plaster. It contained a billiard table at which three men played. One of the men looked over his shoulder and said, "Bonjour, monsieur."

The newcomer did not reply at all. He crossed the room, passing the new zinc bar, and approached an open door beyond which a woman of any age around forty looked at him above the sewing on her lap.

“Bong jour, madame,” he said. “Dormie, madame?”

The woman gave him a single glance, brief, still. “C’est ça, monsieur,” she said, rising.

“Dormie, madame?” he said, raising his voice a little, his spiked moustache beaded a little with rain, dampness beneath his strained yet assured eyes. “Dormie, madame?”

“Bon, monsieur,” the woman said. “Bon. Bon.”

“Dor—” the newcomer essayed again. Someone touched his arm. It was the man who had spoken from the billiard table when he entered.

“Regardez, Monsieur l’Anglais,” the man said. He took the bag from the newcomer and swept his other arm toward the ceiling. “La chambre.” He touched the traveler again; he laid his face upon his palm and closed his eyes; he gestured again toward the ceiling and went on across the room toward a wooden stair without balustrade.

As he passed the bar he took a candle stub from it and lit the candle (the big room and the room beyond the door where the woman sat were lighted by single bulbs hanging naked on cords from the ceiling) at the foot of the stair.

They mounted, thrusting their fitful shadows before them, into a corridor narrow, chill, and damp as a tomb. The walls were of rough plaster not yet dried. The floor was of pine, without carpet or paint. Cheap metal doorknobs glinted symmetrically. The sluggish air lay like a hand upon the very candle.

They entered a room, smelling too of wet plaster, and even colder than the corridor; a sluggish chill almost substantial, as though the atmosphere between the dead and recent walls were congealing, like a patent three-minute dessert. The room contained a bed, a dresser, a

chair, a washstand; the bowl, pitcher, and slop basin were of American enamel.

When the traveler touched the bed the linen was soundless under his hand, coarse as sacking, clinging damply to the hand in the dead air in which their two breathings vaporized in the faint candle.

The host set the candle on the dresser. "Dîner, monsieur?" he said. The traveler stared down at the host, incongruous in his correct clothes, with that strained air. His waxed moustaches gleamed like faint bayonets above a cravat striped with what the host could not have known was the patterned coloring of a Scottish regiment. "Manger?" the host shouted. He chewed violently in pantomime. "Manger?" he roared, his shadow aping his gesture as he pointed toward the floor.

"Yes," the traveler shouted in reply, their faces not a yard apart. "Yes. Yes."

The host nodded violently, pointed toward the floor and then at the door, nodded again, went out.

He returned below stairs. He found the woman now in the kitchen, at the stove. "He will eat," the host said.

"I knew that," the woman said.

"You would think that they would stay at home," the host said. "I'm glad I was not born of a race doomed to a place too small to hold all of us at one time."

"Perhaps he has come to look at the war," the woman said.

"Of course he has," the host said. "But he should have come four years ago. That was when we needed Englishmen to look at the war."

"He was too old to come then," the woman said. "Didn't you see his hair?"

"Then let him stay at home now," the host said. "He is no younger."

"He may have come to look at the grave of his son," the woman said.

"Him?" the host said. "That one? He is too cold to ever have had a son."

“Perhaps you are right,” the woman said. “After all, that is his affair. It is our affair only that he has money.”

“That’s right,” the host said. “A man in this business, he cannot pick and choose.”

“He can pick, though,” the woman said.

“Good!” the host said. “Very good! Pick! That is worth telling to the English himself.”

“Why not let him find it out when he leaves?”

“Good!” the host said. “Better still. Good! Oh, good!”

“Attention,” the woman said. “Here he comes.”

They listened to the traveler’s steady tramp, then he appeared in the door. Against the lesser light of the bigger room, his dark face and his white hair looked like a kodak negative.

The table was set for two, a carafe of red wine at each place.

As the traveller seated himself, the other guest entered and took the other place — a small, rat-faced man who appeared at first glance to have no eyelashes at all. He tucked his napkin into the top of his vest and took up the soup ladle (the tureen sat between them in the center of the table) and offered it to the other. “Faites-moi l’honneur, monsieur,” he said. The other bowed stiffly; accepting the ladle.

The small man lifted the cover from the tureen. “Vous venez examiner ce scène de nos victoires, monsieur?” he said, helping himself in turn. The other looked at him. “Monsieur l’Anglais a peut-être beaucoup des amis qui sont tombés en voisinage.”

“A speak no French,” the other said, eating.

The little man did not eat. He held his yet unwetted spoon above his bowl. “What agreeable for me. I speak the Engleesh. I am Suisse, me. I speak all langue.” The other did not reply. He ate steadily, not fast.

“You ave return to see the grave of your galant countreemans, eh? You ave son here, perhaps, eh?”

“No,” the other said. He did not cease to eat.

“No?” The other finished his soup and set the bowl aside. He drank some wine. “What deplorable, that man who ave,” the Swiss said. “But it is finish now. Not?” Again the other said nothing. He was not looking at the Swiss. He did not seem to be looking at anything, with his gaunt eyes, his rigid moustaches upon his rigid face. “Me, I suffer too. All suffer. But I tell myself, What would you? It is war.”

Still the other did not answer. He ate steadily, deliberately, and finished his meal and rose and left the room. He lit his candle at the bar, where the host, leaning beside a second man in a corduroy coat, lifted a glass slightly to him. “Au bon dormir, monsieur,” the host said.

The traveler looked at the host, his face gaunt in the candle, his waxed moustaches rigid, his eyes in shadow. “What?” he said. “Yes. Yes.” He turned and went toward the stairs. The two men at the bar watched him, his stiff, deliberate back.

Ever since the train left Arras, the two women had been watching the other occupant of the carriage. It was a third-class carriage because no first-class trains ran on this line, and they sat with their shawled heads and the thick, still hands of peasants folded upon closed baskets on their laps, watching the man sitting opposite them — the white distinction of the hair against the bronze, gaunt face, the needles of the moustaches, the foreign-made suit and the stick — on a worn and greasy wooden seat, looking out the window.

At first they had just looked, ready to avert their gaze, but as the man did not seem to be aware of them, they began to whisper quietly to one another behind their hands. But the man did not seem to notice this, so they soon were talking in undertone, watching with bright, alert, curious eyes the stiff, incongruous figure leaning a little forward on the stick, looking out a foul window beyond which there was nothing to see save an occasional shattered road and man-high stump of shattered tree breaking small patches of tilled land whorled with apparent unreason about islands of earth indicated by low signboards

painted red, the islands inscrutable, desolate above the destruction which they wombed.

Then the train, slowing, ran suddenly among tumbled brick, out of which rose a small house of corrugated iron bearing a name in big letters; they watched the man lean forward.

“See!” one of the women said. “His mouth. He is reading the name. What did I tell you? It is as I said. His son fell here.”

“Then he had lots of sons,” the other woman said. “He has read the name each time since we left Arras. Eh! Eh! Him a son? That cold?”
“They do get children, though.”

“That is why they drink whisky. Otherwise . . .”

“That’s so. They think of nothing save money and eating, the English.”

Presently they got out; the train went on. Then others entered the carriage, other peasants with muddy boots, carrying baskets or live or dead beasts; they in turn watched the rigid, motionless figure leaning at the window while the train ran across the ruined land and past the brick or iron stations among the tumbled ruins, watching his lips move as he read the names.

“Let him look at the war, about which he has apparently heard at last,” they told one another. “Then he can go home. It was not in his barnyard that it was fought.”

“Nor in his house,” a woman said.

II

The battalion stands at ease in the rain. It has been in rest billets two days, equipment has been replaced and cleaned, vacancies have been filled and the ranks closed up, and it now stands at ease with the stupid docility of sheep in the ceaseless rain, facing the streaming shape of the sergeant-major.

Presently the colonel emerges from a door across the square. He stands in the door a moment, fastening his trench coat, then, followed by two A.D.C.'s, he steps gingerly into the mud in polished boots and approaches.

“Para-a-a-de— ‘Shun!’” the sergeant-major shouts. The battalion clashes, a single muffled, sullen sound. The sergeant-major turns, takes a pace toward the officers, and salutes, his stick beneath his armpit. The colonel jerks his stick toward his cap peak.

“Stand at ease, men,” he says. Again the battalion clashes, a single sluggish, trickling sound. The officers approach the guide file of the first platoon, the sergeant-major falling in behind the last officer. The sergeant of the first platoon takes a pace forward and salutes. The colonel does not respond at all.

The sergeant falls in behind the sergeant-major, and the five of them pass down the company front, staring in turn at each rigid, forward-staring face as they pass it. First Company.

The sergeant salutes the colonel's back and returns to his original position and comes to attention. The sergeant of the second company has stepped forward, saluted, is ignored, and falls in behind the sergeant-major, and they pass down the second company front. The colonel's trench coat sheathes water onto his polished boots. Mud from the earth creeps up his boots and meets the water and is channelled by the water as the mud creeps up the polished boots again.

Third Company. The colonel stops before a soldier, his trench coat hunched about his shoulders where the rain trickles from the back of his cap, so that he looks somehow like a choleric and outraged bird. The other two officers, the sergeant-major and the sergeant halt in turn, and the five of them glare at the five soldiers whom they are facing. The five soldiers stare rigid and unwinking straight before them, their faces like wooden faces, their eyes like wooden eyes.

“Sergeant,” the colonel says in his pettish voice, “has this man shaved today?”

“Sir!” the sergeant says in a ringing voice; the sergeant-major says: “Did this man shave today, Sergeant?” and all five of them glare now at the soldier, whose rigid gaze seems to pass through and beyond them, as if they were not there. “Take a pace forward when you speak in ranks!” the sergeant-major says.

The soldier, who has not spoken, steps out of ranks, splashing a jet of mud yet higher up the colonel’s boots.

“What is your name?” the colonel says.

“024186 Gray,” the soldier raps out glibly. The company, the battalion, stares straight ahead.

“Sir!” the sergeant-major thunders.

“Sir-r,” the soldier says.

“Did you shave this morning?” the colonel says.

“Nae, sir-r.”

“Why not?”

“A dinna shave, sir-r.”

“You dont shave?”

“A am nae auld enough tae shave.”

“Sir!” the sergeant-major thunders.

“Sir-r,” the soldier says.

“You are not . . .” The colonel’s voice dies somewhere behind his choleric glare, the trickling water from his cap peak. “Take his name, Sergeant-major,” he says, passing on.

The battalion stares rigidly ahead. Presently it sees the colonel, the two officers and the sergeant-major reappear in single file. At the proper place the sergeant-major halts and salutes the colonel’s back. The colonel jerks his stick hand again and goes on, followed by the two officers, at a trot toward the door from which he had emerged.

The sergeant-major faces the battalion again. "Para-a-a-de—" he shouts. An indistinguishable movement passes from rank to rank, an indistinguishable precursor of that damp and sullen clash which dies borning. The sergeant-major's stick has come down from his armpit; he now leans on it, as officers do. For a time his eye roves along the battalion front.

"Sergeant Cunninghame!" he says at last.

"Sir!"

"Did you take that man's name?"

There is silence for a moment — a little more than a short moment, a little less than a long one. Then the sergeant says: "What man, sir?"

"You, soldier!" the sergeant-major says.

The battalion stands rigid. The rain lances quietly into the mud between it and the sergeant-major as though it were too spent to either hurry or cease.

"You soldier that dont shave!" the sergeant-major says.

"Gray, sir!" the sergeant says.

"Gray. Double out 'ere."

The man Gray appears without haste and tramps stolidly before the battalion, his kilts dark and damp and heavy as a wet horse-blanket. He halts, facing the sergeant-major.

"Why didn't you shave this morning?" the sergeant-major says.

"A am nae auld enough tae shave," Gray says.

"Sir!" the sergeant-major says.

Gray stares rigidly beyond the sergeant-major's shoulder.

"Say sir when addressing a first-class warrant officer!" the sergeant-major says. Gray stares doggedly past his shoulder, his face beneath his vizorless bonnet as oblivious of the cold lances of rain as though it were granite. The sergeant-major raises his voice:

“Sergeant Cunninghame!”

“Sir!”

“Take this man’s name for insubordination also.”

“Very good, sir!”

The sergeant-major looks at Gray again. “And I’ll see that you get the penal battalion, my man. Fall in!”

Gray turns without haste and returns to his place in ranks, the sergeant-major watching him. The sergeant-major raises his voice again:

“Sergeant Cunninghame!”

“Sir!”

“You did not take that man’s name when ordered. Let that happen again and you’ll be for it yourself.”

“Very good, sir!”

“Carry on!” the sergeant-major says.

“But why did ye no shave?” the corporal asked him. They were back in billets: a stone barn with leprous walls, where no light entered, squatting in the ammoniac air on wet straw about a reeking brazier. “Ye kenned we were for inspection thae mor-rn.”

“A am nae auld enough tae shave,” Gray said.

“But ye kenned thae colonel would mar-rk ye on parade.”

“A am nae auld enough tae shave,” Gray repeated doggedly and without heat.

III

“For two hundred years,” Matthew Gray said, “there’s never a day, except Sunday, has passed but there is a hull rising on Clyde or a hull going out of Clydemouth with a Gray-driven nail in it.” He looked at young Alec across his steel spectacles, his neck bowed. “And not excepting their godless Sabbath hammering and sawing either.

Because if a hull could be built in a day, Grays could build it," he added with dour pride. "And now, when you are big enough to go down to the yards with your granddadder and me and take a man's place among men, to be trusted manlike with hammer and saw yersel."

"Whisht, Matthew," old Alec said. "The lad can saw as straight a line and drive as mony a nail a day as yersel or even me."

Matthew paid his father no attention. He continued to speak his slow, considered words, watching his oldest son across the spectacles. "And with John Wesley not old enough by two years, and wee Matthew by ten, and your grandfather an auld man will soon be—"

"Whisht," old Alec said. "I'm no but sixty-eight. Will you be telling the lad he'll make his bit journey to London and come back to find me in the parish house, mayhap? 'Twill be over by Christmastide."

"Christmastide or no," Matthew said, "a Gray, a shipwright, has no business at an English war."

"Whisht ye," old Alec said. He rose and went to the chimney cupboard and returned, carrying a box. It was of wood, dark and polished with age, the corners bound with iron, and fitted with an enormous iron lock which any child with a hairpin could have solved. From his pocket he took an iron key almost as big as the lock.

He opened the box and lifted carefully out a small velvet-covered jeweler's box and opened it in turn. On the satin lining lay a medal, a bit of bronze on a crimson ribbon: a Victoria Cross. "I kept the hulls going out of Clydemouth while your uncle Simon was getting this bit of brass from the Queen," old Alec said. "I heard naught of complaint.

And if need be, I'll keep them going out while Alec serves the Queen a bit himsel. Let the lad go," he said. He put the medal back into the wooden box and locked it. "A bit fighting winna hurt the lad. If I were his age, or yours either, for that matter, I'd gang mysel.

Alec, lad, hark ye. Ye'll see if they'll no take a hale lad of sixty-eight and I'll gang wi ye and leave the auld folk like Matthew to do the best they

can. Nay, Matthew; dinna ye thwart the lad; have no the Grays ever served the Queen in her need?"

So young Alec went to enlist, descending the hill on a weekday in his Sunday clothes, with a New Testament and a loaf of homebaked bread tied in a handkerchief. And this was the last day's work which old Alec ever did, for soon after that, one morning Matthew descended the hill to the shipyard alone, leaving old Alec at home.

And after that, on the sunny days (and sometimes on the bad days too, until his daughter-in-law found him and drove him back into the house) he would sit shawled in a chair on the porch, gazing south and eastward, calling now and then to his son's wife within the house: "Hark now. Do you hear them? The guns."

"I hear nothing," the daughter-in-law would say. "It's only the sea at Kinkeadbight. Come into the house, now. Matthew will be displeased." "Whisht, woman. Do you think there is a Gray in the world could let off a gun and me not know the sound of it?"

They had a letter from him shortly after he enlisted, from England, in which he said that being a soldier, England, was different from being a shipwright, Clydeside, and that he would write again later.

Which he did, each month or so, writing that soldiering was different from building ships and that it was still raining. Then they did not hear from him for seven months. But his mother and father continued to write him a joint letter on the first Monday of each month, letters almost identical with the previous one, the previous dozen: We are well. Ships are going out of Clyde faster than they can sink them. You still have the Book?

This would be in his father's slow, indomitable hand. Then, in his mother's:

Are you well? Do you need anything? Jessie and I are knitting the stockings and will send them. Alec, Alec.

He received this one during the seven months, during his term in the penal battalion, forwarded to him by his old corporal, since he had not told his people of his changed life. He answered it, huddled among his fellow felons, squatting in the mud with newspapers buttoned inside his tunic and his head and feet wrapped in strips of torn blanket: I am well. Yes I still have the Book (not telling them that his platoon was using it to light tobacco with and that they were now well beyond Lamentations). It still rains. Love to Grandadder and Jessie and Matthew and John Wesley.

Then his time in the penal battalion was up. He returned to his old company, his old platoon, finding some new faces, and a letter: We are well. Ships are going out of Clyde yet. You have a new sister. Your Mother is well.

He folded the letter and put it away. "A see mony new faces in thae battalion," he said to the corporal. "We ha a new sair-rgeant-major too, A doot not?"

"Naw," the corporal said. "'Tis the same one." He was looking at Gray, his gaze intent, speculative; his face cleared. "Ye ha shaved thae morn," he said.

"Ay," Gray said. "Am auld enough tae shave noo."

That was the night on which the battalion was to go up to Arras. It was to move at midnight, so he answered the letter at once:

I am well. Love to Grandadder and Jessie and Matthew and John Wesley and the baby.

"Morning! Morning!" The General, lap-robed and hooded, leans from his motor and waves his gloved hand and shouts cheerily to them as they slog past the car on the Bapaume road, taking the ditch to pass.

"A's a cheery auld card," a voice says.

"Awfficers," a second drawls; he falls to cursing as he slips in the greaselike mud, trying to cling to the crest of the kneedeep ditch.

"Aweel," a third says, "thae awfficers wud gang tae thae war-r too, A doot not."

“Why dinna they gang then?” a fourth says. “Thae war-r is no back that way.”

Platoon by platoon they slip and plunge into the ditch and drag their heavy feet out of the clinging mud and pass the halted car and crawl terrifically onto the crown of the road again: “A says tae me, a says: ‘Fritz has a new gun that will carry to Par-ris,’ a says, and A says tae him: “Tis nawthin: a has one that will hit our Cor-rps Headquar-rters.” “Morning! Morning!” The General continues to wave his glove and shout cheerily as the battalion detours into the ditch and heaves itself back onto the road again.

They are in the trench. Until the first rifle explodes in their faces, not a shot has been fired. Gray is the third man. During all the while that they crept between flares from shellhole to shellhole, he has been working himself nearer to the sergeant-major and the Officer; in the glare of that first rifle he can see the gap in the wire toward which the Officer was leading them, the moiled rigid glints of the wire where bullets have nicked the mud and rust from it, and against the glare the tall, leaping shape of the sergeant-major. Then Gray, too, springs bayonet first into the trench full of grunting shouts and thudding blows.

Flares go up by dozens now; in the corpse glare Gray sees the sergeant-major methodically tossing grenades into the next traverse. He runs toward him, passing the Officer leaning, bent double, against the fire step. The sergeant-major has vanished beyond the traverse. Gray follows and comes upon the sergeant-major. Holding the burlap curtain aside with one hand, the sergeant-major is in the act of tossing a grenade into a dugout as if he might be tossing an orange hull into a cellar.

The sergeant-major turns in the rocket glare. “Tis you, Gray,” he says. The earth-muffled bomb thuds; the sergeant-major is in the act of catching another bomb from the sack about his neck as Gray’s bayonet goes into his throat. The sergeant-major is a big man. He falls backward, holding the rifle barrel with both hands against his throat, his teeth glaring, pulling Gray with him. Gray clings to the rifle. He tries

to shake the speared body on the bayonet as he would shake a rat on an umbrella rib.

He frees the bayonet. The sergeant-major falls. Gray reverses the rifle and hammers its butt into the sergeant-major's face, but the trench floor is too soft to supply any resistance. He glares about. His gaze falls upon a duckboard upended in the mud. He drags it free and slips it beneath the sergeant-major's head and hammers the face with his riflebutt. Behind him in the first traverse the Officer is shouting: "Blow your whistle, Sergeant-major!"

IV

In the citation it told how Private Gray, on a night raid, one of four survivors, following the disablement of the Officer and the death of all the N.C.O.'s, took command of the situation and (the purpose of the expedition was a quick raid for prisoners); held a foothold in the enemy's front line until a supporting attack arrived and consolidated the position.

The Officer told how he ordered the men back out, ordering them to leave him and save themselves, and how Gray appeared with a German machine gun from somewhere and, while his three companions built a barricade, overcame the Officer and took from him his Very pistol and fired the colored signal which called for the attack; all so quickly that support arrived before the enemy could counterattack or put down a barrage.

It is doubtful if his people ever saw the citation at all. Anyway, the letters which he received from them during his sojourn in hospital, the tenor of them, were unchanged: "We are well. Ships are still going out."

His next letter home was once more months late. He wrote it when he was sitting up again, in London:

I have been sick but I am better now. I have a ribbon like in the box but not all red. The Queen was there. Love to Granddaddy and Jessie and Matthew and John Wesley and the baby.

The reply was written on Friday:

Your mother is glad that you are better. Your grandfather is dead. The baby's name is Elizabeth. We are well. Your mother sends her love.

His next letter was three months later, in winter again:

My hurt is well. I am going to a school for officers. Love to Jessie and Matthew and John Wesley and Elizabeth.

Matthew Gray pondered over this letter for a long while; so long that the reply was a week late, written on the second Monday instead of the first. He wrote it carefully, waiting until his family was in bed. It was such a long letter, or he had been at it so long, that after a time his wife came into the room in her nightdress.

"Go back to bed," he told her. "I'll be coming soon. 'Tis something to be said to the lad."

When at last he laid the pen down and sat back to reread the letter, it was a long one, written out slowly and deliberately and without retraction or blot:

. . . your bit ribbon . . . for that way lies vainglory and pride. The pride and vainglory of going for an officer. Never miscall your birth, Alec. You are not a gentleman. You are a Scottish shipwright. If your grandfather were here he would not be last to tell you so. . . . We are glad your hurt is well. Your mother sends her love.

He sent home the medal, and his photograph in the new tunic with the pips and ribbon and the barred cuffs. But he did not go home himself. He returned to Flanders in the spring, with poppies blowing in the churned beet- and cabbage-fields. When his leaves came, he spent them in London, in the haunts of officers, not telling his people that he had any leave.

He still had the Book. Occasionally he came upon it among his effects and opened it at the jagged page where his life had changed: . . . and a voice said, Peter, raise thyself; kill —

Often his batman would watch him as, unawares and oblivious, he turned the Book and mused upon the jagged page — the ranker, the gaunt, lonely man with a face that belied his years or lack of them: a

sobriety, a profound and mature calm, a grave and deliberate conviction of expression and gesture (“like a mout be Haig hissel,” the batman said) — watching him at his clean table, writing steadily and slowly, his tongue in his cheek as a child writes:

I am well. It has not rained in a fortnight. Love to Jessie and Matthew and John Wesley and Elizabeth.

Four days ago the battalion came down from the lines. It has lost its major and two captains and most of the subalterns, so that now the remaining captain is major, and two subalterns and a sergeant have the companies. Meanwhile, replacements have come up, the ranks are filled, and the battalion is going in again tomorrow. So today K Company stands with ranks open for inspection while the subaltern-captain (his name is Gray) moves slowly along each platoon front.

He passes from man to man, slowly, thoroughly, the sergeant behind him. He stops.

“Where is your trenching tool?” he says.

“Blawn—” the soldier begins. Then he ceases, staring rigidly before him.

“Blawn out of your pack, eh?” the captain finishes for him. “Since when? What battles have ye taken par-rt in since four days?”

The soldier stares rigidly across the drowsy street. The captain moves on. “Take his name, Sergeant.”

He moves on to the second platoon, to the third. He halts again. He looks the soldier up and down.

“What is your name?”

“010801 McLan, sir-r.”

“Replacement?”

“Replacement, sir-r.”

The captain moves on. “Take his name, Sergeant. Rifle’s filthy.”

The sun is setting. The village rises in black silhouette against the sunset; the river gleams in mirrored fire. The bridge across the river is a

black arch upon which slowly and like figures cut from black paper, men are moving.

The party crouches in the roadside ditch while the captain and the sergeant peer cautiously across the parapet of the road. "Do ye make them out?" the captain says in a low voice.

"Huns, sir-r," the sergeant whispers. "A ken their-r helmets."

Presently the column has crossed the bridge. The captain and the sergeant crawl back into the ditch, where the party crouches, among them a wounded man with a bandaged head. "Keep yon man quiet, now," the captain says.

He leads the way along the ditch until they reach the outskirts of the village. Here they are out of the sun, and here they sit quietly beneath a wall, surrounding the wounded man, while the captain and the sergeant again crawl away. They return in five minutes. "Fix bayonets," the sergeant says in a low voice. "Quiet, now."

"Wull A stay wi thae hur-rt lad, Sair-rgent?" one whispers.

"Nay," the sergeant says. "A'll tak's chance wi us. Forrard."

They steal quietly along the wall, behind the captain. The wall approaches at right angles to the street, the road which crosses the bridge. The captain raises his hand. They halt and watch him as he peers around the corner.

They are opposite the bridgehead. It and the road are deserted; the village dreams quietly in the setting sun. Against the sky beyond the village the dust of the retreating column hangs, turning to rose and gold.

Then they hear a sound, a short, guttural word. Not ten yards away and behind a ruined wall leveled breast-high and facing the bridge, four men squat about a machine gun. The captain raises his hand again. They grasp their rifles: a rush of hobnails on cobblestones, a cry of

astonishment cut sharply off; blows, short, hard breaths, curses; not a shot.

The man with the bandaged head begins to laugh, shrilly, until someone hushes him with a hand that tastes like brass. Under the captain's direction they bash in the door of the house and drag the gun and the four bodies into it. They hoist the gun upstairs and set it up in a window looking down upon the bridgehead. The sun sinks further, the shadows fall long and quiet across village and river. The man with the bandaged head babbles to himself.

Another column swings up the road, dogged and orderly beneath coalhod helmets. It crosses the bridge and passes on through the village. A party detaches itself from the rear of the column and splits into three squads.

Two of them have machine guns, which they set up on opposite sides of the street, the near one utilizing the barricade behind which the other gun had been captured. The third squad returns to the bridge, carrying sappers' tools and explosive. The sergeant tells off six of the nineteen men, who descend the stairs silently. The captain remains with the gun in the window.

Again there is a brief rush, a scuffle, blows. From the window the captain sees the heads of the machine-gun crew across the street turn, then the muzzle of the gun swings, firing. The captain rakes them once with his gun, then he sweeps with it the party on the bridge, watching it break like a covey of quail for the nearest wall.

The captain holds the gun on them. They wilt running and dot the white road and become motionless. Then he swings the gun back to the gun across the street. It ceases.

He gives another order. The remaining men, except the man with the bandage, run down the stairs. Half of them stop at the gun beneath the window and drag it around. The others dash on across the street,

toward the second gun. They are halfway across when the other gun rattles.

The running men plunge as one in midstep. Their kilts whip forward and bare their pale thighs. The gun rakes across the doorway where the others are freeing the first gun of bodies.

As the captain sweeps his gun down again, dust puffs from the left side of the window, his gun rings metallically, something sears along his arm and across his ribs, dust puffs from the right side of the window. He rakes the other gun again. It ceases. He continues to fire into the huddled clump about it long after the gun has ceased.

The dark earth bites into the sun's rim. The street is now all in shadow; a final level ray comes into the room, and fades. Behind him in the twilight the wounded man laughs, then his laughter sinks into a quiet contented gibberish.

Just before dark another column crosses the bridge. There is still enough light for it to be seen that these troops wear khaki and that their helmets are flat. But likely there is no one to see, because when a party mounted to the second story and found the captain propped in the window beside the cold gun, they thought that he was dead.

This time Matthew Gray saw the citation. Someone clipped it from the Gazette and sent it to him, and he sent it in turn to his son in the hospital, with a letter:

. . . Since you must go to a war we are glad that you are doing well in it. Your mother thinks that you have done your part and that you should come home.

But women do not understand such things. But I myself think that it is time they stopped fighting. What is the good in the high wages when food is so high that there is profit for none save the profiteers. When a war gets to where the battles do not even prosper the people who win them, it is time to stop.

V

In the bed next his, and later in the chair next his on the long glassed veranda, there was a subaltern. They used to talk. Or rather, the subaltern talked while Gray listened. He talked of peace, of what he would do when it was over, talking as if it were about finished, as if it would not last past Christmas.

“We’ll be back out there by Christmas,” Gray said.

“Gas cases? They don’t send gas cases out again. They have to be cured.”

“We will be cured.”

“But not in time. It will be over by Christmas. It can’t last another year. You don’t believe me, do you? Sometimes I believe you want to go back. But it will be. It will be finished by Christmas, and then I’m off. Canada. Nothing at home for us now.” He looked at the other, at the gaunt, wasted figure with almost white hair, lying with closed eyes in the fall sunlight. “You’d better come with me.”

“I’ll meet you in Givenchy on Christmas Day,” Gray said.

But he didn’t. He was in the hospital on the eleventh of November, hearing the bells, and he was still there on Christmas Day, where he received a letter from home:

You can come on home now. It will not be too soon now. They will need ships worse than ever now, now that the pride and the vainglory have worn themselves out.

The medical officer greeted him cheerfully. “Dammit, stuck here, when I know a place in Devon where I could hear a nightingale, by jove.” He thumped Gray’s chest. “Not much: just a bit of a murmur. Give you no trouble, if you’ll stop away from wars from now on. Might keep you from getting in again, though.”

He waited for Gray to laugh, but Gray didn’t laugh. “Well, it’s all finished now, damn them. Sign here, will you.” Gray signed. “Forget it

as quickly as it began, I hope. Well—” He extended his hand, smiling his antiseptic smile. “Cheer-O, Captain. And good luck.”

Matthew Gray, descending the hill at seven o'clock in the morning, saw the man, the tall, hospital-colored man in city clothing and carrying a stick, and stopped.

“Alec?” he said. “Alec.” They shook hands. “I could not — I did not . . .” He looked at his son, at the white hair, the waxed moustaches. “You have two ribbons now for the box, you have written.” Then Matthew turned back up the hill at seven o'clock in the morning. “We’ll go to your mother.”

Then Alec Gray reverted for an instant. Perhaps he had not progressed as far as he thought, or perhaps he had been climbing a hill, and the return was not a reversion so much as something like an avalanche waiting the pebble, momentary though it was to be. “The shipyard, Father.”

His father strode firmly on, carrying his lunchpail. “’Twill wait,” he said. “We’ll go to your mother.”

His mother met him at the door. Behind her he saw young Matthew, a man now, and John Wesley, and Elizabeth whom he had never seen. “You did not wear your uniform home,” young Matthew said. “No,” he said. “No, I—”

“Your mother had wanted to see you in your regimentals and all,” his father said.

“No,” his mother said. “No! Never! Never!”

“Hush, Annie,” his father said. “Being a captain now, with two ribbons now for the box. This is false modesty. Ye hae shown courage; ye should have — But ’tis of no moment: the proper uniform for a Gray is an overall and a hammer.”

“Ay, sir,” Alec said, who had long since found out that no man has courage but that any man may blunder blindly into valor as one stumbles into an open manhole in the street.

He did not tell his father until that night, after his mother and the children had gone to bed. “I am going back to England. I have work promised there.”

“Ah,” his father said. “At Bristol, perhaps? They build ships there.” The lamp glowed, touching with faint gleams the black and polished surface of the box on the mantel-shelf. There was a wind getting up, hollowing out the sky like a dark bowl, carving house and hill and headland out of dark space. “‘Twill be blowing out yon the night,” his father said.

“There are other things,” Alec said. “I have made friends, you see.” His father removed the iron-rimmed spectacles. “You have made friends. Officers and such, I doubt not?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And friends are good to have, to sit about the hearth of nights and talk with. But beyond that, only them that love you will bear your faults. You must love a man well to put up with all his trying ways, Alec.”

“But they are not that sort of friends, sir. They are . . .” He ceased. He did not look at his father. Matthew sat, slowly polishing the spectacles with his thumb. They could hear the wind. “If this fails, I’ll come back to the shipyard.”

His father watched him gravely, polishing the spectacles slowly.

“Shipwrights are not made like that, Alec. To fear God, to do your work like it was your own hull you were putting the ribs in . . .” He moved.

“We’ll see what the Book will say.” He replaced the glasses.

On the table was a heavy, brass-bound Bible. He opened it; the words seemed to him to rise to meet him from the page. Yet he read them, aloud: “. . . and the captains of thousands and the captains of ten

thousands . . . A paragraph of pride. He faced his son, bowing his neck to see across the glasses. "You will go to London, then?"

"Yes, sir," Alec said.

VI

His position was waiting. It was in an office. He had already had cards made: Captain A. Gray, M.C., D.S.M., and on his return to London he joined the Officers' Association, donating to the support of the widows and orphans.

He had rooms in the proper quarter, and he would walk to and from the office, with his cards and his waxed moustaches, his sober correct clothes and his stick carried in a manner inimitable, at once jaunty and unobtrusive, giving his coppers to blind and maimed in Piccadilly, asking of them the names of their regiments. Once a month he wrote home: I am well. Love to Jessie and Matthew and John Wesley and Elizabeth.

During that first year Jessie was married. He sent her a gift of plate, stinting himself a little to do so, drawings from his savings. He was saving, not against old age; he believed too firmly in the Empire to do that, who had surrendered completely to the Empire like a woman, a bride. He was saving against the time when he would recross the Channel among the dead scenes of his lost and found life.

That was three years later. He was already planning to ask for leave, when one day the manager broached the subject himself. With one correct bag he went to France. But he did not bear eastward at once. He went to the Riviera; for a week he lived like a gentleman, spending his money like a gentleman, lonely, alone in that bright aviary of the svelte kept women of all Europe.

That was why those who saw him descend from the Mediterranean Express that morning in Paris said, "Here is a rich milord," and why they continued to say it in the hard-benched third-class trains, as he sat leaning forward on his stick, lip-moving the names on sheet-iron

stations about the battered and waking land lying now three years quiet beneath the senseless and unbroken battalions of days.

He reached London and found what he should have known before he left. His position was gone. Conditions, the manager told him, addressing him punctiliously by his rank.

What savings he had left melted slowly; he spent the last of them on a black silk dress for his mother, with the letter:

I am well. Love to Matthew and John Wesley and Elizabeth.

He called upon his friends, upon the officers whom he had known. One, the man he knew best, gave him whisky in a comfortable room with a fire: "You aren't working now? Rotten luck. By the way, you remember Whiteby? He had a company in the — th. Nice chap: no people, though. He killed himself last week. Conditions."

"Oh. Did he? Yes. I remember him. Rotten luck."

"Yes. Rotten luck. Nice chap."

He no longer gave his pennies to the blind and the maimed in Piccadilly. He needed them for papers:

Artisans needed

Become stonemason

Men to drive motorcars. War record not necessary

Shop-assistants (must be under twenty-one)

Shipwrights needed

and at last:

Gentleman with social address and connections to meet out-of-town clients. Temporary

He got the place, and with his waxed moustaches and his correct clothes he revealed the fleshpots of the West End to Birmingham and Leeds. It was temporary.

Artisans

Carpenters

Housepainters

Winter was temporary, too. In the spring he took his waxed moustaches and his ironed clothes into Surrey, with a set of books, an encyclopedia, on commission. He sold all his things save what he stood in, and gave up his rooms in town.

He still had his stick, his waxed moustaches, his cards. Surrey, gentle, green, mild. A tight little house in a tight little garden. An oldish man in a smoking jacket pattering in a flower bed: "Good day, sir. Might I—"

The man in the smoking jacket looks up. "Go to the side, can't you? Don't come this way."

He goes to the side entrance. A slatted gate, freshly white, bearing an enameled plate:

NO

HAWKERS

BEGGARS

He passes through and knocks at a tidy door smug beneath a vine.

"Good day, miss. May I see the—"

"Go away. Didn't you see the sign on the gate?"

"But I—"

"Go away, or I'll call the master."

In the fall he returned to London. Perhaps he could not have said why himself. Perhaps it was beyond any saying, instinct perhaps bringing him back to be present at the instant out of all time of the manifestation, apotheosis, of his life which had died again. Anyway, he was there, still with his waxed moustaches, erect, his stick clasped beneath his left armpit, among the Household troops in brass cuirasses, on dappled geldings, and Guards in scarlet tunics, and the Church militant in stole and surplice and Prince defenders of God in humble mufti, all at attention for two minutes, listening to despair. He still had thirty shillings, and he replenished his cards: Captain A. Gray, M.C., D.S.M.

It is one of those spurious, pale days like a sickly and premature child of spring while spring itself is still weeks away. In the thin sunlight buildings fade upward into misty pinks and golds. Women wear violets pinned to their furs, appearing to bloom themselves like flowers in the languorous, treacherous air.

It is the women who look twice at the man standing against the wall at a corner: a gaunt man with white hair, and moustaches twisted into frayed points, with a bleached and frayed regimental scarf in a celluloid collar, a once-good suit now threadbare yet apparently pressed within twenty-four hours, standing against the wall with closed eyes, a dilapidated hat held bottom-up before him.

He stood there for a long time, until someone touched his arm. It was a constable. "Move along, sir. Against orders." In his hat were seven pennies and three halfpence. He bought a cake of soap and a little food.

Another anniversary came and passed; he stood again, his stick at his armpit, among the bright, silent uniforms, the quiet throng in either frank or stubborn cast-offs, with patient, bewildered faces. In his eyes now is not that hopeful resignation of a beggar, but rather that bitterness, that echo as of bitter and unheard laughter of a hunchback.

A meager fire burns on the sloping cobbles. In the fitful light the damp, fungus-grown wall of the embankment and the stone arch of the bridge loom. At the foot of the cobbled slope the invisible river clucks and gurgles with the tide.

Five figures lie about the fire, some with heads covered as though in slumber, others smoking and talking. One man sits upright, his back to the wall, his hands lying beside him; he is blind: he sleeps that way. He says that he is afraid to lie down.

"Cant you tell you are lying down, without seeing you are?" another says.

"Something might happen," the blind man says.

“What? Do you think they would give you a shell, even if it would bring back your sight?”

“They’d give him the shell, all right,” a third said.

“Ow. Why dont they line us all up and put down a bloody barrage on us?”

“Was that how he lost his sight?” a fourth says. “A shell?”

“Ow. He was at Mons. A dispatch rider, on a motorbike. Tell them about it, mate.”

The blind man lifts his face a little. Otherwise he does not move. He speaks in a flat voice. “She had the bit of scar on her wrist. That was how I could tell. It was me put the scar on her wrist, you might say. We was working in the shop one day. I had picked up an old engine and we was fitting it onto a bike so we could—”

“What?” the fourth says. “What’s he talking about?”

“Shhhh,” the first says. “Not so loud. He’s talking about his girl. He had a bit of a bike shop on the Brighton Road and they were going to marry.” He speaks in a low tone, his voice just under the weary, monotonous voice of the blind man. “Had their picture taken and all the day he enlisted and got his uniform.

He had it with him for a while, until one day he lost it. He was fair wild. So at last we got a bit of a card about the same size of the picture. ‘Here’s your picture, mate,’ we says. ‘Hold onto it this time.’ So he’s still got the card. Likely he’ll show it to you before he’s done. So dont you let on.”

“No,” the other says. “I shant let on.”

The blind man talks. “ — got them at the hospital to write her a letter, and sure enough, here she come. I could tell her by the bit of scar on her wrist. Her voice sounded different, but then everything sounded

different since. But I could tell by the scar. We would sit and hold hands, and I could touch the bit of scar inside her left wrist. In the cinema too. I would touch the scar and it would be like I—”

“The cinema?” the fourth says. “Him?”

“Yes,” the other says. “She would take him to the cinema the comedies, so he could hear them laughing.”

The blind man talks. “ — told me how the pictures hurt her eyes, and that she would leave me at the cinema and when it was over she would come and fetch me. So I said it was all right. And the next night it was again.

And I said it was all right. And the next night I told her I wouldn't go either. I said we would stop at home, at the hospital. And then she didn't say anything for a long while. I could hear her breathing. Then she said it was all right.

So after that we didn't go to the cinema. We would just sit, holding hands, and me feeling the scar now and then. We couldn't talk loud in the hospital, so we would whisper. But mostly we didn't talk. We just held hands. And that was for eight nights. I counted.

Then it was the eighth night. We were sitting there, with the other hand in my hand, and me touching the scar now and then. Then on a sudden the hand jerked away. I could hear her standing up. ‘Listen,’ she says. ‘This cant go on any longer. You will have to know sometime,’ she says. And I says, ‘I dont want to know but one thing. What is your name?’ I says. She told me her name; one of the nurses. And she says—
”

“What?” the fourth says. “What is this?”

“He told you,” the first said. “It was one of the nurses in the hospital. The girl had been bugging off with another fellow and left the nurse for him to hold her hand, thinking he was fooled.”

“But how did he know?” the fourth says.

“Listen,” the first says.

“— ‘and you knew all the time,’ she says, ‘since the first time?’ ‘It was the scar,’ I says. ‘You’ve got it on the wrong wrist. You’ve got it on your right wrist,’ I says. ‘And two nights ago, I lifted up the edge of it a bit. What is it,’ I says. ‘Courtplaster?’”

The blind man sits against the wall, his face lifted a little, his hands motionless beside him. “That’s how I knew, by the scar. Thinking they could fool me, when it was me put the scar on her, you might say—”

The prone figure farthest from the fire lifts its head. “Hup,” he says; “ere e comes.”

The others turn as one and look toward the entrance.

“Here who comes?” the blind man says. “Is it the bobbies?”

They do not answer. They watch the man who enters: a tall man with a stick. They cease to talk, save the blind man, watching the tall man come among them. “Here who comes, mates?” the blind man says. “Mates!”

The newcomer passes them, and the fire; he does not look at them. He goes on. “Watch, now,” the second says. The blind man is now leaning a little forward; his hands fumble at the ground beside him as though he were preparing to rise.

“Watch who?” he says. “What do you see?”

They do not answer. They are watching the newcomer covertly, attentively, as he disrobes and then, a white shadow, a ghostly gleam in the darkness, goes down to the water and washes himself, slapping his body hard with icy and filthy handfuls of river water.

He returns to the fire; they turn their faces quickly aside, save the blind man (he still sits forward, his arms propped beside him as though on the point of rising, his wan face turned toward the sound, the movement) and one other. “Yer stones is ot, sir,” this one says. “I’ve ad them right in the blaze.”

“Thanks,” the newcomer says. He still appears to be utterly oblivious of them, so they watch him again, quietly, as he spreads his sorry garments on one stone and takes a second stone from the fire and irons them. While he is dressing, the man who spoke to him goes down to the water and returns with the cake of soap which he had used. Still watching, they see the newcomer rub his fingers on the cake of soap and twist his moustaches into points.

“A bit more on the left one, sir,” the man holding the soap says. The newcomer soaps his fingers and twists his left moustache again, the other man watching him, his head bent and tilted a little back, in shape and attitude and dress like a caricatured scarecrow.

“Right, now?” the newcomer says.

“Right, sir,” the scarecrow says. He retreats into the darkness and returns without the cake of soap, and carrying instead the hat and the stick. The newcomer takes them. From his pocket he takes a coin and puts it into the scarecrow’s hand. The scarecrow touches his cap; the newcomer is gone.

They watch him, the tall shape, the erect back, the stick, until he disappears.

“What do you see, mates?” the blind man says. “Tell a man what you see.”

VII

Among the demobilized officers who emigrated from England after the Armistice was a subaltern named Walkley. He went out to Canada, where he raised wheat and prospered, both in pocket and in health. So much so that, had he been walking out of the Gare de Lyon in Paris instead of in Piccadilly Circus on this first evening (it is Christmas eve) of his first visit home, they would have said, “Here is not only a rich milord; it is a well one.”

He had been in London just long enough to outfit himself with the beginning of a wardrobe, and in his new clothes (bought of a tailor which in the old days he could not have afforded) he was enjoying himself too much to even go anywhere. So he just walked the streets, among the cheerful throngs, until suddenly he stopped dead still, staring at a face. The man had almost white hair, moustaches waxed to needle points.

He wore a frayed scarf in which could be barely distinguished the colors and pattern of a regiment. His threadbare clothes were freshly ironed and he carried a stick. He was standing at the curb, and he appeared to be saying something to the people who passed, and Walkley moved suddenly forward, his hand extended. But the other man only stared at him with eyes that were perfectly dead.

“Gray,” Walkley said, “don’t you remember me?” The other stared at him with that dead intensity. “We were in hospital together. I went out to Canada. Don’t you remember?”

“Yes,” the other said. “I remember you. You are Walkley.” Then he quit looking at Walkley.

He moved a little aside, turning to the crowd again, his hand extended; it was only then that Walkley saw that the hand contained three or four boxes of the matches which may be bought from any tobacconist for a penny a box. “Matches? Matches, sir?” he said. “Matches? Matches?” Walkley moved also, getting again in front of the other. “Gray—” he said.

The other looked at Walkley again, this time with a kind of restrained yet raging impatience. “Let me alone, you son of a bitch!” he said, turning immediately toward the crowd again, his hand extended. “Matches! Matches, sir!” he chanted.

Walkley moved on. He paused again, half turning, looking back at the gaunt face above the waxed moustaches. Again the other looked him full in the face, but the glance passed on, as though without

recognition. Walkley went on. He walked swiftly. "My God," he said. "I think I am going to vomit."

The End

Ad Astra, William Faulkner

Ad Astra

I DONT KNOW what we were. With the exception of Comyn, we had started out Americans, but after three years, in our British tunics and British wings and here and there a ribbon, I dont suppose we had even bothered in three years to wonder what we were, to think or to remember.

And on that day, that evening, we were even less than that, or more than that: either beneath or beyond the knowledge that we had not even wondered in three years. The subadar — after a while he was there, in his turban and his trick major's pips — said that we were like men trying to move in water.

"But soon it will clear away," he said. "The effluvium of hatred and of words. We are like men trying to move in water, with held breath watching our terrific and infinitesimal limbs, watching one another's terrific stasis without touch, without contact, robbed of all save the impotence and the need."

We were in the car then, going to Amiens, Sartoris driving and Comyn sitting half a head above him in the front seat like a tackling dummy, the subadar, Bland and I in back, each with a bottle or two in his pockets. Except the subadar, that is. He was squat, small and thick, yet his sobriety was colossal.

In that maelstrom of alcohol where the rest of us had fled our inescapable selves he was like a rock, talking quietly in a grave bass four sizes too big for him: "In my country I was prince. But all men are brothers."

But after twelve years I think of us as bugs in the surface of the water, isolant and aimless and unflagging. Not on the surface; in it, within that line of demarcation not air and not water, sometimes submerged, sometimes not.

You have watched an unbreaking groundswell in a cove, the water shallow, the cove quiet, a little sinister with satiate familiarity, while beyond the darkling horizon the dying storm has raged on. That was the water, we the flotsam. Even after twelve years it is no clearer than that.

It had no beginning and no ending. Out of nothing we howled, unwitting the storm which we had escaped and the foreign strand which we could not escape; that in the interval between two surges of the swell we died who had been too young to have ever lived.

We stopped in the middle of the road to drink again. The land was dark and empty. And quiet: that was what you noticed, remarked. You could hear the earth breathe, like coming out of ether, like it did not yet know, believe, that it was awake. "But now it is peace," the subadar said. "All men are brothers."

"You spoke before the Union once," Bland said. He was blond and tall. When he passed through a room where women were he left a sighing wake like a ferry boat entering the slip. He was a Southerner, too, like Sartoris; but unlike Sartoris, in the five months he had been out, no one had ever found a bullet hole in his machine.

But he had transferred out of an Oxford battalion — he was a Rhodes scholar — with a barnacle and a wound-stripe. When he was tight he would talk about his wife, though we all knew that he was not married.

He took the bottle from Sartoris and drank. "I've got the sweetest little wife," he said. "Let me tell you about her."

"Dont tell us," Sartoris said. "Give her to Comyn. He wants a girl."

"All right," Bland said. "You can have her, Comyn."

"Is she blonde?" Comyn said.

"I dont know," Bland said. He turned back to the subadar. "You spoke before the Union once. I remember you."

"Ah," the subadar said. "Oxford. Yes."

"He can attend their schools among the gentleborn, the bleach-skinned," Bland said. "But he cannot hold their commission, because gentility is a matter of color and not lineage or behavior."

"Fighting is more important than truth," the subadar said. "So we must restrict the prestige and privileges of it to the few so that it will not lose popularity with the many who have to die."

"Why more important?" I said. "I thought this one was being fought to end war forevermore."

The subadar made a brief gesture, dark, deprecatory, tranquil. "I was a white man also for that moment. It is more important for the Caucasian because he is only what he can do; it is the sum of him."

"So you see further than we see?"

"A man sees further looking out of the dark upon the light than a man does in the light and looking out upon the light. That is the principle of the spyglass. The lens is only to tease him with that which the sense that suffers and desires can never affirm."

"What do you see, then?" Bland said.

"I see girls," Comyn said. "I see acres and acres of the yellow hair of them like wheat and me among the wheat. Have ye ever watched a hidden dog quartering a wheat field, any of yez?"

"Not hunting bitches," Bland said.

Comyn turned in the seat, thick and huge. He was big as all outdoors. To watch two mechanics shoehorning him into the cockpit of a Dolphin like two chambermaids putting an emergency bolster into a case too small for it, was a sight to see. "I will beat the head off ye for a shilling," he said.

"So you believe in the rightness of man?" I said.

"I will beat the heads off yez all for a shilling," Comyn said.

"I believe in the pitiableness of man," the subadar said. "That is better."

"I will give yez a shilling, then," Comyn said.

"All right," Sartoris said. "Did you ever try a little whisky for the night air, any of you all?"

Comyn took the bottle and drank. "Acres and acres of them," he said, "with their little round white woman parts gleaming among the moiling wheat."

So we drank again, on the lonely road between two beet fields, in the dark quiet, and the turn of the inebriation began to make. It came back from wherever it had gone, rolling down upon us and upon the grave sober rock of the subadar until his voice sounded remote and tranquil and dreamlike, saying that we were brothers.

Monaghan was there then, standing beside our car in the full glare of the headlights of his car, in an R.F.C. cap and an American tunic with both shoulder straps flapping loose, drinking from Comyn's bottle. Beside him stood a second man, also in a tunic shorter and trimmer than ours, with a bandage about his head.

"I'll fight you," Comyn told Monaghan. "I'll give you the shilling."

"All right," Monaghan said. He drank again.

"We are all brothers," the subadar said. "Sometimes we pause at the wrong inn. We think it is night and we stop, when it is not night. That is all."

"I'll give you a sovereign," Comyn told Monaghan.

“All right,” Monaghan said. He extended the bottle to the other man, the one with the bandaged head.

“I thangk you,” the man said. “I haf plenty yet.”

“I’ll fight him,” Comyn said.

“It is because we can do only within the heart,” the subadar said.

“While we see beyond the heart.”

“I’ll be damned if you will,” Monaghan said. “He’s mine.” He turned to the man with the bandaged head. “Aren’t you mine? Here; drink.”

“I haf plenty, I thangk you, gentlemen,” the other said. But I dont think any of us paid much attention to him until we were inside the Cloche-Clos. It was crowded, full of noise and smoke.

When we entered all the noise ceased, like a string cut in two, the end raveling back into a sort of shocked consternation of pivoting faces, and the waiter — an old man in a dirty apron — falling back before us, slack-jawed, with an expression of outraged unbelief, like an atheist confronted with either Christ or the devil.

We crossed the room, the waiter retreating before us, paced by the turning outraged faces, to a table adjacent to one where three French officers sat watching us with that same expression of astonishment and then outrage and then anger.

As one they rose; the whole room, the silence, became staccato with voices, like machine guns. That was when I turned and looked at Monaghan’s companion for the first time, in his green tunic and his black snug breeks and his black boots and his bandage.

He had cut himself recently shaving, and with his bandaged head and his face polite and dazed and bloodless and sick, he looked like Monaghan had been using him pretty hard. Roundfaced, not old, with his immaculately turned bandage which served only to emphasize the generations of difference between him and the turbaned subadar, flanked by Monaghan with his wild face and wild tunic and surrounded

by the French people's shocked and outraged faces, he appeared to contemplate with a polite and alert concern his own struggle against the inebriation which Monaghan was forcing upon him.

There was something Anthony-like about him: rigid, soldierly, with every button in place, with his unblemished bandage and his fresh razor cuts, he appeared to muse furiously upon a clear flame of a certain conviction of individual behavior above a violent and inexplicable chaos.

Then I remarked Monaghan's second companion: an American military policeman. He was not drinking. He sat beside the German, rolling cigarettes from a cloth sack.

On the German's other side Monaghan was filling his glass. "I brought him down this morning," he said. "I'm going to take him home with me."

"Why?" Bland said. "What do you want with him?"

"Because he belongs to me," Monaghan said. He set the full glass before the German. "Here; drink."

"I once thought about taking one home to my wife," Bland said. "So I could prove to her that I have only been to a war. But I never could find a good one. A whole one, I mean."

"Come on," Monaghan said. "Drink."

"I haf plenty," the German said. "All day I haf plenty."

"Do you want to go to America with him?" Bland said:

"Yes. I would ligk it. Thanks."

"Sure you'll like it," Monaghan said. "I'll make a man of you. Drink."

The German raised the glass, but he merely held it in his hand. His face was strained, deprecatory, yet with a kind of sereneness, like that of a man who has conquered himself. I imagine some of the old martyrs must have looked at the lions with that expression. He was sick, too.

Not from the liquor: from his head. "I haf in Beyreuth a wife and a little wohn. Mine son. I haf not him yet seen."

"Ah," the subadar said. "Beyreuth. I was there one spring."

"Ah," the German said. He looked quickly at the subadar. "So? The music?"

"Yes," the subadar said. "In your music a few of you have felt, tasted, lived, the true brotherhood. The rest of us can only look beyond the heart. But we can follow them for a little while in the music."

"And then we must return," the German said. "That iss not good. Why must we yet return always?"

"It is not the time for that yet," the subadar said. "But soon . . . It is not as far as it once was. Not now."

"Yes," the German said. "Defeat will be good for us. Defeat iss good for art; victory, it iss not good."

"So you admit you were whipped," Comyn said. He was sweating again, and Sartoris' nostrils were quite white. I thought of what the subadar had said about men in water. Only our water was drunkenness: that isolation of alcoholism which drives men to shout and laugh and fight, not with one another but with their unbearable selves which, drunk, they are even more fain and still less fell to escape.

Loud and overloud, unwitting the black thunderhead of outraged France (steadily the other tables were being emptied; the other customers were now clotted about the high desk where the patronne, an old woman in steel spectacles, sat, a wad of knitting on the ledge before her) we shouted at one another, speaking in foreign tongues out of our inescapable isolations, reiterant, unlistened to by one another; while submerged by us and more foreign still, the German and the subadar talked quietly of music, art, the victory born of defeat.

And outside in the chill November darkness was the suspension, the not-quite-believing, not-quite-awakened nightmare, the breathing spell of the old verbiaged lusts and the buntinged and panoplied greeds.

“By God, I’m shanty Irish,” Monaghan said. “That’s what I am.”

“What about it?” Sartoris said, his nostrils like chalk against his high-colored face. His twin brother had been killed in July. He was in a Camel squadron below us, and Sartoris was down there when it happened. For a week after that, as soon as he came in from patrol he would fill his tanks and drums and go out again, alone.

One day somebody saw him, roosting about five thousand feet above an old Ak.W. I suppose the other guy who was with his brother that morning had seen the markings on the Hun patrol leader’s crate; anyway, that’s what Sartoris was doing, using the Ak.W. for bait. Where he got it and who he got to fly it, we didn’t know.

But he got three Huns that week, catching them dead when they dived on the Ak.W., and on the eighth day he didn’t go out again. “He must have got him,” Hume said. But we didn’t know. He never told us. But after that, he was all right again. He never did talk much; just did his patrols and maybe once a week he’d sit and drink his nostrils white in a quiet sort of way.

Bland was filling his glass, a drop at a time almost, with a catlike indolence. I could see why men didn’t like him and why women did. Comyn, his arms crossed on the table, his cuff in a pool of spilt liquor, was staring at the German. His eyes were bloodshot, a little protuberant. Beneath his downcrushed monkey cap the American M.P. smoked his meager cigarettes, his face quite blank.

The steel chain of his whistle looped into his breast pocket, his pistol was hunched forward onto his lap. Beyond, the French people, the soldiers, the waiter, the patronne, clotted at the desk. I could hear their voices like from a distance, like crickets in September grass, the shadows of their hands jerking up the wall and flicking away.

“I’m not a soldier,” Monaghan said. “I’m not a gentleman. I’m not anything.” At the base of each flapping shoulder strap there was a small

rip; there were two longer ones parallel above his left pocket where his wings and ribbon had been. "I dont know what I am. I have been in this damn war for three years and all I know is, I'm not dead. I—"

"How do you know you're not dead?" Bland said.

Monaghan looked at Bland, his mouth open upon his uncompleted word.

"I'll kill you for a shilling," Comyn said. "I dont like your bloody face, Lootenant. Bloody lootenant."

"I'm shanty Irish," Monaghan said. "That's what I am. My father was shanty Irish, by God. And I dont know what my grandfather was. I dont know if I had one. My father dont remember one. Likely it could have been one of several. So he didn't even have to be a gentleman. He never had to be.

That's why he could make a million dollars digging sewers in the ground. So he could look up at the tall glittering windows and say — I've heard him, and him smoking the pipe would gas the puking guts out of you damn, niggling, puny—"

"Are you bragging about your father's money or about his sewers?" Bland said.

" — would look up at them and he'd say to me, he'd say, 'When you're with your fine friends, the fathers and mothers and sisters of them you met at Yale, ye might just remind them that every man is the slave of his own refuse and so your old dad they would be sending around to the forty-story back doors of their kitchens is the king of them all—' What did you say?" He looked at Bland.

"Look here, buddy," the M.P. said. "This is about enough of this. I've got to report this prisoner."

"Wait," Monaghan said. He did not cease to look at Bland. "What did you say?"

"Are you bragging about your father's money or about his sewers?" Bland said.

“No,” Monaghan said. “Why should I? Any more than I would brag about the thirteen Huns I got, or the two ribbons, one of which his damned king—” he jerked his head at Comyn— “gave me.”

“Dont call him my damned king,” Comyn said, his cuff soaking slowly in the spilt liquor.

“Look,” Monaghan said. He jerked his hand at the rips on his flapping shoulder straps, at the two parallel rips on his breast. “That’s what I think of it. Of all your goddamn twaddle about glory and gentlemen. I was young; I thought you had to be. Then I was in it and there wasn’t time to stop even when I found it didn’t count. But now it’s over; finished now. Now I can be what I am.

Shanty Irish; son of an immigrant that knew naught but shovel and pick until youth and the time for pleasuring was wore out of him before his time. Out of a peat bog he came, and his son went to their gentlemen’s school and returned across the water to swank it with any of them that owned the peat bogs and the bitter sweat of them that mired it, and the king said him well.”

“I will give yez the shilling and I will beat the head off yez,” Comyn said.

“But why do you want to take him back with you?” Bland said.

Monaghan just looked at Bland. There was something of the crucified about Monaghan, too: furious, inarticulate not with stupidity but at it, like into him more than any of us had distilled the ceased drums of the old lust and greed waking at last aghast at their own impotence and accrued despair.

Bland sat on his spine, legs extended, his hands in his slacks, his handsome face calmly insufferable.

“What stringed pick would he bow? maybe a shovel strung with the gut of an alley-cat? he will create perhaps in music the flushed toilets of Manhattan to play for your father after supper of an evening?”

Monaghan just looked at Bland with that wild, rapt expression. Bland turned his lazy face a little to the German.

“Look here,” the M.P. said.

“You have a wife, Herr Leutnant?” Bland said.

The German looked up. He glanced swiftly from face to face. “Yes, thank you,” he said. He still had not touched his full glass save to hold it in his hand. But he was no nearer sober than before, the liquor become the hurting of his head, his head the pulse and beat of alcohol in him.

“My people are of Prussia little barons. There are four brothers: the second for the Army, the third who did nothing in Berlin, the little one a cadet of dragoons; I, the eldest, in the University. There I learned. There was a time then.

It was as though we, young from the quiet land, were brought together, chosen and worthy to witness a period quick like a woman with a high destiny of the earth and of man. It iss as though the old trash, the old litter of man’s blundering, iss to be swept away for a new race that will in the heroic simplicity of olden time walk the new earth. You knew that time, not? When the eye sparkled, the blut ran quick?” He looked about at our faces. “No?

Well, in America perhaps not. America iss new; in a new house it is not the litter so much as in old.” He looked at his glass for a moment, his face tranquil. “I return home; I say to my father, in the University I haf learned it iss not good; baron I will not be. He cannot believe. He talks of Germany, the fatherland; I say to him, It iss there; so.

You say fatherland; I, brotherland, I say, the word father iss that barbarism which will be first swept away; it iss the symbol of that hierarchy which hass stained the history of man with injustice of arbitrary instead of moral; force instead of love.

“From Berlin they send for that one; from the Army that one comes. I still say baron I will not be, for it iss not good. We are in the little hall

where my ancestors on the walls hang; I stand before them like court-martial; I say that Franz must be baron, for I will not be.

My father says you can; you will; it iss for Germany. Then I say, For Germany then will my wife be baroness? And like a court-martial I tell them I haf married the daughter of a musician who wass peasant.

“So it iss that. That one of Berlin iss to be baron. He and Franz are twin, but Franz iss captain already, and the most humble of the Army may eat meat with our kaiser; he does not need to be baron. So I am in Beyreuth with my wife and my music.

It iss as though I am dead. I do not get letter until to say my father iss dead and I haf killed him, and that one iss now home from Berlin to be baron. But he does not stay at home. In 1912 he iss in Berlin newspaper dead of a lady’s husband and so Franz iss baron after all.

“Then it iss war. But I am in Beyreuth with my wife and my music, because we think that it will not be long, since it was not long before. The fatherland in its pride needed us of the schools, but when it needed us it did not know it. And when it did realize that it needed us it wass too late and any peasant who would be hard to die would do. And so—”

“Why did you go, then?” Bland said. “Did the women make you? throw eggs at you, maybe?”

The German looked at Bland. “I am German; that iss beyond the I, the I am. Not for baron and kaiser.” Then he quit looking at Bland without moving his eyes. “There wass a Germany before there wass barons,” he said. “And after, there will be.”

“Even after this?”

“More so. Then it was pride, a word in the mouth. Now it is a — how you call it? . . .”

“A nation vanquishes its banners,” the subadar said. “A man conquers himself.”

“Or a woman a child bears,” the German said.

“Out of the lust, the travail,” the subadar said; “out of the travail, the affirmation, the godhead; truth.”

The M.P. was rolling another cigarette. He watched the subadar, upon his face an expression savage, restrained, and cold. He licked the cigarette and looked at me.

“When I came to this goddamn country,” he said, “I thought niggers were niggers. But now I’ll be damned if I know what they are. What’s he? snake-charmer?”

“Yes,” I said. “Snake-charmer.”

“Then he better get his snake out and beat it. I’ve got to report this prisoner. Look at those frogs yonder.” As I turned and looked three of the Frenchmen were leaving the room, insult and outrage in the shapes of their backs. The German was talking again.

“I hear by the newspapers how Franz is colonel and then general, and how the cadet, who was still the round-headed boy part of a gun always when I last saw him, is now ace with iron cross by the kaiser’s own hand. Then it is 1916. I see by the paper how the cadet is killed by your Bishop—” he bowed slightly to Comyn— “that good man.

So now I am cadet myself. It is as though I know. It is as though I see what is to be. So I transfer to be aviator, and yet though I know now that Franz is general of staff and though to myself each night I say, ‘You have again returned,’ I know that it is no good.

“That, until our kaiser fled. Then I learn that Franz is now in Berlin; I believe that there is a truth, that we have not forfeited all in pride, because we know it will not be much longer now, and Franz in Berlin safe, the fighting away from.

“Then it is this morning. Then comes the letter in my mother’s hand that I have not seen in seven years, addressed to me as baron. Franz is shot from his horse by German soldier in Berlin street.

It iss as though all had been forgotten, because women can forget all that quick, since to them nothing iss real — truth, justice, all — nothing that cannot be held in the hands or cannot die. So I burn all my papers, the picture of my wife and my son that I haf not yet seen, destroy my identity disk and remove all insignia from my tunic—” he gestured toward his collar.

“You mean,” Bland said, “that you had no intention of coming back? Why didn’t you take a pistol to yourself and save your government an aeroplane?”

“Suicide iss just for the body,” the German said. “The body settles nothing. It iss of no importance. It iss just to be kept clean when possible.”

“It is merely a room in the inn,” the subadar said. “It is just where we hide for a little while.”

“The lavatory,” Bland said; “the toilet.”

The M.P. rose. He tapped the German on the shoulder. Comyn was staring at the German.

“So you admit you were whipped,” he said.

“Yes,” the German said. “It wass our time first, because we were the sickest. It will be your England’s next. Then she too will be well.”

“Dont say my England,” Comyn said. “I am of the Irish nation.” He turned to Monaghan. “You said, my damned king. Dont say my damned king. Ireland has had no king since the Ur Neill, God bless the red-haired stern of him.”

Rigid, controlled, the German made a faint gesture. “You see?” he said to no one at all.

“The victorious lose that which the vanquished gain,” the subadar said.

“And what will you do now?” Bland said.

The German did not answer. He sat bolt upright with his sick face and his immaculate bandage.

“What will you do?” the subadar said to Bland. “What will any of us do? All this generation which fought in the war are dead tonight. But we do not yet know it.”

We looked at the subadar: Comyn with his bloodshot pig’s eyes, Sartoris with his white nostrils, Bland slumped in his chair, indolent, insufferable, with his air of a spoiled woman. Above the German the M.P. stood.

“It seems to worry you a hell of a lot,” Bland said.

“You do not believe?” the subadar said. “Wait. You will see.”

“Wait?” Bland said. “I dont think I’ve done anything in the last three years to have acquired that habit. In the last twenty-six years. Before that I dont remember. I may have.”

“Then you will see sooner than waiting,” the subadar said. “You will see.” He looked about at us, gravely serene. “Those who have been four years rotting out yonder—” he waved his short thick arm— “are not more dead than we.”

Again the M.P. touched the German’s shoulder. “Hell,” he said. “Come along, buddy.” Then he turned his head and we all looked up at the two Frenchmen, an officer and a sergeant, standing beside the table. For a while we just remained so.

It was like all the little bugs had suddenly found that their orbits had coincided and they wouldn’t even have to be aimless any more or even to keep on moving. Beneath the alcohol I could feel that hard, hot ball beginning in my stomach, like in combat, like when you know something is about to happen; that instant when you think Now. Now I can dump everything overboard and just be. Now. Now. It is quite pleasant.

“Why is that here, monsieur?” the officer said. Monaghan looked up at him, thrust backward and sideways in his chair, poised on the balls of his thighs as though they were feet, his arm lying upon the table. “Why do you make desagreable for France, monsieur, eh?” the officer said.

Someone grasped Monaghan as he rose; it was the M.P. behind him, holding him half risen. “Wa-a-a-i-daminate,” the M.P. said; “wa-a-a-i-daminate.” The cigarette bobbed on his lower lip as he talked, his hands on Monaghan’s shoulders, the brassard on his arm lifted into bold relief.

“What’s it to you, Frog?” he said. Behind the officer and the sergeant the other French people stood, and the old woman. She was trying to push through the circle. “This is my prisoner,” the M.P. said. “I’ll take him anywhere I please and keep him there as long as I like. What do you think about that?”

“By which authority, monsieur?” the officer said. He was tall, with a gaunt, tragic face. I saw then that one of his eyes was glass. It was motionless, rigid in a face that looked even deader than the spurious eye.

The M.P. glanced toward his brassard, then instead he looked at the officer again and tapped the pistol swinging low now against his flank. “I’ll take him all over your goddamn lousy country. I’ll take him into your goddamn senate and kick your president up for a chair for him and you can suck your chin until I come back to wipe the latrine off your feet again.”

“Ah,” the officer said, “a devil-dog, I see.”

He said “dehvildahg” between his teeth, with no motion of his dead face, in itself insult. Behind him the patronne began to shriek in French: “Boche! Boche! Broken! Broken! Every cup, every saucer, glass, plate — all, all! I will show you! I have kept them for this day. Eight months since the obus I have kept them in a box against this day: plates, cups, saucers, glasses, all that I have had since thirty years, all gone, broken at one time! And it costing me fifty centimes the glass for such that I shame myself to have my patrons—”

There is an unbearable point, a climax, in weariness. Even alcohol cannot approach it. Mobs are motivated by it, by a sheer attenuation of

sameness become unbearable. As Monaghan rose, the M.P. flung him back. Then it was as though we all flung everything overboard at once, facing unbashful and without shame the specter which for four years we had been decking out in high words, leaping forward with concerted and orderly promptitude each time the bunting slipped.

I saw the M.P. spring at the officer, then Comyn rose and met him. I saw the M.P. hit Comyn three times on the point of the jaw with his fist before Comyn picked him up bodily and threw him clean over the crowd, where he vanished, horizontal in midair, tugging at his pistol. I saw three poilus on Monaghan's back and the officer trying to hit him with a bottle, and Sartoris leaping upon the officer from behind. Comyn was gone; through the gap which he had made the patronne emerged, shrieking.

Two men caught at her and she strove forward, trying to spit on the German. "Boche! Boche!" she shrieked, spitting and slobbering, her gray hair broken loose about her face; she turned and spat full at me. "Thou, too!" she shrieked, "it was not England that was devastated! Thou, too, come to pick the bones of France.

Jackal! Vulture! Animal! Broken, broken! All! All! All!" And beneath it all, unmoved, unmoving, alert, watchful and contained, the German and the subadar sat, the German with his high, sick face, the subadar tranquil as a squat idol, the both of them turbaned like prophets in the Old Testament.

It didn't take long. There was no time in it. Or rather, we were outside of time; within, not on, that surface, that demarcation between the old where we knew we had not died and the new where the subadar said that we were dead.

Beyond the brandished bottles, the blue sleeves and the grimed hands, the faces like masks grimaced into rigid and soundless shouts to frighten children, I saw Comyn again. He came plowing up like a laden ship in a chop sea; beneath his arm was the ancient waiter, to his lips

he held the M.P.'s whistle. Then Sartoris swung a chair at the single light.

It was cold in the street, a cold that penetrated the clothing, the alcohol-distended pores, and murmured to the skeleton itself. The plaza was empty, the lights infrequent and remote. So quiet it was that I could hear the faint water in the fountain.

From some distance away came sound, remote too under the thick low sky — shouting, far-heard, on a thin female note like all shouting, even a mob of men, broken now and then by the sound of a band. In the shadow of the wall Monaghan and Comyn held the German on his feet. He was unconscious; the three of them invisible save for the faint blur of the bandage, inaudible save for the steady monotone of Monaghan's cursing.

"There should never have been an alliance between Frenchmen and Englishmen," the subadar said. He spoke without effort; invisible, his effortless voice had an organ quality, out of all proportion to his size. "Different nations should never join forces to fight for the same object.

Let each fight for something different; ends that do not conflict, each in his own way." Sartoris passed us, returning from the fountain, carrying his bulging cap carefully before him, bottom-up.

We could hear the water dripping from it between his footsteps. He became one of the blob of thicker shadow where the bandage gleamed and where Monaghan cursed steadily and quietly. "And each after his own tradition," the subadar said. "My people.

The English gave them rifles. They looked at them and came to me: 'This spear is too short and too heavy: how can a man slay a swift enemy with a spear of this size and weight?'

They gave them tunics with buttons to be kept buttoned; I have passed a whole trench of them squatting, motionless, buried to the ears in

blankets, straw, empty sand bags, their faces gray with cold; I have lifted the blankets away from patient torsos clad only in a shirt.

“The English officers would say to them, ‘Go there and do thus’; they would not stir. Then one day at full noon the whole battalion, catching movement beyond a crater, sprang from the trench, carrying me and an officer with it.

We carried the trench without firing a shot; what was left of us — the officer, I, and seventeen others — lived three days in a traverse of the enemy’s front line; it required a whole brigade to extricate us.

‘Why didn’t you shoot?’ the officer said. ‘You let them pick you off like driven pheasant.’ They did not look at him. Like children they stood, murmurous, alert, without shame. I said to the headman, ‘Were the rifles loaded, O Das?’ Like children they stood, diffident, without shame. ‘O Son of many kings,’ Das said. ‘Speak the truth of thy knowing to the sahib,’ I said. ‘They were not loaded, sahib,’ Das said.”

Again the band came, remote, thudding in the thick air. They were giving the German drink from a bottle. Monaghan said: “Now. Feel better now?”

“It iss mine head,” the German said. They spoke quietly, like they were discussing wall-paper.

Monaghan cursed again. “I’m going back. By God, I—”

“No, no,” the German said. “I will not permit. You haf already obligated—”

We stood in the shadow beneath the wall and drank. We had one bottle left. Comyn crashed it, empty, against the wall.

“Now what?” Bland said.

“Girls,” Comyn said. “Would ye watch Comyn of the Irish nation among the yellow hair of them like a dog among the wheat?”

We stood there, hearing the far band, the far shouting. “You sure you feel all right?” Monaghan said.

"Thanks," the German said. "I feel goot."

"Come on, then," Comyn said.

"You going to take him with you?" Bland said.

"Yes," Monaghan said. "What of it?"

"Why not take him on to the A.P.M.? He's sick."

"Do you want me to bash your bloody face in?" Monaghan said.

"All right," Bland said.

"Come on," Comyn said. "What fool would rather fight than fush? All men are brothers, and all their wives are sisters. So come along, yez midnight fusileers."

"Look here," Bland said to the German, "do you want to go with them?" With his bandaged head, he and the subadar alone were visible, like two injured men among five spirits.

"Hold him up a minute," Monaghan told Comyn. Monaghan approached Bland. He cursed Bland. "I like fighting," he said, in that same monotone. "I even like being whipped."

"Wait," the German said. "Again I will not permit." Monaghan halted, he and Bland not a foot apart. "I haf wife and son in Beyreuth," the German said. He was speaking to me. He gave me the address, twice, carefully.

"I'll write to her," I said. "What shall I tell her?"

"Tell her it iss nothing. You will know."

"Yes. I'll tell her you are all right."

"Tell her this life iss nothing."

Comyn and Monaghan took his arms again, one on either side. They turned and went on, almost carrying him. Comyn looked back once.

"Peace be with you," he said.

“And with you, peace,” the subadar said. They went on. We watched them come into silhouette in the mouth of an alley where a light was. There was an arch there, and the faint cold pale light on the arch and on the walls so that it was like a gate and they entering the gate, holding the German up between them.

“What will they do with him?” Bland said. “Prop him in the corner and turn the light off? Or do French brothels have he-beds too?”

“Who the hell’s business is that?” I said.

The sound of the band came, thudding; it was cold. Each time my flesh jerked with alcohol and cold I believed that I could hear it rasp on the bones.

“Since seven years now I have been in this climate,” the subadar said. “But still I do not like the cold.” His voice was deep, quiet, like he might be six feet tall. It was like when they made him they said among themselves, “We’ll give him something to carry his message around with.” “Why? Who’ll listen to his message?” “He will. So we’ll give him something to hear it with.”

“Why dont you go back to India then?” Bland said.

“Ah,” the subadar said. “I am like him; I too will not be baron.”

“So you clear out and let foreigners who will treat the people like oxen or rabbits come in and take it.”

“By removing myself I undid in one day what it took two thousand years to do. Is not that something?”

We shook with the cold. Now the cold was the band, the shouting, murmuring with cold hands to the skeleton, not the ears.

“Well,” Bland said, “I suppose the English government is doing more to free your people than you could.”

The subadar touched Bland on the chest, lightly. “You are wise, my friend. Let England be glad that all Englishmen are not so wise.”

“So you will be an exile for the rest of your days, eh?”

The subadar jerked his short, thick arm toward the empty arch where Comyn and the German and Monaghan had disappeared. "Did you not hear what he said? This life is nothing."

"You can think so," Bland said. "But, by God, I'd hate to think that what I saved out of the last three years is nothing."

"You saved a dead man," the subadar said serenely. "You will see."

"I saved my destiny," Bland said. "You nor nobody else knows what that will be."

"What is your destiny except to be dead? It is unfortunate that your generation had to be the one. It is unfortunate that for the better part of your days you will walk the earth a spirit. But that was your destiny."

From far away came the shouting, on that sustained note, feminine and childlike all at once, and then the band again, brassy, thudding, like the voices, forlornly gay, hysteric, but most of all forlorn. The arch in the cold glow of the light yawned empty, profound, silent, like the gate to another city, another world.

Suddenly Sartoris left us. He walked steadily to the wall and leaned against it on his propped arms, vomiting.

"Hell," Bland said. "I want a drink." He turned to me. "Where's your bottle?"

"It's gone."

"Gone where? You had two."

"I haven't got one now, though. Drink water."

"Water?" he said. "Who the hell drinks water?"

Then the hot hard ball came into my stomach again, pleasant, unbearable, real; again that instant when you say Now. Now I can dump everything. "You will, you goddamn son," I said.

Bland was not looking at me. "Twice," he said in a quiet, detached tone.

“Twice in an hour. How’s that for high?” He turned and went toward the fountain. Sartoris came back, walking steadily erect. The band blent with the cold along the bones.

“What time is it?” I said.

Sartoris peered at his wrist. “Twelfth.”

“It’s later than midnight,” I said. “It must be.”

“I said it was the twelfth,” Sartoris said.

Bland was stooping at the fountain. There was a little light there. As we reached him he stood up, mopping at his face. The light was on his face and I thought for some time that he must have had his whole head under to be mopping that high up his face before I saw that he was crying. He stood there, mopping at his face, crying hard but quiet.

“My poor little wife,” he said. “My poor little wife.”

The end

All the Dead Pilots, William Faulkner

All the Dead Pilots

I

IN THE PICTURES, the snapshots hurriedly made, a little faded, a little dog-eared with the thirteen years, they swagger a little. Lean, hard, in their brass-and-leather martial harness, posed standing beside or leaning upon the esoteric shapes of wire and wood and canvas in which they flew without parachutes, they too have an esoteric look; a look not exactly human, like that of some dim and threatful apotheosis of the race seen for an instant in the glare of a thunderclap and then forever gone.

Because they are dead, all the old pilots, dead on the eleventh of November, 1918. When you see modern photographs of them, the recent pictures made beside the recent shapes of steel and canvas with the new cowlings and engines and slotted wings, they look a little outlandish: the lean young men who once swaggered.

They look lost, baffled. In this saxophone age of flying they look as out of place as, a little thick about the waist, in the sober business suits of thirty and thirty-five and perhaps more than that, they would look among the saxophones and miniature brass bowlers of a night club orchestra.

Because they are dead too, who had learned to respect that whose respect in turn their hardness had commanded before there were welded center sections and parachutes and ships that would not spin.

That's why they watch the saxophone girls and boys with slipstream-proof lipstick and aeronautical flasks piling up the saxophone crates in private driveways and on golf greens, with the quick sympathy and the bafflement too. "My gad," one of them — ack emma, warrant officer pilot, captain and M.C. in turn — said to me once; "if you can treat a crate that way, why do you want to fly at all?"

But they are all dead now. They are thick men now, a little thick about the waist from sitting behind desks, and maybe not so good at it, with wives and children in suburban homes almost paid out, with gardens in which they putter in the long evenings after the 5:15 is in, and perhaps not so good at that either: the hard, lean men who swaggered hard and drank hard because they had found that being dead was not as quiet as they had heard it would be.

That's why this story is composite: a series of brief glares in which, instantaneous and without depth or perspective, there stood into sight the portent and the threat of what the race could bear and become, in an instant between dark and dark.

In 1918 I was at Wing Headquarters, trying to get used to a mechanical leg, where, among other things, I had the censoring of mail from all squadrons in the Wing. The job itself wasn't bad, since it gave me spare time to experiment with a synchronized camera on which I was working. But the opening and reading of the letters, the scrawled, brief pages of transparent and honorable lies to mothers and sweethearts, in the script and spelling of schoolboys.

But a war is such a big thing, and it takes so long. I suppose they who run them (I don't mean the staffs, but whoever or whatever it is that controls events) do get bored now and then. And it's when you get bored that you turn petty, play horse.

So now and then I would go up to a Camel squadron behind Amiens and talk with the gunnery sergeant about the synchronization of the machine guns. This was Spoomer's squadron. His uncle was the corps commander, the K.G., and so Spoomer, with his Guards' Captaincy, had also got in turn a Mons Star, a D.S.O., and now a pursuit squadron of single seaters, though the third barnacle on his tunic was still the single wing of an observer.

In 1914 he was in Sandhurst: a big, ruddy-colored chap with china eyes, and I like to think of his uncle sending for him when the news got out, the good news. Probably at the uncle's club (the uncle was a brigadier then, just recalled hurriedly from Indian service) and the two of them opposite one another across the mahogany, with the newsboys crying in the street, and the general saying, "By gad, it will be the making of the Army. Pass the wine, sir."

I daresay the general was put out, not to say outraged, when he finally realized that neither the Hun nor the Home Office intended running this war like the Army wanted it run. Anyway, Spoomer had already gone out to Mons and come back with his Star (though Ffollansbye said that the general sent Spoomer out to get the Star, since it was going to

be one decoration you had to be on hand to get) before the uncle got him transferred to his staff, where Spoomer could get his D.S.O.

Then perhaps the uncle sent him out again to tap the stream where it came to surface. Or maybe Spoomer went on his own this time. I like to think so. I like to think that he did it through pro patria, even though I know that no man deserves praise for courage or opprobrium for cowardice, since there are situations in which any man will show either of them. But he went out, and came back a year later with his observer's wing and a dog almost as large as a calf.

That was in 1917, when he and Sartoris first came together, collided. Sartoris was an American, from a plantation at Mississippi, where they grew grain and Negroes, or the Negroes grew the grain — something. Sartoris had a working vocabulary of perhaps two hundred words, and I daresay to tell where and how and why he lived was beyond him, save that he lived in the plantation with his great-aunt and his grandfather.

He came through Canada in 1916, and he was at Pool. Ffollansbye told me about it. It seems that Sartoris had a girl in London, one of those three-day wives and three-year widows. That's the bad thing about war. They — the Sartorises and such — didn't die until 1918, some of them. But the girls, the women, they died on the fourth of August, 1914.

So Sartoris had a girl. Ffollansbye said they called her Kitchener, "because she had such a mob of soldiers." He said they didn't know if Sartoris knew this or not, but that anyway for a while Kitchener — Kit — appeared to have ditched them all for Sartoris. They would be seen anywhere and any time together, then Ffollansbye told me how he found Sartoris alone and quite drunk one evening in a restaurant. Ffollansbye told how he had already heard that Kit and Spoomer had gone off somewhere together about two days ago.

He said that Sartoris was sitting there, drinking himself blind, waiting for Spoomer to come in. He said he finally got Sartoris into a cab and sent him to the aerodrome. It was about dawn then, and Sartoris got a

captain's tunic from someone's kit, and a woman's garter from someone else's kit, perhaps his own, and pinned the garter on the tunic like a barnacle ribbon. Then he went and waked a corporal who was an ex-professional boxer and with whom Sartoris would put on the gloves now and then, and made the corporal put on the tunic over his underclothes.

"Namesh Spoomer," Sartoris told the corporal. "Cap'm Spoomer"; swaying and prodding at the garter with his finger. "Dishtinguish Sheries Thighs," Sartoris said. Then he and the corporal in the borrowed tunic, with his woolen underwear showing beneath, stood there in the dawn, swinging at one another with their naked fists.

III

You'd think that when a war had got you into it, it would let you be. That it wouldn't play horse with you. But maybe it wasn't that. Maybe it was because the three of them, Spoomer and Sartoris and the dog, were so humorless about it. Maybe a humorless person is an unflagging challenge to them above the thunder and the alarms.

Anyway, one afternoon — it was in the spring, just before Cambrai fell — I went up to the Camel aerodrome to see the gunnery sergeant, and I saw Sartoris for the first time. They had given the squadron to Spoomer and the dog the year before, and the first thing they did was to send Sartoris out to it.

The afternoon patrol was out, and the rest of the people were gone too, to Amiens I suppose, and the aerodrome was deserted. The sergeant and I were sitting on two empty petrol tins in the hangar door when I saw a man thrust his head out the door of the officers' mess and look both ways along the line, his air a little furtive and very alert. It was Sartoris, and he was looking for the dog.

"The dog?" I said. Then the sergeant told me, this too composite, out of his own observation and the observation of the entire enlisted personnel exchanged and compared over the mess tables or over pipes

at night: that terrible and omniscient inquisition of those in an inferior station.

When Spoomer left the aerodrome, he would lock the dog up somewhere. He would have to lock it up in a different place each time, because Sartoris would hunt until he found it, and let it out.

It appeared to be a dog of intelligence, because if Spoomer had only gone down to Wing or somewhere on business, the dog would stay at home, spending the interval grubbing in the refuse bin behind the men's mess, to which it was addicted in preference to that of the officers. But if Spoomer had gone to Amiens, the dog would depart up the Amiens road immediately on being freed, to return later with Spoomer in the squadron car.

"Why does Mr. Sartoris let it out?" I said. "Do you mean that Captain Spoomer objects to the dog eating kitchen refuse?"

But the sergeant was not listening. His head was craned around the door, and we watched Sartoris. He had emerged from the mess and he now approached the hangar at the end of the line, his air still alert, still purposeful. He entered the hangar. "That seems a rather childish business for a grown man," I said.

The sergeant looked at me. Then he quit looking at me. "He wants to know if Captain Spoomer went to Amiens or not."

After a while I said, "Oh. A young lady. Is that it?"

He didn't look at me. "You might call her a young lady. I suppose they have young ladies in this country."

I thought about that for a while. Sartoris emerged from the first hangar and entered the second one. "I wonder if there are any young ladies any more anywhere," I said.

"Perhaps you are right, sir. War is hard on women."

"What about this one?" I said. "Who is she?"

He told me. They ran an estaminet, a “bit of a pub” he called it — an old harridan of a woman, and the girl. A little place on a back street, where officers did not go. Perhaps that was why Sartoris and Spoomer created such a furore in that circle.

I gathered from the sergeant that the contest between the squadron commander and one of his greenest cubs was the object of general interest and the subject of the warmest conversation and even betting among the enlisted element of the whole sector of French and British troops. “Being officers and all,” he said.

“They frightened the soldiers off, did they?” I said. “Is that it?” The sergeant did not look at me. “Were there many soldiers to frighten off?”

“I suppose you know these young women,” the sergeant said. “This war and all.”

And that’s who the girl was. What the girl was. The sergeant said that the girl and the old woman were not even related. He told me how Sartoris bought her things — clothes, and jewelry; the sort of jewelry you might buy in Amiens, probably. Or maybe in a canteen, because Sartoris was not much more than twenty.

I saw some of the letters which he wrote to his great-aunt back home, letters that a third-form lad in Harrow could have written, perhaps bettered. It seemed that Spoomer did not make the girl any presents. “Maybe because he is a captain,” the sergeant said. “Or maybe because of them ribbons he dont have to.”

“Maybe so,” I said.

And that was the girl, the girl who, in the centime jewelry which Sartoris gave her, dispensed beer and wine to British and French privates in an Amiens back street, and because of whom Spoomer used his rank to betray Sartoris with her by keeping Sartoris at the aerodrome on special duties, locking up the dog to hide from Sartoris

what he had done. And Sartoris taking what revenge he could by letting out the dog in order that it might grub in the refuse of plebeian food.

He entered the hangar in which the sergeant and I were: a tall lad with pale eyes in a face that could be either merry or surly, and quite humorless. He looked at me. "Hello," he said.

"Hello," I said. The sergeant made to get up.

"Carry on," Sartoris said. "I don't want anything." He went on to the rear of the hangar. It was cluttered with petrol drums and empty packing cases and such. He was utterly without self-consciousness, utterly without shame of his childish business.

The dog was in one of the packing cases. It emerged, huge, of a napped, tawny color; Ffollansbye had told me that, save for Spoomer's wing and his Mons Star and his D.S.O., he and the dog looked alike. It quitted the hangar without haste, giving me a brief, sidelong glance. We watched it go on and disappear around the corner of the men's mess. Then Sartoris turned and went back to the officers' mess and also disappeared.

Shortly afterward, the afternoon patrol came in. While the machines were coming up to the line, the squadron car turned onto the aerodrome and stopped at the officers' mess and Spoomer got out. "Watch him," the sergeant said. "He'll try to do it like he wasn't watching himself, noticing himself."

He came along the hangars, big, hulking, in green golf stockings. He did not see me until he was turning into the hangar. He paused; it was almost imperceptible, then he entered, giving me a brief, sidelong glance. "How do," he said in a high, fretful, level voice. The sergeant had risen. I had never seen Spoomer even glance toward the rear, toward the overturned packing case, yet he had stopped. "Sergeant," he said.

"Sir," the sergeant said.

"Sergeant," Spoomer said. "Have those timers come up yet?"

“Yes, sir. They came up two weeks ago. They’re all in use now, sir.”

“Quite so. Quite so.” He turned; again he gave me a brief, sidelong glance, and went on down the hangar line, not fast. He disappeared. “Watch him, now,” the sergeant said. “He wont go over there until he thinks we have quit watching him.”

We watched. Then he came into sight again, crossing toward the men’s mess, walking briskly now. He disappeared beyond the corner. A moment later he emerged, dragging the huge, inert beast by the scruff of its neck. “You mustn’t eat that stuff,” he said. “That’s for soldiers.”

IV

I didn’t know at the time what happened next. Sartoris didn’t tell me until later, afterward. Perhaps up to that time he had not anything more than instinct and circumstantial evidence to tell him that he was being betrayed: evidence such as being given by Spoomer some duty not in his province at all and which would keep him on the aerodrome for the afternoon, then finding and freeing the hidden dog and watching it vanish up the Amiens road at its clumsy hand gallop.

But something happened. All I could learn at the time was, that one afternoon Sartoris found the dog and watched it depart for Amiens. Then he violated his orders, borrowed a motor bike and went to Amiens too.

Two hours later the dog returned and repaired to the kitchen door of the men’s mess, and a short time after that, Sartoris himself returned on a lorry (they were already evacuating Amiens) laden with household effects and driven by a French soldier in a peasant’s smock. The motor bike was on the lorry too, pretty well beyond repair. The soldier told how Sartoris had driven the bike full speed into a ditch, trying to run down the dog.

But nobody knew just what had happened, at the time. But I had imagined the scene, before he told me. I imagined him there, in that bit

of a room full of French soldiers, and the old woman (she could read pips, no doubt; ribbons, anyway) barring him from the door to the living quarters.

I can imagine him, furious, baffled, inarticulate (he knew no French) standing head and shoulders above the French people whom he could not understand and that he believed were laughing at him.

“That was it,” he told me. “Laughing at me behind their faces, about a woman. Me knowing that he was up there, and them knowing I knew that if I busted in and dragged him out and bashed his head off, I’d not only be cashiered, I’d be clinked for life for having infringed the articles of alliance by invading foreign property without warrant or something.”

Then he returned to the aerodrome and met the dog on the road and tried to run it down. The dog came on home, and Spoomer returned, and he was just dragging it by the scruff of the neck from the refuse bin behind the men’s mess, when the afternoon patrol came in.

They had gone out six and come back five, and the leader jumped down from his machine before it had stopped rolling. He had a bloody rag about his right hand and he ran toward Spoomer stooped above the passive and stiff-legged dog. “By gad,” he said, “they have got Cambrai!”

Spoomer did not look up. “Who have?”

“Jerry has, by gad!”

“Well, by gad,” Spoomer said. “Come along, now. I have told you about that muck.”

A man like that is invulnerable. When Sartoris and I talked for the first time, I started to tell him that. But then I learned that Sartoris was invincible too. We talked, that first time. “I tried to get him to let me teach him to fly a Camel,” Sartoris said. “I will teach him for nothing. I will tear out the cockpit and rig the duals myself, for nothing.”

“Why?” I said. “What for?”

“Or anything. I will let him choose it. He can take an S.E. if he wants to, and I will take an Ak.W. or even a Fee and I will run him clean out of the sky in four minutes. I will run him so far into the ground he will have to stand on his head to swallow.”

We talked twice: that first time, and the last time. “Well, you did better than that,” I said the last time we talked.

He had hardly any teeth left then, and he couldn’t talk very well, who had never been able to talk much, who lived and died with maybe two hundred words. “Better than what?” he said.

“You said before that you would run him clean out of the sky. You didn’t do that; you did better: you have run him clean off the continent of Europe.”

V

I think I said that he was invulnerable too. November 11, 1918, couldn’t kill him, couldn’t leave him growing a little thicker each year behind an office desk, with what had once been hard and lean and immediate grown a little dim, a little baffled, and betrayed, because by that day he had been dead almost six months.

He was killed in July, but we talked that second time, that other time before that. This last time was a week after the patrol had come in and told that Cambrai had fallen, a week after we heard the shells falling in Amiens. He told me about it himself, through his missing teeth.

The whole squadron went out together. He left his flight as soon as they reached the broken front, and flew back to Amiens with a bottle of brandy in his overall leg. Amiens was being evacuated, the roads full of lorries and carts of household goods, and ambulances from the Base hospital, and the city and its immediate territory was now interdict.

He landed in a short meadow. He said there was an old woman working in a field beyond the canal (he said she was still there when he returned an hour later, stooping stubbornly among the green rows, beneath the

moist spring air shaken at slow and monstrous intervals by the sound of shells falling in the city) and a light ambulance stopped halfway in the roadside ditch.

He went to the ambulance. The engine was still running. The driver was a young man in spectacles.

He looked like a student, and he was dead drunk, half sprawled out of the cab. Sartoris had a drink from his own bottle and tried to rouse the driver, in vain. Then he had another drink (I imagine that he was pretty well along himself by then; he told me how only that morning, when Spoomer had gone off in the car and he had found the dog and watched it take the Amiens road, how he had tried to get the operations officer to let him off patrol and how the operations officer had told him that La Fayette awaited him on the Santerre plateau) and tumbled the driver back into the ambulance and drove on to Amiens himself.

He said the French corporal was drinking from a bottle in a doorway when he passed and stopped the ambulance before the estaminet. The door was locked. He finished his brandy bottle and he broke the estaminet door in by diving at it as they do in American football. Then he was inside.

The place was empty, the benches and tables overturned and the shelves empty of bottles, and he said that at first he could not remember what it was he had come for, so he thought it must be a drink. He found a bottle of wine under the bar and broke the neck off against the edge of the bar, and he told how he stood there, looking at himself in the mirror behind the bar, trying to think what it was he had come to do. "I looked pretty wild," he said.

Then the first shell fell. I can imagine it: he standing there in that quiet, peaceful, redolent, devastated room, with the bashed-in door and the musing and waiting city beyond it, and then that slow, unhurried, reverberant sound coming down upon the thick air of spring like a hand laid without haste on the damp silence; he told how dust or sand or plaster, something, sifted somewhere, whispering down in a faint hiss,

and how a big, lean cat came up over the bar without a sound and flowed down to the floor and vanished like dirty quicksilver.

Then he saw the closed door behind the bar and he remembered what he had come for. He went around the bar. He expected this door to be locked too, and he grasped the knob and heaved back with all his might. It wasn't locked. He said it came back into the shelves with a sound like a pistol, jerking him off his feet. "My head hit the bar," he said. "Maybe I was a little groggy after that."

Anyway, he was holding himself up in the door, looking down at the old woman. She was sitting on the bottom stair, her apron over her head, rocking back and forth. He said that the apron was quite clean, moving back and forth like a piston, and he standing in the door, drooling a little at the mouth. "Madame," he said. The old woman rocked back and forth.

He propped himself carefully and leaned and touched her shoulder. "Toinette," he said. "Où est-elle, 'Toinette?" That was probably all the French he knew; that, with vin added to his 196 English words, composed his vocabulary.

Again the old woman did not answer. She rocked back and forth like a wound-up toy. He stepped carefully over her and mounted the stair. There was a second door at the head of the stair. He stopped before it, listening. His throat filled with a hot, salty liquid. He spat it, drooling; his throat filled again. This door was unlocked also. He entered the room quietly.

It contained a table, on which lay a khaki cap with the bronze crest of the Flying Corps, and as he stood drooling in the door, the dog heaved up from the corner furthest from the window, and while he and the dog looked at one another above the cap, the sound of the second shell came dull and monstrous into the room, stirring the limp curtains before the window.

As he circled the table the dog moved too, keeping the table between them, watching him. He was trying to move quietly, yet he struck the table in passing (perhaps while watching the dog) and he told how, when he reached the opposite door and stood beside it, holding his breath, drooling, he could hear the silence in the next room. Then a voice said:

“Maman?”

He kicked the locked door, then he dived at it, again like the American football, and through it, door and all. The girl screamed. But he said he never saw her, never saw anyone. He just heard her scream as he went into the room on all-fours. It was a bedroom; one corner was filled by a huge wardrobe with double doors.

The wardrobe was closed, and the room appeared to be empty. He didn't go to the wardrobe. He said he just stood there on his hands and knees, drooling, like a cow, listening to the dying reverberation of the third shell, watching the curtains on the window blow once into the room as though to a breath.

He got up. “I was still groggy,” he said. “And I guess that brandy and the wine had kind of got joggled up inside me.” I daresay they had. There was a chair. Upon it lay a pair of slacks, neatly folded, a tunic with an observer's wing and two ribbons, an ordnance belt. While he stood looking down at the chair, the fourth shell came.

He gathered up the garments. The chair toppled over and he kicked it aside and lurched along the wall to the broken door and entered the first room, taking the cap from the table as he passed. The dog was gone.

He entered the passage. The old woman still sat on the bottom step, her apron over her head, rocking back and forth. He stood at the top of the stair, holding himself up, waiting to spit. Then beneath him a voice said: “Que faites-vous en haut?”

He looked down upon the raised moustached face of the French corporal whom he had passed in the street drinking from the bottle.

For a time they looked at one another. Then the corporal said, "Descendez," making a peremptory gesture with his arm. Clasp ing the garments in one hand, Sartoris put the other hand on the stair rail and vaulted over it.

The corporal jumped aside. Sartoris plunged past him and into the wall, banging his head hollowly again. As he got to his feet and turned, the corporal kicked at him, striking for his pelvis. The corporal kicked him again.

Sartoris knocked the corporal down, where he lay on his back in his clumsy overcoat, tugging at his pocket and snapping his boot at Sartoris' groin. Then the corporal freed his hand and shot point-blank at Sartoris with a short-barreled pistol.

Sartoris sprang upon him before he could shoot again, trampling the pistol hand. He said he could feel the man's bones through his boot, and that the corporal began to scream like a woman behind his brigand's moustaches.

That was what made it funny, Sartoris said: that noise coming out of a pair of moustaches like a Gilbert and Sullivan pirate. So he said he stopped it by holding the corporal up with one hand and hitting him on the chin with the other until the noise stopped. He said that the old woman had not ceased to rock back and forth under her starched apron. "Like she might have dressed up to get ready to be sacked and ravaged," he said.

He gathered up the garments. In the bar he had another pull at the bottle, looking at himself in the mirror. Then he saw that he was bleeding at the mouth. He said he didn't know if he had bitten his tongue when he jumped over the stair rail or if he had cut his mouth with the broken bottle neck. He emptied the bottle and flung it to the floor.

He said he didn't know then what he intended to do. He said he didn't realize it even when he had dragged the unconscious driver out of the

ambulance and was dressing him in Captain Spoomer's slacks and cap and ribboned tunic, and tumbled him back into the ambulance.

He remembered seeing a dusty inkstand behind the bar. He sought and found in his overalls a bit of paper, a bill rendered him eight months ago by a London tailor, and, leaning on the bar, drooling and spitting, he printed on the back of the bill Captain Spoomer's name and squadron number and aerodrome, and put the paper into the tunic pocket beneath the ribbons and the wing, and drove back to where he had left his aeroplane.

There was an Anzac battalion resting in the ditch beside the road. He left the ambulance and the sleeping passenger with them, and four of them helped him to start his engine, and held the wings for his tight take-off.

Then he was back at the front. He said he did not remember getting there at all; he said the last thing he remembered was the old woman in the field beneath him, then suddenly he was in a barrage, low enough to feel the concussed air between the ground and his wings, and to distinguish the faces of troops. He said he didn't know what troops they were, theirs or ours, but that he strafed them anyway.

"Because I never heard of a man on the ground getting hurt by an aeroplane," he said. "Yes, I did; I'll take that back. There was a farmer back in Canada plowing in the middle of a thousand-acre field, and a cadet crashed on top of him."

Then he returned home. They told at the aerodrome that he flew between two hangars in a slow roll, so that they could see the valve stems in both wheels, and that he ran his wheels across the aerodrome and took off again. The gunnery sergeant told me that he climbed vertically until he stalled, and that he held the Camel mushing on its back. "He was watching the dog," the sergeant said.

"It had been home about an hour and it was behind the men's mess, grubbing in the refuse bin." He said that Sartoris dived at the dog and

then looped, making two turns of an upward spin, coming off on one wing and still upside down. Then the sergeant said that he probably did not set back the air valve, because at a hundred feet the engine conked, and upside down Sartoris cut the tops out of the only two poplar trees they had left.

The sergeant said they ran then, toward the gout of dust and the mess of wire and wood. Before they reached it, he said the dog came trotting out from behind the men's mess. He said the dog got there first and that they saw Sartoris on his hands and knees, vomiting, while the dog watched him. Then the dog approached and sniffed tentatively at the vomit and Sartoris got up and balanced himself and kicked it, weakly but with savage and earnest purpose.

VI

The ambulance driver, in Spoomer's uniform, was sent back to the aerodrome by the Anzac major. They put him to bed, where he was still sleeping when the brigadier and the Wing Commander came up that afternoon. They were still there when an ox cart turned onto the aerodrome and stopped, with, sitting on a wire cage containing chickens, Spoomer in a woman's skirt and a knitted shawl. The next day Spoomer returned to England. We learned that he was to be a temporary colonel at ground school.

"The dog will like that, anyway," I said.

"The dog?" Sartoris said.

"The food will be better there," I said.

"Oh," Sartoris said. They had reduced him to second lieutenant, for dereliction of duty by entering a forbidden zone with government property and leaving it unguarded, and he had been transferred to another squadron, to the one which even the B.E. people called the Laundry.

This was the day before he left. He had no front teeth at all now, and he apologized for the way he talked, who had never really talked with

an intact mouth. "The joke is," he said, "it's another Camel squadron. I have to laugh."

"Laugh?" I said.

"Oh, I can ride them. I can sit there with the gun out and keep the wings level now and then. But I can't fly Camels. You have to land a Camel by setting the air valve and flying it into the ground. Then you count ten, and if you have not crashed, you level off. And if you can get up and walk away, you have made a good landing. And if they can use the crate again, you are an ace. But that's not the joke."

"What's not?"

"The Camels. The joke is, this is a night-flying squadron. I suppose they are all in town and they don't get back until after dark to fly them. They're sending me to a night-flying squadron. That's why I have to laugh."

"I would laugh," I said. "Isn't there something you can do about it?"

"Sure. Just keep that air valve set right and not crash. Not wash out and have those wing flares explode. I've got that beat. I'll just stay up all night, pop the flares and sit down after sunrise. That's why I have to laugh, see. I can't fly Camels in the daytime, even. And they don't know it."

"Well, anyway, you did better than you promised," I said. "You have run him off the continent of Europe."

"Yes," he said. "I sure have to laugh. He's got to go back to England, where all the men are gone. All those women, and not a man between fourteen and eighty to help him. I have to laugh."

VII

When July came, I was still in the Wing office, still trying to get used to my mechanical leg by sitting at a table equipped with a paper cutter, a pot of glue and one of red ink, and laden with the meager, thin, here soiled and here clean envelopes that came down in periodical batches — envelopes addressed to cities and hamlets and sometimes less than

hamlets, about England — when one day I came upon two addressed to the same person in America: a letter and a parcel. I took the letter first. It had neither location nor date:

Dear Aunt Jenny

Yes I got the socks Elnora knitted. They fit all right because I gave them to my batman he said they fit all right. Yes I like it here better than where I was these are good guys here except these damn Camels. I am all right about going to church we dont always have church.

Sometimes they have it for the ak emmas because I reckon a ak emma needs it but usually I am pretty busy Sunday but I go enough I reckon. Tell Elnora much oblige for the socks they fit all right but maybe you better not tell her I gave them away. Tell Isom and the other niggers hello and Grandfather tell him I got the money all right but war is expensive as hell.

Johnny.

But then, the Malbroucks dont make the wars, anyway. I suppose it takes too many words to make a war. Maybe that's why.

The package was addressed like the letter, to Mrs Virginia Sartoris, Jefferson, Mississippi, U.S.A., and I thought, What in the world would it ever occur to him to send to her? I could not imagine him choosing a gift for a woman in a foreign country; choosing one of those trifles which some men can choose with a kind of infallible tact.

His would be, if he thought to send anything at all, a section of crank shaft or maybe a handful of wrist pins salvaged from a Hun crash. So I opened the package. Then I sat there, looking at the contents.

It contained an addressed envelope, a few dog-eared papers, a wrist watch whose strap was stiff with some dark dried liquid, a pair of goggles without any glass in one lens, a silver belt buckle with a monogram. That was all.

So I didn't need to read the letter. I didn't have to look at the contents of the package, but I wanted to. I didn't want to read the letter, but I had to.

— Squadron, R.A.F., France.

5th July, 1918.

Dear Madam,

I have to tell you that your son was killed on yesterday morning. He was shot down while in pursuit of duty over the enemy lines. Not due to carelessness or lack of skill. He was a good man. The E.A. outnumbered your son and had more height and speed which is our misfortune but no fault of the Government which would give us better machines if they had them which is no satisfaction to you.

Another of ours, Mr R. Kyerling 1000 feet below could not get up there since your son spent much time in the hangar and had a new engine in his machine last week. Your son took fire in ten seconds Mr Kyerling said and jumped from your son's machine since he was side slipping safely until the E.A. shot away his stabiliser and controls and he began to spin.

I am very sad to send you these sad tidings though it may be a comfort to you that he was buried by a minister. His other effects sent you later.

I am, madam, and etc.

C. Kaye Major

He was buried in the cemetery just north of Saint Vaast since we hope it will not be shelled again since we hope it will be over soon by our padre since there were just two Camels and seven E.A. and so it was on our side by that time.

C. K. Mjr.

The other papers were letters, from his great-aunt, not many and not long. I don't know why he had kept them. But he had. Maybe he just forgot them, like he had the bill from the London tailor he had found in his overalls in Amiens that day in the spring.

. . . let those foreign women alone. I lived through a war myself and I know how women act in war, even with Yankees. And a good-for-nothing hellion like you . . .

And this:

. . . we think it's about time you came home. Your grandfather is getting old, and it don't look like they will ever get done fighting over there. So you come on home. The Yankees are in it now. Let them fight if they want to. It's their war. It's not ours.

And that's all. That's it. The courage, the recklessness, call it what you will, is the flash, the instant of sublimation; then flick! the old darkness again. That's why. It's too strong for steady diet. And if it were a steady diet, it would not be a flash, a glare.

And so, being momentary, it can be preserved and prolonged only on paper: a picture, a few written words that any match, a minute and harmless flame that any child can engender, can obliterate in an instant. A one-inch sliver of sulphur-tipped wood is longer than memory or grief; a flame no larger than a sixpence is fiercer than courage or despair.

The End

Crevasse, William Faulkner

Crevasse

THE PARTY GOES on, skirting the edge of the barrage weaving down into shell craters old and new, crawling out again. Two men half drag, half carry between them a third, while two others carry the three rifles. The third man's head is bound in a bloody rag; he stumbles his aimless legs along, his head lolling, sweat channeling slowly down his mud-crusted face.

The barrage stretches on and on across the plain, distant, impenetrable. Occasionally a small wind comes up from nowhere and thins the dun smoke momentarily upon clumps of bitten poplars. The party enters and crosses a field which a month ago was sown to wheat and where yet wheatspears thrust and cling stubbornly in the churned soil, among scraps of metal and seething hunks of cloth.

It crosses the field and comes to a canal bordered with tree stumps sheared roughly at a symmetrical five-foot level. The men flop and drink of the contaminated water and fill their water bottles. The two bearers let the wounded man slip to earth; he hangs lax on the canal bank with both arms in the water and his head too, had not the others held him up.

One of them raises water in his helmet, but the wounded man cannot swallow. So they set him upright and the other holds the helmet brim to his lips and refills the helmet and pours the water on the wounded man's head, sopping the bandage. Then he takes a filthy rag from his pocket and dries the wounded man's face with clumsy gentleness.

The captain, the subaltern and the sergeant, still standing, are poring over a soiled map. Beyond the canal the ground rises gradually; the canal cutting reveals the chalk formation of the land in pallid strata. The captain puts the map away and the sergeant speaks the men to their feet, not loud.

The two bearers raise the wounded man and they follow the canal bank, coming after a while to a bridge formed by a water-logged barge hull lashed bow and stern to either bank, and so pass over. Here they halt again while once more the captain and the subaltern consult the map.

Gunfire comes across the pale spring noon like a prolonged clashing of hail on an endless metal roof. As they go on the chalky soil rises gradually underfoot. The ground is dryly rough, shaling, and the going is harder still for the two who carry the wounded man. But when they

would stop the wounded man struggles and wrenches free and staggers on alone, his hands at his head, and stumbles, falling.

The bearers catch and raise him and hold him muttering between them and wrenching his arms. He is muttering “. . . bonnet . . .” and he frees his hands and tugs again at his bandage. The commotion passes forward. The captain looks back and stops; the party halts also, unbidden, and lowers rifles.

“A’s pickin at’s bandage, sir-r,” one of the bearers tells the captain. They let the man sit down between them; the captain kneels beside him.

“. . . bonnet . . . bonnet,” the man mutters. The captain loosens the bandage. The sergeant extends a water bottle and the captain wets the bandage and lays his hand on the man’s brow. The others stand about, looking on with a kind of sober, detached interest. The captain rises. The bearers raise the wounded man again. The sergeant speaks them into motion.

They gain the crest of the ridge. The ridge slopes westward into a plateau slightly rolling. Southward, beneath its dun pall, the barrage still rages; westward and northward about the shining empty plain smoke rises lazily here and there above clumps of trees. But this is the smoke of burning things, burning wood and not powder, and the two officers gaze from beneath their hands, the men halting again without order and lowering arms.

“Gad, sir,” the subaltern says suddenly in a high, thin voice; “it’s houses burning! They’re retreating! Beasts! Beasts!”

“’Tis possible,” the captain says, gazing beneath his hand. “We can get around that barrage now. Should be a road just yonder.” He strides on again.

“For-rard,” the sergeant says, in that tone not loud. The men slope arms once more with unquestioning docility.

The ridge is covered with a tough, gorselike grass. Insects buzz in it, zip from beneath their feet and fall to slatting again beneath the shimmering noon. The wounded man is babbling again. At intervals they pause and give him water and wet the bandage again, then two others exchange with the bearers and they hurry the man on and close up again.

The head of the line stops; the men jolt prodding into one another like a train of freight cars stopping. At the captain's feet lies a broad shallow depression in which grows a sparse, dead-looking grass like clumps of bayonets thrust up out of the earth. It is too big to have been made by a small shell, and too shallow to have been made by a big one. It bears no traces of having been made by anything at all, and they look quietly down into it. "Queer," the subaltern says. "What do you fancy could have made it?"

The captain does not answer. He turns. They circle the depression, looking down into it quietly as they pass it. But they have no more than passed it when they come upon another one, perhaps not quite so large. "I didn't know they had anything that could make that," the subaltern says. Again the captain does not answer. They circle this one also and keep on along the crest of the ridge. On the other hand the ridge sheers sharply downward stratum by stratum of pallid eroded chalk.

A shallow ravine gashes its crumbling yawn abruptly across their path. The captain changes direction again, paralleling the ravine, until shortly afterward the ravine turns at right angles and goes on in the direction of their march. The floor of the ravine is in shadow; the captain leads the way down the shelving wall, into the shade. They lower the wounded man carefully and go on.

After a time the ravine opens. They find that they have debouched into another of those shallow depressions. This one is not so clearly defined, though, and the opposite wall of it is nicked by what is apparently another depression, like two overlapping disks. They cross the first

depression, while more of the dead-looking grass bayonets saber their legs dryly, and pass through the gap into the next depression.

This one is like a miniature valley between miniature cliffs. Overhead they can see only the drowsy and empty bowl of the sky, with a few faint smoke smudges to the northwest. The sound of the barrage is now remote and far away: a vibration in earth felt rather than heard. There are no recent shell craters or marks here at all.

It is as though they had strayed suddenly into a region, a world where the war had not reached, where nothing had reached, where no life is, and silence itself is dead. They give the wounded man water and go on.

The valley, the depression, strays vaguely before them. They can see that it is a series of overlapping, vaguely circular basins formed by no apparent or deducible agency. Pallid grass bayonets saber at their legs, and after a time they are again among old healed scars of trees to which there cling sparse leaves neither green nor dead, as if they too had been overtaken and caught by a hiatus in time, gossiping dryly among themselves though there is no wind. The floor of the valley is not level.

It in itself descends into vague depressions, rises again as vaguely between its shelving walls. In the center of these smaller depressions whitish knobs of chalk thrust up through the thin topsoil. The ground has a resilient quality, like walking on cork; feet make no sound. "Jolly walking," the subaltern says.

Though his voice is not raised, it fills the small valley with the abruptness of a thunderclap, filling the silence, the words seeming to hang about them as though silence here had been so long undisturbed that it had forgot its purpose; as one they look quietly and soberly about, at the shelving walls, the stubborn ghosts of trees, the bland, hushed sky. "Topping hole-up for embusqué birds and such," the subaltern says.

“Ay,” the captain says. His word in turn hangs sluggishly and fades. The men at the rear close up, the movement passing forward, the men looking quietly and soberly about.

“But no birds here,” the subaltern says. “No insects even.”

“Ay,” the captain says. The word fades, the silence comes down again, sunny, profoundly still. The subaltern pauses and stirs something with his foot. The men halt also, and the subaltern and the captain, without touching it, examine the half-buried and moldering rifle. The wounded man is babbling again.

“What is it, sir?” the subaltern says. “Looks like one of those things the Canadians had. A Ross. Right?”

“French,” the captain says; “1914.”

“Oh,” the subaltern says. He turns the rifle aside with his toe. The bayonet is still attached to the barrel, but the stock has long since rotted away. They go on, across the uneven ground, among the chalky knobs thrusting up through the soil. Light, the wan and drowsy sunlight, is laked in the valley, stagnant, bodiless, without heat. The saberlike grass thrusts sparsely and rigidly upward.

They look about again at the shaling walls, then the ones at the head of the party watch the subaltern pause and prod with his stick at one of the chalky knobs and turn presently upward its earth-stained eyesockets and its unbottomed grin.

“Forward,” the captain says sharply. The party moves; the men look quietly and curiously at the skull as they pass. They go on, among the other whitish knobs like marbles studded at random in the shallow soil. “All in the same position, do you notice, sir?” the subaltern says, his voice chattily cheerful; “all upright. Queer way to bury chaps: sitting down. Shallow, too.”

“Ay,” the captain says. The wounded man babbles steadily. The two bearers stop with him, but the others crowd on after the officers,

passing the two bearers and the wounded man. "Dinna stop to gi's sup water," one of the bearers says.

"A'll drink walkin." They take up the wounded man again and hurry him on while one of them tries to hold the neck of a water bottle to the wounded man's mouth, clattering it against his teeth and spilling the water down the front of his tunic. The captain looks back.

"What's this?" he says sharply. The men crowd up. Their eyes are wide, sober; he looks about at the quiet, intent faces. "What's the matter back there, Sergeant?"

"Wind-up," the subaltern says. He looks about at the eroded walls, the whitish knobs thrusting quietly out of the earth. "Feel it myself," he says. He laughs, his laughter a little thin, ceasing. "Let's get out of here, sir," he says. "Let's get into the sun again."

"You are in the sun here," the captain says. "Ease off there, men. Stop crowding. We'll be out soon. We'll find the road and get past the barrage and make contact again." He turns and goes on. The party gets into motion again.

Then they all stop as one, in the attitudes of walking, in an utter suspension, and stare at one another. Again the earth moves under their feet. A man screams, high, like a woman or a horse; as the firm earth shifts for a third time beneath them the officers whirl and see beyond the downplunging man a gaping hole with dry dust still crumbling about the edges before the orifice crumbles again beneath a second man.

Then a crack springs like a sword slash beneath them all; the earth breaks under their feet and tilts like jagged squares of pale fudge, framing a black yawn out of which, like a silent explosion, bursts the unmistakable smell of rotted flesh. While they scramble and leap (in silence now; there has been no sound since the first man screamed) from one cake to another, the cakes tilt and slide until the whole floor of the valley rushes slowly under them and plunges them downward

into darkness. A grave rumbling rises into the sunlight on a blast of decay and of faint dust which hangs and drifts in the faint air about the black orifice.

The captain feels himself plunging down a sheer and shifting wall of moving earth, of sounds of terror and of struggling in the ink dark. Someone else screams. The scream ceases; he hears the voice of the wounded man coming thin and reiterant out of the plunging bowels of decay: "A'm no dead! A'm no dead!" and ceasing abruptly, as if a hand had been laid on his mouth.

Then the moving cliff down which the captain plunges slopes gradually off and shoots him, uninjured, onto a hard floor, where he lies for a time on his back while across his face the lightward- and airward-seeking blast of death and dissolution rushes. He has fetched up against something; it tumbles down upon him lightly, with a muffled clatter as if it had come to pieces.

Then he begins to see the light, the jagged shape of the cavern mouth high overhead, and then the sergeant is bending over him with a pocket torch. "McKie?" the captain says. For reply the sergeant turns the flash upon his own face. "Where's Mr. McKie?" the captain says.

"A's gone, sir-r," the sergeant says in a husky whisper. The captain sits up.

"How many are left?"

"Fourteen, sir-r," the sergeant whispers.

"Fourteen. Twelve missing. We'll have to dig fast." He gets to his feet. The faint light from above falls coldly upon the heaped avalanche, upon the thirteen helmets and the white bandage of the wounded man huddled about the foot of the cliff. "Where are we?"

For answer the sergeant moves the torch. It streaks laterally into the darkness, along a wall, a tunnel, into yawning blackness, the walls faceted with pale glints of chalk. About the tunnel, sitting or leaning

upright against the walls, are skeletons in dark tunics and bagging Zouave trousers, their moldering arms beside them; the captain recognizes them as Senegalese troops of the May fighting of 1915, surprised and killed by gas probably in the attitudes in which they had taken refuge in the chalk caverns.

He takes the torch from the sergeant.

“We’ll see if there’s anyone else,” he says. “Have out the trenching tools.” He flashes the light upon the precipice. It rises into gloom, darkness, then into the faint rumor of daylight overhead. With the sergeant behind him he climbs the shifting heap, the earth sighing beneath him and shaling downward.

The injured man begins to wail again, “A’m no dead! A’m no dead!” until his voice goes into a high sustained screaming. Someone lays a hand over his mouth. His voice is muffled, then it becomes laughter on a rising note, becomes screaming again, is choked again.

The captain and the sergeant mount as high as they dare, prodding at the earth while the earth shifts beneath them in long hushed sighs. At the foot of the precipice the men huddle, their faces lifted faint, white, and patient into the light. The captain sweeps the torch up and down the cliff. There is nothing, no arm, no hand, in sight. The air is clearing slowly. “We’ll get on,” the captain says.

“Ay, sir-r,” the sergeant says.

In both directions the cavern fades into darkness, plumbless and profound, filled with the quiet skeletons sitting and leaning against the walls, their arms beside them.

“The cave-in threw us forward,” the captain says.

“Ay, sir-r,” the sergeant whispers.

“Speak out,” the captain says. “It’s but a bit of a cave. If men got into it, we can get out.”

“Ay, sir-r,” the sergeant whispers.

“If it threw us forward, the entrance will be yonder.”

“Ay, sir-r,” the sergeant whispers.

The captain flashes the torch ahead. The men rise and huddle quietly behind him, the wounded man among them. He whimpers. The cavern goes on, unrolling its glinted walls out of the darkness; the sitting shapes grin quietly into the light as they pass. The air grows heavier; soon they are trotting, gasping, then the air grows lighter and the torch sweeps up another slope of earth, closing the tunnel.

The men halt and huddle. The captain mounts the slope. He snaps off the light and crawls slowly along the crest of the slide, where it joins the ceiling of the cavern, sniffing. The light flashes on again. “Two men with trenching tools,” he says.

Two men mount to him. He shows them the fissure through which air seeps in small, steady breaths. They begin to dig, furiously, hurling the dirt back. Presently they are relieved by two others; presently the fissure becomes a tunnel and four men can work at once. The air becomes fresher. They burrow furiously, with whimpering cries like dogs.

The wounded man, hearing them perhaps, catching the excitement perhaps, begins to laugh again, meaningless and high. Then the man at the head of the tunnel bursts through. Light rushes in around him like water; he burrows madly; in silhouette they see his wallowing buttocks lunge from sight and a burst of daylight surges in.

The others leave the wounded man and surge up the slope, fighting and snarling at the opening. The sergeant springs after them and beats them away from the opening with a trenching spade, cursing in his hoarse whisper.

“Let them go, Sergeant,” the captain says. The sergeant desists. He stands aside and watches the men scramble into the tunnel. Then he descends, and he and the captain help the wounded man up the slope. At the mouth of the tunnel the wounded man rebels.

"A'm no dead! A'm no dead!" he wails, struggling. By cajolery and force they thrust him, still wailing and struggling, into the tunnel, where he becomes docile again and scuttles through.

"Out with you, Sergeant," the captain says.

"After you, sir-r," the sergeant whispers.

"Out wi ye, man!" the captain says. The sergeant enters the tunnel. The captain follows. He emerges onto the outer slope of the avalanche which had closed the cave, at the foot of which the fourteen men are kneeling in a group.

On his hands and knees like a beast, the captain breathes, his breath making a hoarse sound. "Soon it will be summer," he thinks, dragging the air into his lungs faster than he can empty them to respire again. "Soon it will be summer, and the long days." At the foot of the slope the fourteen men kneel.

The one in the center has a Bible in his hand, from which he is intoning monotonously. Above his voice the wounded man's gibberish rises, meaningless and unemphatic and sustained.

The End

Red Leaves, William Faulkner

Red Leaves

I

THE TWO INDIANS crossed the plantation toward the slave quarters. Neat with whitewash, of baked soft brick, the two rows of houses in which lived the slaves belonging to the clan, faced one another across the mild shade of the lane marked and scored with naked feet and with a few homemade toys mute in the dust. There was no sign of life.

"I know what we will find," the first Indian said.

"What we will not find," the second said. Although it was noon, the lane was vacant, the doors of the cabins empty and quiet; no cooking smoke rose from any of the chinked and plastered chimneys.

"Yes. It happened like this when the father of him who is now the Man, died."

"You mean, of him who was the Man."

"Yao."

The first Indian's name was Three Basket. He was perhaps sixty. They were both squat men, a little solid, burgher-like; paunchy, with big heads, big, broad, dust-colored faces of a certain blurred serenity like carved heads on a ruined wall in Siam or Sumatra, looming out of a mist. The sun had done it, the violent sun, the violent shade. Their hair looked like sedge grass on burnt-over land. Clamped through one ear Three Basket wore an enameled snuffbox.

"I have said all the time that this is not the good way. In the old days there were no quarters, no Negroes. A man's time was his own then. He had time. Now he must spend most of it finding work for them who prefer sweating to do."

"They are like horses and dogs."

"They are like nothing in this sensible world. Nothing contents them save sweat. They are worse than the white people."

"It is not as though the Man himself had to find work for them to do."

"You said it. I do not like slavery. It is not the good way. In the old days, there was the good way. But not now."

"You do not remember the old way either."

"I have listened to them who do. And I have tried this way. Man was not made to sweat."

"That's so. See what it has done to their flesh."

“Yes. Black. It has a bitter taste, too.”

“You have eaten of it?”

“Once. I was young then, and more hardy in the appetite than now. Now it is different with me.”

“Yes. They are too valuable to eat now.”

“There is a bitter taste to the flesh which I do not like.”

“They are too valuable to eat, anyway, when the white men will give horses for them.”

They entered the lane. The mute, meager toys — the fetish-shaped objects made of wood and rags and feathers — lay in the dust about the patinaed doorsteps, among bones and broken gourd dishes. But there was no sound from any cabin, no face in any door; had not been since yesterday, when Issetibbeha died. But they already knew what they would find.

It was in the central cabin, a house a little larger than the others, where at certain phases of the moon the Negroes would gather to begin their ceremonies before removing after nightfall to the creek bottom, where they kept the drums. In this room they kept the minor accessories, the cryptic ornaments, the ceremonial records which consisted of sticks daubed with red clay in symbols.

It had a hearth in the center of the floor, beneath a hole in the roof, with a few cold wood ashes and a suspended iron pot. The window shutters were closed; when the two Indians entered, after the abashless sunlight they could distinguish nothing with the eyes save a movement, shadow, out of which eyeballs rolled, so that the place appeared to be full of Negroes. The two Indians stood in the doorway.

“Yao,” Basket said. “I said this is not the good way.”

“I don’t think I want to be here,” the second said.

“That is black man’s fear which you smell. It does not smell as ours does.”

"I don't think I want to be here."

"Your fear has an odor too."

"Maybe it is Issetibbeha which we smell."

"Yao. He knows. He knows what we will find here. He knew when he died what we should find here today." Out of the rank twilight of the room the eyes, the smell, of Negroes rolled about them. "I am Three Basket, whom you know," Basket said into the room. "We are come from the Man. He whom we seek is gone?" The Negroes said nothing. The smell of them, of their bodies, seemed to ebb and flux in the still hot air.

They seemed to be musing as one upon something remote, inscrutable. They were like a single octopus. They were like the roots of a huge tree uncovered, the earth broken momentarily upon the writhen, thick, fetid tangle of its lightless and outraged life. "Come," Basket said. "You know our errand. Is he whom we seek gone?"

"They are thinking something," the second said. "I do not want to be here."

"They are knowing something," Basket said.

"They are hiding him, you think?"

"No. He is gone. He has been gone since last night. It happened like this before, when the grandfather of him who is now the Man died. It took us three days to catch him. For three days Doom lay above the ground, saying 'I see my horse and my dog. But I do not see my slave. What have you done with him that you will not permit me to lie quiet?'"

"They do not like to die."

"Yao. They cling. It makes trouble for us, always. A people without honor and without decorum. Always a trouble."

"I do not like it here."

“Nor do I. But then, they are savages; they cannot be expected to regard usage. That is why I say that this way is a bad way.”

“Yao. They cling. They would even rather work in the sun than to enter the earth with a chief. But he is gone.”

The Negroes had said nothing, made no sound. The white eyeballs rolled, wild, subdued; the smell was rank, violent. “Yes, they fear,” the second said. “What shall we do now?”

“Let us go and talk with the Man.”

“Will Mocketubbe listen?”

“What can he do? He will not like to. But he is the Man now.”

“Yao. He is the Man. He can wear the shoes with the red heels all the time now.” They turned and went out. There was no door in the door frame. There were no doors in any of the cabins.

“He did that anyway,” Basket said.

“Behind Issetibbeha’s back. But now they are his shoes, since he is the Man.”

“Yao. Issetibbeha did not like it. I have heard. I know that he said to Mocketubbe: ‘When you are the Man, the shoes will be yours. But until then, they are my shoes.’ But now Mocketubbe is the Man; he can wear them.”

“Yao,” the second said. “He is the Man now. He used to wear the shoes behind Issetibbeha’s back, and it was not known if Issetibbeha knew this or not. And then Issetibbeha became dead, who was not old, and the shoes are Mocketubbe’s, since he is the Man now. What do you think of that?”

“I don’t think about it,” Basket said. “Do you?”

“No,” the second said.

“Good,” Basket said. “You are wise.”

The house sat on a knoll, surrounded by oak trees. The front of it was one story in height, composed of the deck house of a steamboat which had gone ashore and which Doom, Issetibbeha's father, had dismantled with his slaves and hauled on cypress rollers twelve miles home overland. It took them five months. His house consisted at the time of one brick wall.

He set the steamboat broadside on to the wall, where now the chipped and flaked gilding of the rococo cornices arched in faint splendor above the gilt lettering of the stateroom names above the jalousied doors.

Doom had been born merely a subchief, a Mingo, one of three children on the mother's side of the family. He made a journey — he was a young man then and New Orleans was a European city — from north Mississippi to New Orleans by keel boat, where he met the Chevalier Sœur Blonde de Vitry, a man whose social position, on its face, was as equivocal as Doom's own.

In New Orleans, among the gamblers and cutthroats of the river front, Doom, under the tutelage of his patron, passed as the chief, the Man, the hereditary owner of that land which belonged to the male side of the family; it was the Chevalier de Vitry who called him *du homme*, and hence Doom.

They were seen everywhere together — the Indian, the squat man with a bold, inscrutable, underbred face, and the Parisian, the expatriate, the friend, it was said, of Carondelet and the intimate of General Wilkinson.

Then they disappeared, the two of them, vanishing from their old equivocal haunts and leaving behind them the legend of the sums which Doom was believed to have won, and some tale about a young woman, daughter of a fairly well-to-do West Indian family, the son and brother of whom sought Doom with a pistol about his old haunts for some time after his disappearance.

Six months later the young woman herself disappeared, boarding the St. Louis packet, which put in one night at a wood landing on the north Mississippi side, where the woman, accompanied by a Negro maid, got off. Four Indians met her with a horse and wagon, and they traveled for three days, slowly, since she was already big with child, to the plantation, where she found that Doom was now chief. He never told her how he accomplished it, save that his uncle and his cousin had died suddenly.

At that time the house consisted of a brick wall built by shiftless slaves, against which was propped a thatched lean-to divided into rooms and littered with bones and refuse, set in the center of ten thousand acres of matchless parklike forest where deer grazed like domestic cattle.

Doom and the woman were married there a short time before Issetibbeha was born, by a combination itinerant minister and slave trader who arrived on a mule, to the saddle of which was lashed a cotton umbrella and a three-gallon demijohn of whisky. After that, Doom began to acquire more slaves and to cultivate some of his land, as the white people did.

But he never had enough for them to do. In utter idleness the majority of them led lives transplanted whole out of African jungles, save on the occasions when, entertaining guests, Doom coursed them with dogs.

When Doom died, Issetibbeha, his son, was nineteen. He became proprietor of the land and of the quintupled herd of blacks for which he had no use at all. Though the title of Man rested with him, there was a hierarchy of cousins and uncles who ruled the clan and who finally gathered in squatting conclave over the Negro question, squatting profoundly beneath the golden names above the doors of the steamboat.

“We cannot eat them,” one said.

“Why not?”

“There are too many of them.”

“That’s true,” a third said. “Once we started, we should have to eat them all. And that much flesh diet is not good for man.”

“Perhaps they will be like deer flesh. That cannot hurt you.”

“We might kill a few of them and not eat them,” Issetibbeha said.

They looked at him for a while. “What for?” one said.

“That is true,” a second said. “We cannot do that. They are too valuable; remember all the bother they have caused us, finding things for them to do. We must do as the white men do.”

“How is that?” Issetibbeha said.

“Raise more Negroes by clearing more land to make corn to feed them, then sell them. We will clear the land and plant it with food and raise Negroes and sell them to the white men for money.”

“But what will we do with this money?” a third said.

They thought for a while.

“We will see,” the first said. They squatted, profound, grave.

“It means work,” the third said.

“Let the Negroes do it,” the first said.

“Yao. Let them. To sweat is bad. It is damp. It opens the pores.”

“And then the night air enters.”

“Yao. Let the Negroes do it. They appear to like sweating.”

So they cleared the land with the Negroes and planted it in grain. Up to that time the slaves had lived in a huge pen with a lean-to roof over one corner, like a pen for pigs. But now they began to build quarters, cabins, putting the young Negroes in the cabins in pairs to mate; five years later Issetibbeha sold forty head to a Memphis trader, and he took the money and went abroad upon it, his maternal uncle from New Orleans conducting the trip.

At that time the Chevalier Sœur Blonde de Vitry was an old man in Paris, in a toupee and a corset, with a careful toothless old face fixed in

a grimace quizzical and profoundly tragic. He borrowed three hundred dollars from Issetibbeha and in return he introduced him into certain circles; a year later Issetibbeha returned home with a gilt bed, a pair of girandoles by whose light it was said that Pompadour arranged her hair while Louis smirked at his mirrored face across her powdered shoulder, and a pair of slippers with red heels. They were too small for him, since he had not worn shoes at all until he reached New Orleans on his way abroad.

He brought the slippers home in tissue paper and kept them in the remaining pocket of a pair of saddlebags filled with cedar shavings, save when he took them out on occasion for his son, Mocketubbe, to play with. At three years of age Mocketubbe had a broad, flat, Mongolian face that appeared to exist in a complete and unfathomable lethargy, until confronted by the slippers.

Mocketubbe's mother was a comely girl whom Issetibbeha had seen one day working in her shift in a melon patch. He stopped and watched her for a while — the broad, solid thighs, the sound back, the serene face. He was on his way to the creek to fish that day, but he didn't go any farther; perhaps while he stood there watching the unaware girl he may have remembered his own mother, the city woman, the fugitive with her fans and laces and her Negro blood, and all the tawdry shabbiness of that sorry affair.

Within the year Mocketubbe was born; even at three he could not get his feet into the slippers. Watching him in the still, hot afternoons as he struggled with the slippers with a certain monstrous repudiation of fact, Issetibbeha laughed quietly to himself. He laughed at Mocketubbe and the shoes for several years, because Mocketubbe did not give up trying to put them on until he was sixteen. Then he quit.

Or Issetibbeha thought he had. But he had merely quit trying in Issetibbeha's presence. Issetibbeha's newest wife told him that Mocketubbe had stolen and hidden the shoes. Issetibbeha quit laughing then, and he sent the woman away, so that he was alone. "Yao," he

said. "I too like being alive, it seems." He sent for Mocketubbe. "I give them to you," he said.

Mocketubbe was twenty-five then, unmarried. Issetibbeha was not tall, but he was taller by six inches than his son and almost a hundred pounds lighter. Mocketubbe was already diseased with flesh, with a pale, broad, inert face and dropsical hands and feet. "They are yours now," Issetibbeha said, watching him. Mocketubbe had looked at him once when he entered, a glance brief, discreet, veiled. "Thanks," he said.

Issetibbeha looked at him. He could never tell if Mocketubbe saw anything, looked at anything. "Why will it not be the same if I give the slippers to you?"

"Thanks," Mocketubbe said. Issetibbeha was using snuff at the time; a white man had shown him how to put the powder into his lip and scour it against his teeth with a twig of gum or of alpea.

"Well," he said, "a man cannot live forever." He looked at his son, then his gaze went blank in turn, unseeing, and he mused for an instant. You could not tell what he was thinking, save that he said half aloud: "Yao. But Doom's uncle had no shoes with red heels." He looked at his son again, fat, inert.

"Beneath all that, a man might think of doing anything and it not be known until too late." He sat in a splint chair hammocked with deer thongs. "He cannot even get them on; he and I are both frustrated by the same gross meat which he wears. He cannot even get them on. But is that my fault?"

He lived for five years longer, then he died. He was sick one night, and though the doctor came in a skunk-skin vest and burned sticks, he died before noon.

That was yesterday; the grave was dug, and for twelve hours now the People had been coming in wagons and carriages and on horseback and

afoot, to eat the baked dog and the succotash and the yams cooked in ashes and to attend the funeral.

III

“It will be three days,” Basket said, as he and the other Indian returned to the house. “It will be three days and the food will not be enough; I have seen it before.”

The second Indian’s name was Louis Berry. “He will smell too, in this weather.”

“Yao. They are nothing but a trouble and a care.”

“Maybe it will not take three days.”

“They run far. Yao. We will smell this Man before he enters the earth. You watch and see if I am not right.”

They approached the house.

“He can wear the shoes now,” Berry said. “He can wear them now in man’s sight.”

“He cannot wear them for a while yet,” Basket said. Berry looked at him. “He will lead the hunt.”

“Moketubbe?” Berry said. “Do you think he will? A man to whom even talking is travail?”

“What else can he do? It is his own father who will soon begin to smell.”

“That is true,” Berry said. “There is even yet a price he must pay for the shoes. Yao. He has truly bought them. What do you think?”

“What do you think?”

“What do you think?”

“I think nothing.”

“Nor do I. Issetibbeha will not need the shoes now. Let Moketubbe have them; Issetibbeha will not care.”

“Yao. Man must die.”

“Yao. Let him; there is still the Man.”

The bark roof of the porch was supported by peeled cypress poles, high above the texas of the steamboat, shading an unfloored banquette where on the trodden earth mules and horses were tethered in bad weather. On the forward end of the steamboat's deck sat an old man and two women. One of the women was dressing a fowl, the other was shelling corn. The old man was talking. He was barefoot, in a long linen frock coat and a beaver hat.

“This world is going to the dogs,” he said. “It is being ruined by white men. We got along fine for years and years, before the white men foisted their Negroes upon us. In the old days the old men sat in the shade and ate stewed deer's flesh and corn and smoked tobacco and talked of honor and grave affairs; now what do we do?

Even the old wear themselves into the grave taking care of them that like sweating.” When Basket and Berry crossed the deck he ceased and looked up at them. His eyes were querulous, bleared; his face was myriad with tiny wrinkles. “He is fled also,” he said.

“Yes,” Berry said, “he is gone.”

“I knew it. I told them so. It will take three weeks, like when Doom died. You watch and see.”

“It was three days, not three weeks,” Berry said.

“Were you there?”

“No,” Berry said. “But I have heard.”

“Well, I was there,” the old man said. “For three whole weeks, through the swamps and the briers—” They went on and left him talking.

What had been the saloon of the steamboat was now a shell, rotting slowly; the polished mahogany, the carving glinting momentarily and fading through the mold in figures cabalistic and profound; the gutted windows were like cataracted eyes.

It contained a few sacks of seed or grain, and the fore part of the running gear of a barouche, to the axle of which two C-springs rusted in graceful curves, supporting nothing. In one corner a fox cub ran steadily and soundlessly up and down a willow cage; three scrawny gamecocks moved in the dust, and the place was pocked and marked with their dried droppings.

They passed through the brick wall and entered a big room of chinked logs. It contained the hinder part of the barouche, and the dismantled body lying on its side, the window slatted over with willow withes, through which protruded the heads, the still, beady, outraged eyes and frayed combs of still more game chickens.

It was floored with packed clay; in one corner leaned a crude plow and two hand-hewn boat paddles. From the ceiling, suspended by four deer thongs, hung the gilt bed which Issetibbeha had fetched from Paris. It had neither mattress nor springs, the frame crisscrossed now by a neat hammocking of thongs.

Issetibbeha had tried to have his newest wife, the young one, sleep in the bed. He was congenitally short of breath himself, and he passed the nights half reclining in his splint chair. He would see her to bed and, later, wakeful, sleeping as he did but three or four hours a night, he would sit in the darkness and simulate slumber and listen to her sneak infinitesimally from the gilt and ribboned bed, to lie on a quilt pallet on the floor until just before daylight. Then she would enter the bed quietly again and in turn simulate slumber, while in the darkness beside her Issetibbeha quietly laughed and laughed.

The girandoles were lashed by thongs to two sticks propped in a corner where a ten-gallon whisky keg lay also. There was a clay hearth; facing it, in the splint chair, Mocketubbe sat. He was maybe an inch better than five feet tall, and he weighed two hundred and fifty pounds.

He wore a broadcloth coat and no shirt, his round, smooth copper balloon of belly swelling above the bottom piece of a suit of linen underwear. On his feet were the slippers with the red heels. Behind his

chair stood a stripling with a punkah-like fan made of fringed paper. Mocketubbe sat motionless, with his broad, yellow face with its closed eyes and flat nostrils, his flipperlike arms extended. On his face was an expression profound, tragic, and inert. He did not open his eyes when Basket and Berry came in.

“He has worn them since daylight?” Basket said.

“Since daylight,” the stripling said. The fan did not cease. “You can see.”

“Yao,” Basket said. “We can see.” Mocketubbe did not move. He looked like an effigy, like a Malay god in frock coat, drawers, naked chest, the trivial scarlet-heeled shoes.

“I wouldn’t disturb him, if I were you,” the stripling said.

“Not if I were you,” Basket said. He and Berry squatted. The stripling moved the fan steadily. “O Man,” Basket said, “listen.” Mocketubbe did not move. “He is gone,” Basket said.

“I told you so,” the stripling said. “I knew he would flee. I told you.”

“Yao,” Basket said. “You are not the first to tell us afterward what we should have known before. Why is it that some of you wise men took no steps yesterday to prevent this?”

“He does not wish to die,” Berry said.

“Why should he not wish it?” Basket said.

“Because he must die some day is no reason,” the stripling said. “That would not convince me either, old man.”

“Hold your tongue,” Berry said.

“For twenty years,” Basket said, “while others of his race sweat in the fields, he served the Man in the shade. Why should he not wish to die, since he did not wish to sweat?”

“And it will be quick,” Berry said. “It will not take long.”

“Catch him and tell him that,” the stripling said.

“Hush,” Berry said. They squatted, watching Mocketubbe’s face. He might have been dead himself. It was as though he were cased so in flesh that even breathing took place too deep within him to show.

“Listen, O Man,” Basket said. “Issetibbeha is dead. He waits. His dog and his horse we have. But his slave has fled. The one who held the pot for him, who ate of his food, from his dish, is fled. Issetibbeha waits.”
“Yao,” Berry said.

“This is not the first time,” Basket said. “This happened when Doom, thy grandfather, lay waiting at the door of the earth. He lay waiting three days, saying, ‘Where is my Negro?’ And Issetibbeha, thy father, answered, ‘I will find him. Rest; I will bring him to you so that you may begin the journey.’”

“Yao,” Berry said.
Mocketubbe had not moved, had not opened his eyes.

“For three days Issetibbeha hunted in the bottom,” Basket said. “He did not even return home for food, until the Negro was with him; then he said to Doom, his father, ‘Here is thy dog, thy horse, thy Negro; rest.’ Issetibbeha, who is dead since yesterday, said it. And now Issetibbeha’s Negro is fled. His horse and his dog wait with him, but his Negro is fled.”

“Yao,” Berry said.
Mocketubbe had not moved. His eyes were closed; upon his supine monstrous shape there was a colossal inertia, something profoundly immobile, beyond and impervious to flesh. They watched his face, squatting.

“When thy father was newly the Man, this happened,” Basket said. “And it was Issetibbeha who brought back the slave to where his father waited to enter the earth.” Mocketubbe’s face had not moved, his eyes had not moved. After a while Basket said, “Remove the shoes.”

The stripling removed the shoes. Mocketubbe began to pant, his bare chest moving deep, as though he were rising from beyond his unfathomed flesh back into life, like up from the water, the sea. But his eyes had not opened yet.

Berry said, "He will lead the hunt."

"Yao," Basket said. "He is the Man. He will lead the hunt."

IV

All that day the Negro, Issetibbeha's body servant, hidden in the barn, watched Issetibbeha's dying. He was forty, a Guinea man. He had a flat nose, a close, small head; the inside corners of his eyes showed red a little, and his prominent gums were a pale bluish red above his square, broad teeth. He had been taken at fourteen by a trader off Kamerun, before his teeth had been filed. He had been Issetibbeha's body servant for twenty-three years.

On the day before, the day on which Issetibbeha lay sick, he returned to the quarters at dusk. In that unhurried hour the smoke of the cooking fires blew slowly across the street from door to door, carrying into the opposite one the smell of the identical meat and bread. The women tended them; the men were gathered at the head of the lane, watching him as he came down the slope from the house, putting his naked feet down carefully in a strange dusk. To the waiting men his eyeballs were a little luminous.

"Issetibbeha is not dead yet," the headman said.

"Not dead," the body servant said. "Who not dead?"

In the dusk they had faces like his, the different ages, the thoughts sealed inscrutable behind faces like the death masks of apes. The smell of the fires, the cooking, blew sharp and slow across the strange dusk, as from another world, above the lane and the pickaninnies naked in the dust.

"If he lives past sundown, he will live until daybreak," one said.

“Who says?”

“Talk says.”

“Yao. Talk says. We know but one thing.” They looked at the body servant as he stood among them, his eyeballs a little luminous. He was breathing slow and deep. His chest was bare; he was sweating a little.

“He knows. He knows it.”

“Let us let the drums talk.”

“Yao. Let the drums tell it.”

The drums began after dark. They kept them hidden in the creek bottom. They were made of hollowed cypress knees, and the Negroes kept them hidden; why, none knew. They were buried in the mud on the bank of a slough; a lad of fourteen guarded them. He was undersized, and a mute; he squatted in the mud there all day, clouded over with mosquitoes, naked save for the mud with which he coated himself against the mosquitoes, and about his neck a fiber bag containing a pig’s rib to which black shreds of flesh still adhered, and two scaly barks on a wire.

He slobbered onto his clutched knees, drooling; now and then Indians came noiselessly out of the bushes behind him and stood there and contemplated him for a while and went away, and he never knew it.

From the loft of the stable where he lay hidden until dark and after, the Negro could hear the drums. They were three miles away, but he could hear them as though they were in the barn itself below him, thudding and thudding. It was as though he could see the fire too, and the black limbs turning into and out of the flames in copper gleams.

Only there would be no fire. There would be no more light there than where he lay in the dusty loft, with the whispering arpeggios of rat feet along the warm and immemorial ax-squared rafters.

The only fire there would be the smudge against mosquitoes where the women with nursing children crouched, their heavy sluggish breasts

nippled full and smooth into the mouths of men children;
contemplative, oblivious of the drumming, since a fire would signify life.

There was a fire in the steamboat, where Issetibbeha lay dying among his wives, beneath the lashed girandoles and the suspended bed. He could see the smoke, and just before sunset he saw the doctor come out, in a waistcoat made of skunk skins, and set fire to two clay-daubed sticks at the bows of the boat deck. "So he is not dead yet," the Negro said into the whispering gloom of the loft, answering himself; he could hear the two voices, himself and himself:

"Who not dead?"

"You are dead."

"Yao, I am dead," he said quietly. He wished to be where the drums were. He imagined himself springing out of the bushes, leaping among the drums on his bare, lean, greasy, invisible limbs. But he could not do that, because man leaped past life, into where death was; he dashed into death and did not die, because when death took a man, it took him just this side of the end of living. It was when death overran him from behind, still in life.

The thin whisper of rat feet died in fainting gusts along the rafters. Once he had eaten rat. He was a boy then, but just come to America. They had lived ninety days in a three-foot-high 'tween-deck in tropic latitudes, hearing from topside the drunken New England captain intoning aloud from a book which he did not recognize for ten years afterward to be the Bible.

Squatting in the stable so, he had watched the rat, civilized, by association with man reft of its inherent cunning of limb and eye; he had caught it without difficulty, with scarce a movement of his hand, and he ate it slowly, wondering how any of the rats had escaped so long. At that time he was still wearing the single white garment which the trader, a deacon in the Unitarian church, had given him, and he spoke then only his native tongue.

He was naked now, save for a pair of dungaree pants bought by Indians from white men, and an amulet slung on a thong about his hips. The amulet consisted of one half of a mother-of-pearl lorgnon which Issetibbeha had brought back from Paris, and the skull of a cottonmouth moccasin. He had killed the snake himself and eaten it, save the poison head. He lay in the loft, watching the house, the steamboat, listening to the drums, thinking of himself among the drums.

He lay there all night. The next morning he saw the doctor come out, in his skunk vest, and get on his mule and ride away, and he became quite still and watched the final dust from beneath the mule's delicate feet die away, and then he found that he was still breathing and it seemed strange to him that he still breathed air, still needed air. Then he lay and watched quietly, waiting to move, his eyeballs a little luminous, but with a quiet light, and his breathing light and regular, and saw Louis Berry come out and look at the sky.

It was good light then, and already five Indians squatted in their Sunday clothes along the steamboat deck; by noon there were twenty-five there. That afternoon they dug the trench in which the meat would be baked, and the yams; by that time there were almost a hundred guests — decorous, quiet, patient in their stiff European finery — and he watched Berry lead Issetibbeha's mare from the stable and tie her to a tree, and then he watched Berry emerge from the house with the old hound which lay beside Issetibbeha's chair.

He tied the hound to the tree too, and it sat there, looking gravely about at the faces. Then it began to howl. It was still howling at sundown, when the Negro climbed down the back wall of the barn and entered the spring branch, where it was already dusk. He began to run then.

He could hear the hound howling behind him, and near the spring, already running, he passed another Negro. The two men, the one motionless and the other running, looked for an instant at each other as though across an actual boundary between two different worlds. He

ran on into full darkness, mouth closed, fists doubled, his broad nostrils bellowing steadily.

He ran on in the darkness. He knew the country well, because he had hunted it often with Issetibbeha, following on his mule the course of the fox or the cat beside Issetibbeha's mare; he knew it as well as did the men who would pursue him. He saw them for the first time shortly before sunset of the second day. He had run thirty miles then, up the creek bottom, before doubling back; lying in a pawpaw thicket he saw the pursuit for the first time.

There were two of them, in shirts and straw hats, carrying their neatly rolled trousers under their arms, and they had no weapons. They were middle-aged, paunchy, and they could not have moved very fast anyway; it would be twelve hours before they could return to where he lay watching them.

"So I will have until midnight to rest," he said. He was near enough to the plantation to smell the cooking fires, and he thought how he ought to be hungry, since he had not eaten in thirty hours.

"But it is more important to rest," he told himself. He continued to tell himself that, lying in the pawpaw thicket, because the effort of resting, the need and the haste to rest, made his heart thud the same as the running had done. It was as though he had forgot how to rest, as though the six hours were not long enough to do it in, to remember again how to do it.

As soon as dark came he moved again. He had thought to keep going steadily and quietly through the night, since there was nowhere for him to go, but as soon as he moved he began to run at top speed, breasting his panting chest, his broad-flaring nostrils through the choked and whipping darkness.

He ran for an hour, lost by then, without direction, when suddenly he stopped, and after a time his thudding heart unraveled from the sound of the drums. By the sound they were not two miles away; he followed

the sound until he could smell the smudge fire and taste the acrid smoke.

When he stood among them the drums did not cease; only the headman came to him where he stood in the drifting smudge, panting, his nostrils flaring and pulsing, the hushed glare of his ceaseless eyeballs in his mud-daubed face as though they were worked from lungs.

“We have expected thee,” the headman said. “Go, now.”
“Go?”

“Eat, and go. The dead may not consort with the living; thou knowest that.”

“Yao. I know that.” They did not look at one another. The drums had not ceased.

“Wilt thou eat?” the headman said.

“I am not hungry. I caught a rabbit this afternoon, and ate while I lay hidden.”

“Take some cooked meat with thee, then.”

He accepted the cooked meat, wrapped in leaves, and entered the creek bottom again; after a while the sound of the drums ceased. He walked steadily until daybreak. “I have twelve hours,” he said. “Maybe more, since the trail was followed by night.”

He squatted and ate the meat and wiped his hands on his thighs. Then he rose and removed the dungaree pants and squatted again beside a slough and coated himself with mud — face, arms, body and legs — and squatted again, clasping his knees, his head bowed.

When it was light enough to see, he moved back into the swamp and squatted again and went to sleep so. He did not dream at all. It was well that he moved, for, waking suddenly in broad daylight and the high sun, he saw the two Indians. They still carried their neatly rolled

trousers; they stood opposite the place where he lay hidden, paunchy, thick, soft-looking, a little ludicrous in their straw hats and shirt tails.

“This is wearying work,” one said.

“I’d rather be at home in the shade myself,” the other said. “But there is the Man waiting at the door to the earth.”

“Yao.” They looked quietly about; stooping, one of them removed from his shirt tail a clot of cockleburs. “Damn that Negro,” he said.

“Yao. When have they ever been anything but a trial and a care to us?”

In the early afternoon, from the top of a tree, the Negro looked down into the plantation. He could see Issetibbeha’s body in a hammock between the two trees where the horse and the dog were tethered, and the concourse about the steamboat was filled with wagons and horses and mules, with carts and saddle-horses, while in bright clumps the women and the smaller children and the old men squatted about the long trench where the smoke from the barbecuing meat blew slow and thick.

The men and the big boys would all be down there in the creek bottom behind him, on the trail, their Sunday clothes rolled carefully up and wedged into tree crotches. There was a clump of men near the door to the house, to the saloon of the steamboat, though, and he watched them, and after a while he saw them bring Mocketubbe out in a litter made of buckskin and persimmon poles; high hidden in his leafed nook the Negro, the quarry, looked quietly down upon his irrevocable doom with an expression as profound as Mocketubbe’s own. “Yao,” he said quietly. “He will go then. That man whose body has been dead for fifteen years, he will go also.”

In the middle of the afternoon he came face to face with an Indian. They were both on a footlog across a slough — the Negro gaunt, lean, hard, tireless and desperate; the Indian thick, soft-looking, the apparent embodiment of the ultimate and the supreme reluctance and inertia. The Indian made no move, no sound; he stood on the log and

watched the Negro plunge into the slough and swim ashore and crash away into the undergrowth.

Just before sunset he lay behind a down log. Up the log in slow procession moved a line of ants. He caught them and ate them slowly, with a kind of detachment, like that of a dinner guest eating salted nuts from a dish. They too had a salt taste, engendering a salivary reaction out of all proportion. He ate them slowly, watching the unbroken line move up the log and into oblivious doom with a steady and terrific undeviation. He had eaten nothing else all day; in his caked mud mask his eyes rolled in reddened rims.

At sunset, creeping along the creek bank toward where he had spotted a frog, a cottonmouth moccasin slashed him suddenly across the forearm with a thick, sluggish blow. It struck clumsily, leaving two long slashes across his arm like two razor slashes, and half sprawled with its own momentum and rage, it appeared for the moment utterly helpless with its own awkwardness and choleric anger. "Olé, grandfather," the Negro said.

He touched its head and watched it slash him again across his arm, and again, with thick, raking, awkward blows. "It's that I do not wish to die," he said. Then he said it again— "It's that I do not wish to die" — in a quiet tone, of slow and low amaze, as though it were something that, until the words had said themselves, he found that he had not known, or had not known the depth and extent of his desire.

V

Moketubbe took the slippers with him. He could not wear them very long while in motion, not even in the litter where he was slung reclining, so they rested upon a square of fawnskin upon his lap — the cracked, frail slippers a little shapeless now, with their scaled patent-leather surfaces and buckleless tongues and scarlet heels, lying upon the supine obese shape just barely alive, carried through swamp and brier by swinging relays of men who bore steadily all day long the crime and its object, on the business of the slain.

To Mocketubbe it must have been as though, himself immortal, he were being carried rapidly through hell by doomed spirits which, alive, had contemplated his disaster, and, dead, were oblivious partners to his damnation.

After resting for a while, the litter propped in the center of the squatting circle and Mocketubbe motionless in it, with closed eyes and his face at once peaceful for the instant and filled with inescapable foreknowledge, he could wear the slippers for a while.

The stripling put them on him, forcing his big, tender, dropsical feet into them; whereupon into his face came again that expression tragic, passive and profoundly attentive, which dyspeptics wear. Then they went on. He made no move, no sound, inert in the rhythmic litter out of some reserve of inertia, or maybe of some kingly virtue such as courage or fortitude.

After a time they set the litter down and looked at him, at the yellow face like that of an idol, beaded over with sweat. Then Three Basket or Had-Two-Fathers would say: "Take them off. Honor has been served." They would remove the shoes. Mocketubbe's face would not alter, but only then would his breathing become perceptible, going in and out of his pale lips with a faint ah-ah-ah sound, and they would squat again while the couriers and the runners came up.

"Not yet?"

"Not yet. He is going east. By sunset he will reach Mouth of Tippah. Then he will turn back. We may take him tomorrow."

"Let us hope so. It will not be too soon."

"Yao. It has been three days now."

"When Doom died, it took only three days."

"But that was an old man. This one is young."

"Yao. A good race. If he is taken tomorrow, I will win a horse."

"May you win it."

“Yao. This work is not pleasant.”

That was the day on which the food gave out at the plantation. The guests returned home and came back the next day with more food, enough for a week longer. On that day Issetibbeha began to smell; they could smell him for a long way up and down the bottom when it got hot toward noon and the wind blew.

But they didn't capture the Negro on that day, nor on the next. It was about dusk on the sixth day when the couriers came up to the litter; they had found blood. “He has injured himself.”

“Not bad, I hope,” Basket said. “We cannot send with Issetibbeha one who will be of no service to him.”

“Nor whom Issetibbeha himself will have to nurse and care for,” Berry said.

“We do not know,” the courier said. “He has hidden himself. He has crept back into the swamp. We have left pickets.”

They trotted with the litter now. The place where the Negro had crept into the swamp was an hour away. In the hurry and excitement they had forgotten that Mocketubbe still wore the slippers; when they reached the place Mocketubbe had fainted. They removed the slippers and brought him to.

With dark, they formed a circle about the swamp. They squatted, clouded over with gnats and mosquitoes; the evening star burned low and close down the west, and the constellations began to wheel overhead. “We will give him time,” they said. “Tomorrow is just another name for today.”

“Yao. Let him have time.” Then they ceased, and gazed as one into the darkness where the swamp lay. After a while the noise ceased, and soon the courier came out of the darkness.

“He tried to break out.”

“But you turned him back?”

“He turned back. We feared for a moment, the three of us. We could smell him creeping in the darkness, and we could smell something else, which we did not know. That was why we feared, until he told us. He said to slay him there, since it would be dark and he would not have to see the face when it came. But it was not that which we smelled; he told us what it was.

A snake had struck him. That was two days ago. The arm swelled, and it smelled bad.

But it was not that which we smelled then, because the swelling had gone down and his arm was no larger than that of a child. He showed us. We felt the arm, all of us did; it was no larger than that of a child. He said to give him a hatchet so he could chop the arm off. But tomorrow is today also.”

“Yao. Tomorrow is today.”

“We feared for a while. Then he went back into the swamp.”

“That is good.”

“Yao. We feared. Shall I tell the Man?”

“I will see,” Basket said. He went away. The courier squatted, telling again about the Negro. Basket returned. “The Man says that it is good. Return to your post.”

The courier crept away. They squatted about the litter; now and then they slept. Sometime after midnight the Negro waked them. He began to shout and talk to himself, his voice coming sharp and sudden out of the darkness, then he fell silent. Dawn came; a white crane flapped slowly across the jonquil sky. Basket was awake. “Let us go now,” he said. “It is today.”

Two Indians entered the swamp, their movements noisy. Before they reached the Negro they stopped, because he began to sing. They could see him, naked and mud-caked, sitting on a log, singing. They squatted silently a short distance away, until he finished. He was chanting

something in his own language, his face lifted to the rising sun. His voice was clear, full, with a quality wild and sad.

“Let him have time,” the Indians said, squatting, patient, waiting. He ceased and they approached. He looked back and up at them through the cracked mud mask. His eyes were bloodshot, his lips cracked upon his square short teeth. The mask of mud appeared to be loose on his face, as if he might have lost flesh since he put it there; he held his left arm close to his breast.

From the elbow down it was caked and shapeless with black mud. They could smell him, a rank smell. He watched them quietly until one touched him on the arm. “Come,” the Indian said. “You ran well. Do not be ashamed.”

VI

As they neared the plantation in the tainted bright morning, the Negro's eyes began to roll a little, like those of a horse. The smoke from the cooking pit blew low along the earth and upon the squatting and waiting guests about the yard and upon the steamboat deck, in their bright, stiff, harsh finery; the women, the children, the old men. They had sent couriers along the bottom, and another on ahead, and Issetibbeha's body had already been removed to where the grave waited, along with the horse and the dog, though they could still smell him in death about the house where he had lived in life. The guests were beginning to move toward the grave when the bearers of Mocketubbe's litter mounted the slope.

The Negro was the tallest there, his high, close, mud-caked head looming above them all. He was breathing hard, as though the desperate effort of the six suspended and desperate days had catapulted upon him at once; although they walked slowly, his naked scarred chest rose and fell above the close-clutched left arm.

He looked this way and that continuously, as if he were not seeing, as though sight never quite caught up with the looking. His mouth was

open a little upon his big white teeth; he began to pant. The already moving guests halted, pausing, looking back, some with pieces of meat in their hands, as the Negro looked about at their faces with his wild, restrained, unceasing eyes.

“Will you eat first?” Basket said. He had to say it twice.

“Yes,” the Negro said. “That’s it. I want to eat.”

The throng had begun to press back toward the center; the word passed to the outermost: “He will eat first.”

They reached the steamboat. “Sit down,” Basket said. The Negro sat on the edge of the deck. He was still panting, his chest rising and falling, his head ceaseless with its white eyeballs, turning from side to side. It was as if the inability to see came from within, from hopelessness, not from absence of vision. They brought food and watched quietly as he tried to eat it.

He put the food into his mouth and chewed it, but chewing, the half-masticated matter began to emerge from the corners of his mouth and to drool down his chin, onto his chest, and after a while he stopped chewing and sat there, naked, covered with dried mud, the plate on his knees, and his mouth filled with a mass of chewed food, open, his eyes wide and unceasing, panting and panting. They watched him, patient, implacable, waiting.

“Come,” Basket said at last.

“It’s water I want,” the Negro said. “I want water.”

The well was a little way down the slope toward the quarters. The slope lay dappled with the shadows of noon, of that peaceful hour when, Issetibbeha napping in his chair and waiting for the noon meal and the long afternoon to sleep in, the Negro, the body servant, would be free. He would sit in the kitchen door then, talking with the women who prepared the food.

Beyond the kitchen the lane between the quarters would be quiet, peaceful, with the women talking to one another across the lane and

the smoke of the dinner fires blowing upon the pickaninnies like ebony toys in the dust.

“Come,” Basket said.

The Negro walked among them, taller than any. The guests were moving on toward where Issetibbeha and the horse and the dog waited. The Negro walked with his high ceaseless head, his panting chest. “Come,” Basket said. “You wanted water.”

“Yes,” the Negro said. “Yes.” He looked back at the house, then down to the quarters, where today no fire burned, no face showed in any door, no pickaninny in the dust, panting. “It struck me here, raking me across this arm; once, twice, three times. I said, ‘Olé, Grandfather.’”

“Come now,” Basket said. The Negro was still going through the motion of walking, his knee action high, his head high, as though he were on a treadmill. His eyeballs had a wild, restrained glare, like those of a horse. “You wanted water,” Basket said. “Here it is.”

There was a gourd in the well. They dipped it full and gave it to the Negro, and they watched him try to drink. His eyes had not ceased as he tilted the gourd slowly against his caked face. They could watch his throat working and the bright water cascading from either side of the gourd, down his chin and breast. Then the water stopped. “Come,” Basket said.

“Wait,” the Negro said. He dipped the gourd again and tilted it against his face, beneath his ceaseless eyes. Again they watched his throat working and the unswallowed water sheathing broken and myriad down his chin, channeling his caked chest.

They waited, patient, grave, decorous, implacable; clansman and guest and kin. Then the water ceased, though still the empty gourd tilted higher and higher, and still his black throat aped the vain motion of his frustrated swallowing. A piece of water-loosened mud carried away from his chest and broke at his muddy feet, and in the empty gourd they could hear his breath: ah-ah-ah.

“Come,” Basket said, taking the gourd from the Negro and hanging it back in the well.

The End

A Rose for Emily, William Faulkner

A Rose for Emily

I

WHEN MISS EMILY Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old manservant — a combined gardener and cook — had seen in at least ten years.

It was a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies, set on what had once been our most select street.

But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily’s house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps — an eyesore among eyesores.

And now Miss Emily had gone to join the representatives of those august names where they lay in the cedar-bemused cemetery among the ranked and anonymous graves of Union and Confederate soldiers who fell at the battle of Jefferson.

Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894

when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor — he who fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron — remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity.

Not that Miss Emily would have accepted charity. Colonel Sartoris invented an involved tale to the effect that Miss Emily's father had loaned money to the town, which the town, as a matter of business, preferred this way of repaying. Only a man of Colonel Sartoris' generation and thought could have invented it, and only a woman could have believed it.

When the next generation, with its more modern ideas, became mayors and aldermen, this arrangement created some little dissatisfaction. On the first of the year they mailed her a tax notice. February came, and there was no reply.

They wrote her a formal letter, asking her to call at the sheriff's office at her convenience. A week later the mayor wrote her himself, offering to call or to send his car for her, and received in reply a note on paper of an archaic shape, in a thin, flowing calligraphy in faded ink, to the effect that she no longer went out at all. The tax notice was also enclosed, without comment.

They called a special meeting of the Board of Aldermen. A deputation waited upon her, knocked at the door through which no visitor had passed since she ceased giving china-painting lessons eight or ten years earlier. They were admitted by the old Negro into a dim hall from which a stairway mounted into still more shadow. It smelled of dust and disuse — a close, dank smell.

The Negro led them into the parlor. It was furnished in heavy, leather-covered furniture. When the Negro opened the blinds of one window, they could see that the leather was cracked; and when they sat down, a faint dust rose sluggishly about their thighs, spinning with slow motes in the single sun-ray. On a tarnished gilt easel before the fireplace stood a crayon portrait of Miss Emily's father.

They rose when she entered — a small, fat woman in black, with a thin gold chain descending to her waist and vanishing into her belt, leaning on an ebony cane with a tarnished gold head.

Her skeleton was small and spare; perhaps that was why what would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in her. She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough as they moved from one face to another while the visitors stated their errand.

She did not ask them to sit. She just stood in the door and listened quietly until the spokesman came to a stumbling halt. Then they could hear the invisible watch ticking at the end of the gold chain.

Her voice was dry and cold. “I have no taxes in Jefferson. Colonel Sartoris explained it to me. Perhaps one of you can gain access to the city records and satisfy yourselves.”

“But we have. We are the city authorities, Miss Emily. Didn’t you get a notice from the sheriff, signed by him?”

“I received a paper, yes,” Miss Emily said. “Perhaps he considers himself the sheriff . . . I have no taxes in Jefferson.”

“But there is nothing on the books to show that, you see. We must go by the—”

“See Colonel Sartoris. I have no taxes in Jefferson.”

“But, Miss Emily—”

“See Colonel Sartoris.” (Colonel Sartoris had been dead almost ten years.) “I have no taxes in Jefferson. Tobe!” The Negro appeared.

“Show these gentlemen out.”

II

So she vanquished them, horse and foot, just as she had vanquished their fathers thirty years before about the smell. That was two years

after her father's death and a short time after her sweetheart — the one we believed would marry her — had deserted her. After her father's death she went out very little; after her sweetheart went away, people hardly saw her at all. A few of the ladies had the temerity to call, but were not received, and the only sign of life about the place was the Negro man — a young man then — going in and out with a market basket.

"Just as if a man — any man — could keep a kitchen properly," the ladies said; so they were not surprised when the smell developed. It was another link between the gross, teeming world and the high and mighty Griersons.

A neighbor, a woman, complained to the mayor, Judge Stevens, eighty years old.

"But what will you have me do about it, madam?" he said.

"Why, send her word to stop it," the woman said. "Isn't there a law?"

"I'm sure that won't be necessary," Judge Stevens said. "It's probably just a snake or a rat that nigger of hers killed in the yard. I'll speak to him about it."

The next day he received two more complaints, one from a man who came in diffident deprecation. "We really must do something about it, Judge. I'd be the last one in the world to bother Miss Emily, but we've got to do something." That night the Board of Aldermen met — three graybeards and one younger man, a member of the rising generation.

"It's simple enough," he said. "Send her word to have her place cleaned up. Give her a certain time to do it in, and if she don't . . ."

"Dammit, sir," Judge Stevens said, "will you accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad?"

So the next night, after midnight, four men crossed Miss Emily's lawn and slunk about the house like burglars, sniffing along the base of the brickwork and at the cellar openings while one of them performed a regular sowing motion with his hand out of a sack slung from his

shoulder. They broke open the cellar door and sprinkled lime there, and in all the outbuildings.

As they recrossed the lawn, a window that had been dark was lighted and Miss Emily sat in it, the light behind her, and her upright torso motionless as that of an idol. They crept quietly across the lawn and into the shadow of the locusts that lined the street. After a week or two the smell went away.

That was when people had begun to feel really sorry for her. People in our town, remembering how old lady Wyatt, her great-aunt, had gone completely crazy at last, believed that the Griersons held themselves a little too high for what they really were. None of the young men were quite good enough for Miss Emily and such.

We had long thought of them as a tableau, Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back-flung front door. So when she got to be thirty and was still single, we were not pleased exactly, but vindicated; even with insanity in the family she wouldn't have turned down all of her chances if they had really materialized.

When her father died, it got about that the house was all that was left to her; and in a way, people were glad. At last they could pity Miss Emily. Being left alone, and a pauper, she had become humanized. Now she too would know the old thrill and the old despair of a penny more or less.

The day after his death all the ladies prepared to call at the house and offer condolence and aid, as is our custom. Miss Emily met them at the door, dressed as usual and with no trace of grief on her face. She told them that her father was not dead. She did that for three days, with the ministers calling on her, and the doctors, trying to persuade her to let them dispose of the body. Just as they were about to resort to law and force, she broke down, and they buried her father quickly.

We did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will.

III

She was sick for a long time. When we saw her again, her hair was cut short, making her look like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows — sort of tragic and serene.

The town had just let the contracts for paving the sidewalks, and in the summer after her father's death they began the work. The construction company came with niggers and mules and machinery, and a foreman named Homer Barron, a Yankee — a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face. The little boys would follow in groups to hear him cuss the niggers, and the niggers singing in time to the rise and fall of picks. Pretty soon he knew everybody in town.

Whenever you heard a lot of laughing anywhere about the square, Homer Barron would be in the center of the group. Presently we began to see him and Miss Emily on Sunday afternoons driving in the yellow-wheeled buggy and the matched team of bays from the livery stable.

At first we were glad that Miss Emily would have an interest, because the ladies all said, "Of course a Grierson would not think seriously of a Northerner, a day laborer." But there were still others, older people, who said that even grief could not cause a real lady to forget noblesse oblige — without calling it noblesse oblige. They just said, "Poor Emily.

Her kinsfolk should come to her." She had some kin in Alabama; but years ago her father had fallen out with them over the estate of old lady Wyatt, the crazy woman, and there was no communication between the two families. They had not even been represented at the funeral.

And as soon as the old people said, "Poor Emily," the whispering began. "Do you suppose it's really so?" they said to one another. "Of course it is. What else could . . ." This behind their hands; rustling of craned silk and satin behind jalousies closed upon the sun of Sunday afternoon as the thin, swift clop-clop-clop of the matched team passed: "Poor Emily."

She carried her head high enough — even when we believed that she was fallen. It was as if she demanded more than ever the recognition of her dignity as the last Grierson; as if it had wanted that touch of earthiness to reaffirm her imperviousness. Like when she bought the rat poison, the arsenic. That was over a year after they had begun to say "Poor Emily," and while the two female cousins were visiting her.

"I want some poison," she said to the druggist. She was over thirty then, still a slight woman, though thinner than usual, with cold, haughty black eyes in a face the flesh of which was strained across the temples and about the eye-sockets as you imagine a lighthouse-keeper's face ought to look. "I want some poison," she said.

"Yes, Miss Emily. What kind? For rats and such? I'd recom—" "I want the best you have. I don't care what kind."

The druggist named several. "They'll kill anything up to an elephant. But what you want is—"

"Arsenic," Miss Emily said. "Is that a good one?"

"Is . . . arsenic? Yes, ma'am. But what you want—"

"I want arsenic."

The druggist looked down at her. She looked back at him, erect, her face like a strained flag. "Why, of course," the druggist said. "If that's what you want. But the law requires you to tell what you are going to use it for."

Miss Emily just stared at him, her head tilted back in order to look him eye for eye, until he looked away and went and got the arsenic and wrapped it up. The Negro delivery boy brought her the package; the

druggist didn't come back. When she opened the package at home there was written on the box, under the skull and bones: "For rats."

IV

So the next day we all said, "She will kill herself"; and we said it would be the best thing. When she had first begun to be seen with Homer Barron, we had said, "She will marry him." Then we said, "She will persuade him yet," because Homer himself had remarked — he liked men, and it was known that he drank with the younger men in the Elks' Club — that he was not a marrying man. Later we said, "Poor Emily" behind the jalousies as they passed on Sunday afternoon in the glittering buggy, Miss Emily with her head high and Homer Barron with his hat cocked and a cigar in his teeth, reins and whip in a yellow glove.

Then some of the ladies began to say that it was a disgrace to the town and a bad example to the young people. The men did not want to interfere, but at last the ladies forced the Baptist minister — Miss Emily's people were Episcopal — to call upon her. He would never divulge what happened during that interview, but he refused to go back again. The next Sunday they again drove about the streets, and the following day the minister's wife wrote to Miss Emily's relations in Alabama.

So she had blood-kin under her roof again and we sat back to watch developments. At first nothing happened. Then we were sure that they were to be married. We learned that Miss Emily had been to the jeweler's and ordered a man's toilet set in silver, with the letters H. B. on each piece. Two days later we learned that she had bought a complete outfit of men's clothing, including a nightshirt, and we said, "They are married." We were really glad. We were glad because the two female cousins were even more Grierson than Miss Emily had ever been.

So we were not surprised when Homer Barron — the streets had been finished some time since — was gone. We were a little disappointed that there was not a public blowing-off, but we believed that he had

gone on to prepare for Miss Emily's coming, or to give her a chance to get rid of the cousins. (By that time it was a cabal, and we were all Miss Emily's allies to help circumvent the cousins.) Sure enough, after another week they departed. And, as we had expected all along, within three days Homer Barron was back in town. A neighbor saw the Negro man admit him at the kitchen door at dusk one evening.

And that was the last we saw of Homer Barron. And of Miss Emily for some time. The Negro man went in and out with the market basket, but the front door remained closed. Now and then we would see her at a window for a moment, as the men did that night when they sprinkled the lime, but for almost six months she did not appear on the streets. Then we knew that this was to be expected too; as if that quality of her father which had thwarted her woman's life so many times had been too virulent and too furious to die.

When we next saw Miss Emily, she had grown fat and her hair was turning gray. During the next few years it grew grayer and grayer until it attained an even pepper-and-salt iron-gray, when it ceased turning. Up to the day of her death at seventy-four it was still that vigorous iron-gray, like the hair of an active man.

From that time on her front door remained closed, save for a period of six or seven years, when she was about forty, during which she gave lessons in china-painting. She fitted up a studio in one of the downstairs rooms, where the daughters and granddaughters of Colonel Sartoris' contemporaries were sent to her with the same regularity and in the same spirit that they were sent to church on Sundays with a twenty-five-cent piece for the collection plate. Meanwhile her taxes had been remitted.

Then the newer generation became the backbone and the spirit of the town, and the painting pupils grew up and fell away and did not send their children to her with boxes of color and tedious brushes and pictures cut from the ladies' magazines. The front door closed upon the last one and remained closed for good. When the town got free postal delivery, Miss Emily alone refused to let them fasten the metal

numbers above her door and attach a mailbox to it. She would not listen to them.

Daily, monthly, yearly we watched the Negro grow grayer and more stooped, going in and out with the market basket. Each December we sent her a tax notice, which would be returned by the post office a week later, unclaimed. Now and then we would see her in one of the downstairs windows — she had evidently shut up the top floor of the house — like the carved torso of an idol in a niche, looking or not looking at us, we could never tell which. Thus she passed from generation to generation — dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse.

And so she died. Fell ill in the house filled with dust and shadows, with only a doddering Negro man to wait on her. We did not even know she was sick; we had long since given up trying to get any information from the Negro. He talked to no one, probably not even to her, for his voice had grown harsh and rusty, as if from disuse.

She died in one of the downstairs rooms, in a heavy walnut bed with a curtain, her gray head propped on a pillow yellow and moldy with age and lack of sunlight.

V

The Negro met the first of the ladies at the front door and let them in, with their hushed, sibilant voices and their quick, curious glances, and then he disappeared. He walked right through the house and out the back and was not seen again.

The two female cousins came at once. They held the funeral on the second day, with the town coming to look at Miss Emily beneath a mass of bought flowers, with the crayon face of her father musing profoundly above the bier and the ladies sibilant and macabre; and the very old men — some in their brushed Confederate uniforms — on the porch and the lawn, talking of Miss Emily as if she had been a contemporary of theirs, believing that they had danced with her and

courted her perhaps, confusing time with its mathematical progression, as the old do, to whom all the past is not a diminishing road but, instead, a huge meadow which no winter ever quite touches, divided from them now by the narrow bottle-neck of the most recent decade of years.

Already we knew that there was one room in that region above stairs which no one had seen in forty years, and which would have to be forced. They waited until Miss Emily was decently in the ground before they opened it.

The violence of breaking down the door seemed to fill this room with pervading dust. A thin, acrid pall as of the tomb seemed to lie everywhere upon this room decked and furnished as for a bridal: upon the valance curtains of faded rose color, upon the rose-shaded lights, upon the dressing table, upon the delicate array of crystal and the man's toilet things backed with tarnished silver, silver so tarnished that the monogram was obscured. Among them lay a collar and tie, as if they had just been removed, which, lifted, left upon the surface a pale crescent in the dust. Upon a chair hung the suit, carefully folded; beneath it the two mute shoes and the discarded socks.

The man himself lay in the bed.

For a long while we just stood there, looking down at the profound and fleshless grin. The body had apparently once lain in the attitude of an embrace, but now the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him. What was left of him, rotted beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him and upon the pillow beside him lay that even coating of the patient and biding dust.

Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. One of us lifted something from it, and leaning forward, that faint and invisible dust dry and acrid in the nostrils, we saw a long strand of iron-gray hair.

The End

A Justice, William Faulkner

A Justice

I

UNTIL GRANDFATHER DIED, we would go out to the farm every Saturday afternoon. We would leave home right after dinner in the surrey, I in front with Roskus, and Grandfather and Caddy and Jason in the back.

Grandfather and Roskus would talk, with the horses going fast, because it was the best team in the county. They would carry the surrey fast along the levels and up some of the hills even. But this was in north Mississippi, and on some of the hills Roskus and I could smell Grandfather's cigar.

The farm was four miles away. There was a long, low house in the grove, not painted but kept whole and sound by a clever carpenter from the quarters named Sam Fathers, and behind it the barns and smokehouses, and further still, the quarters themselves, also kept whole and sound by Sam Fathers.

He did nothing else, and they said he was almost a hundred years old. He lived with the Negroes and they — the white people; the Negroes called him a blue-gum — called him a Negro. But he wasn't a Negro. That's what I'm going to tell about.

When we got there, Mr. Stokes, the manager, would send a Negro boy with Caddy and Jason to the creek to fish, because Caddy was a girl and Jason was too little, but I wouldn't go with them. I would go to Sam Fathers' shop, where he would be making breast-yokes or wagon wheels, and I would always bring him some tobacco.

Then he would stop working and he would fill his pipe — he made them himself, out of creek clay with a reed stem — and he would tell me about the old days. He talked like a nigger — that is, he said his words like niggers do, but he didn't say the same words — and his hair was nigger hair. But his skin wasn't quite the color of a light nigger and his nose and his mouth and chin were not nigger nose and mouth and chin.

And his shape was not like the shape of a nigger when he gets old. He was straight in the back, not tall, a little broad, and his face was still all the time, like he might be somewhere else all the while he was working or when people, even white people, talked to him, or while he talked to me.

It was just the same all the time, like he might be away up on a roof by himself, driving nails. Sometimes he would quit work with something half-finished on the bench, and sit down and smoke. And he wouldn't jump up and go back to work when Mr. Stokes or even Grandfather came along.

So I would give him the tobacco and he would stop work and sit down and fill his pipe and talk to me.

"These niggers," he said. "They call me Uncle Blue-Gum. And the white folks, they call me Sam Fathers."

"Isn't that your name?" I said.

"No. Not in the old days. I remember. I remember how I never saw but one white man until I was a boy big as you are; a whisky trader that came every summer to the Plantation. It was the Man himself that named me. He didn't name me Sam Fathers, though."

"The Man?" I said.

"He owned the Plantation, the Negroes, my mammy too. He owned all the land that I knew of until I was grown. He was a Choctaw chief. He sold my mammy to your great-grandpappy. He said I didn't have to go unless I wanted to, because I was a warrior too then. He was the one who named me Had-Two-Fathers."

“Had-Two-Fathers?” I said. “That’s not a name. That’s not anything.”
“It was my name once. Listen.”

II

This is how Herman Basket told it when I was big enough to hear talk. He said that when Doom came back from New Orleans, he brought this woman with him. He brought six black people, though Herman Basket said they already had more black people in the Plantation than they could find use for. Sometimes they would run the black men with dogs, like you would a fox or a cat or a coon. And then Doom brought six more when he came home from New Orleans.

He said he won them on the steamboat, and so he had to take them. He got off the steamboat with the six black people, Herman Basket said, and a big box in which something was alive, and the gold box of New Orleans salt about the size of a gold watch.

And Herman Basket told how Doom took a puppy out of the box in which something was alive, and how he made a bullet of bread and a pinch of the salt in the gold box, and put the bullet into the puppy and the puppy died.

That was the kind of a man that Doom was, Herman Basket said. He told how, when Doom got off the steamboat that night, he wore a coat with gold all over it, and he had three gold watches, but Herman Basket said that even after seven years, Doom’s eyes had not changed. He said that Doom’s eyes were just the same as before he went away, before his name was Doom, and he and Herman Basket and my pappy were sleeping on the same pallet and talking at night, as boys will.

Doom’s name was Ikkemotubbe then, and he was not born to be the Man, because Doom’s mother’s brother was the Man, and the Man had a son of his own, as well as a brother. But even then, and Doom no bigger than you are, Herman Basket said that sometimes the Man

would look at Doom and he would say: "O Sister's Son, your eye is a bad eye, like the eye of a bad horse."

So the Man was not sorry when Doom got to be a young man and said that he would go to New Orleans, Herman Basket said. The Man was getting old then. He used to like to play mumble-peg and to pitch horseshoes both, but now he just liked mumble-peg. So he was not sorry when Doom went away, though he didn't forget about Doom.

Herman Basket said that each summer when the whisky-trader came, the Man would ask him about Doom. "He calls himself David Callicoot now," the Man would say. "But his name is Ikkemotubbe. You haven't heard maybe of a David Callicoot getting drowned in the Big River, or killed in the white man's fight at New Orleans?"

But Herman Basket said they didn't hear from Doom at all until he had been gone seven years. Then one day Herman Basket and my pappy got a written stick from Doom to meet him at the Big River. Because the steamboat didn't come up our river any more then. The steamboat was still in our river, but it didn't go anywhere any more. Herman Basket told how one day during the high water, about three years after Doom went away, the steamboat came and crawled up on a sand-bar and died.

That was how Doom got his second name, the one before Doom. Herman Basket told how four times a year the steamboat would come up our river, and how the People would go to the river and camp and wait to see the steamboat pass, and he said that the white man who told the steamboat where to swim was named David Callicoot.

So when Doom told Herman Basket and pappy that he was going to New Orleans, he said, "And I'll tell you something else. From now on, my name is not Ikkemotubbe. It's David Callicoot. And some day I'm going to own a steamboat, too." That was the kind of man that Doom was, Herman Basket said.

So after seven years he sent them the written stick and Herman Basket and pappy took the wagon and went to meet Doom at the Big River, and Doom got off the steamboat with the six black people. "I won them on the steamboat," Doom said. "You and Crawford (my pappy's name was Crawfishford, but usually it was Crawford) can divide them."

"I don't want them," Herman Basket said that pappy said.

"Then Herman can have them all," Doom said.

"I don't want them either," Herman Basket said.

"All right," Doom said. Then Herman Basket said he asked Doom if his name was still David Callicoat, but instead of answering, Doom told one of the black people something in the white man's talk, and the black man lit a pine knot. Then Herman Basket said they were watching Doom take the puppy from the box and make the bullet of bread and the New Orleans salt which Doom had in the little gold box, when he said that pappy said:

"I believe you said that Herman and I were to divide these black people."

Then Herman Basket said he saw that one of the black people was a woman.

"You and Herman don't want them," Doom said.

"I wasn't thinking when I said that," pappy said. "I will take the lot with the woman in it. Herman can have the other three."

"I don't want them," Herman Basket said.

"You can have four, then," pappy said. "I will take the woman and one other."

"I don't want them," Herman Basket said.

"I will take only the woman," pappy said. "You can have the other five."

"I don't want them," Herman Basket said.

"You don't want them, either," Doom said to pappy. "You said so yourself."

Then Herman Basket said that the puppy was dead. "You didn't tell us your new name," he said to Doom.

"My name is Doom now," Doom said. "It was given me by a French chief in New Orleans. In French talking, Doo-um; in our talking, Doom."

"What does it mean?" Herman Basket said.

He said how Doom looked at him for a while. "It means the Man," Doom said.

Herman Basket told how they thought about that. He said they stood there in the dark, with the other puppies in the box, the ones that Doom hadn't used, whimpering and scuffing, and the light of the pine knot shining on the eyeballs of the black people and on Doom's gold coat and on the puppy that had died.

"You cannot be the Man," Herman Basket said. "You are only on the sister's side. And the Man has a brother and a son."

"That's right," Doom said. "But if I were the Man, I would give Crawford those black people. I would give Herman something, too. For every black man I gave Crawford, I would give Herman a horse, if I were the Man."

"Craw-ford only wants this woman," Herman Basket said.

"I would give Herman six horses, anyway," Doom said. "But maybe the Man has already given Herman a horse."

"No," Herman Basket said. "My ghost is still walking."

It took them three days to reach the Plantation. They camped on the road at night. Herman Basket said that they did not talk.

They reached the Plantation on the third day. He said that the Man was not very glad to see Doom, even though Doom brought a present of candy for the Man's son. Doom had something for all his kinsfolk, even for the Man's brother. The Man's brother lived by himself in a cabin by the creek. His name was Sometimes-Wakeup. Sometimes the People took him food. The rest of the time they didn't see him.

Herman Basket told how he and pappy went with Doom to visit Sometimes-Wakeup in his cabin. It was at night, and Doom told Herman Basket to close the door. Then Doom took the puppy from pappy and set it on the floor and made a bullet of bread and the New Orleans salt for Sometimes-Wakeup to see how it worked. When they left, Herman Basket said how Sometimes-Wakeup burned a stick and covered his head with the blanket.

That was the first night that Doom was at home. On the next day Herman Basket told how the Man began to act strange at his food, and died before the doctor could get there and burn sticks. When the Willow-Bearer went to fetch the Man's son to be the Man, they found that he had acted strange and then died too.

"Now Sometimes-Wakeup will have to be the Man," pappy said. So the Willow-Bearer went to fetch Sometimes-Wakeup to come and be the Man. The Willow-Bearer came back soon. "Sometimes-Wakeup does not want to be the Man," the Willow-Bearer said. "He is sitting in his cabin with his head in his blanket."

"Then Ikkemotubbe will have to be the Man," pappy said. So Doom was the Man. But Herman Basket said that pappy's ghost would not be easy. Herman Basket said he told pappy to give Doom a little time. "I am still walking," Herman Basket said. "But this is a serious matter with me," pappy said.

He said that at last pappy went to Doom, before the Man and his son had entered the earth, before the eating and the horse-racing were over. "What woman?" Doom said.

"You said that when you were the Man," pappy said. Herman Basket said that Doom looked at pappy but that pappy was not looking at Doom.

"I think you don't trust me," Doom said. Herman Basket said how pappy did not look at Doom. "I think you still believe that that puppy was sick," Doom said. "Think about it." Herman Basket said that pappy thought.

“What do you think now?” Doom said.

But Herman Basket said that pappy still did not look at Doom. “I think it was a well dog,” pappy said.

III

At last the eating and the horse-racing were over and the Man and his son had entered the earth. Then Doom said, “Tomorrow we will go and fetch the steamboat.” Herman Basket told how Doom had been talking about the steamboat ever since he became the Man, and about how the House was not big enough. So that evening Doom said, “Tomorrow we will go and fetch the steamboat that died in the river.”

Herman Basket said how the steamboat was twelve miles away, and that it could not even swim in the water. So the next morning there was no one in the Plantation except Doom and the black people. He told how it took Doom all that day to find the People. Doom used the dogs, and he found some of the People in hollow logs in the creek bottom. That night he made all the men sleep in the House. He kept the dogs in the House, too.

Herman Basket told how he heard Doom and pappy talking in the dark. “I don’t think you trust me,” Doom said.

“I trust you,” pappy said.

“That is what I would advise,” Doom said.

“I wish you could advise that to my ghost,” pappy said.

The next morning they went to the steamboat. The women and the black people walked. The men rode in the wagons, with Doom following behind with the dogs.

The steamboat was lying on its side on the sand-bar. When they came to it, there were three white men on it. “Now we can go back home,” pappy said.

But Doom talked to the white men. “Does this steamboat belong to you?” Doom said.

"It does not belong to you," the white men said. And though they had guns, Herman Basket said they did not look like men who would own a boat.

"Shall we kill them?" he said to Doom. But he said that Doom was still talking to the men on the steamboat.

"What will you take for it?" Doom said.

"What will you give for it?" the white men said.

"It is dead," Doom said. "It's not worth much."

"Will you give ten black people?" the white men said.

"All right," Doom said. "Let the black people who came with me from the Big River come forward." They came forward, the five men and the woman. "Let four more black people come forward." Four more came forward. "You are now to eat of the corn of those white men yonder," Doom said. "May it nourish you." The white men went away, the ten black people following them. "Now," Doom said, "let us make the steamboat get up and walk."

Herman Basket said that he and pappy did not go into the river with the others, because pappy said to go aside and talk. They went aside. Pappy talked, but Herman Basket said that he said he did not think it was right to kill white men, but pappy said how they could fill the white men with rocks and sink them in the river and nobody would find them.

So Herman Basket said they overtook the three white men and the ten black people, then they turned back toward the boat. Just before they came to the steamboat, pappy said to the black men: "Go on to the Man. Go and help make the steamboat get up and walk. I will take this woman on home."

"This woman is my wife," one of the black men said. "I want her to stay with me."

"Do you want to be arranged in the river with rocks in your inside too?" pappy said to the black man.

"Do you want to be arranged in the river yourself?" the black man said to pappy. "There are two of you, and nine of us."

Herman Basket said that pappy thought. Then pappy said, "Let us go to the steamboat and help the Man."

They went to the steamboat. But Herman Basket said that Doom did not notice the ten black people until it was time to return to the Plantation. Herman Basket told how Doom looked at the black people, then looked at pappy. "It seems that the white men did not want these black people," Doom said.

"So it seems," pappy said.

"The white men went away, did they?" Doom said.

"So it seems," pappy said.

Herman Basket told how every night Doom would make all the men sleep in the House, with the dogs in the House too, and how each morning they would return to the steamboat in the wagons. The wagons would not hold everybody, so after the second day the women stayed at home.

But it was three days before Doom noticed that pappy was staying at home too. Herman Basket said that the woman's husband may have told Doom. "Craw-ford hurt his back lifting the steamboat," Herman Basket said he told Doom. "He said he would stay at the Plantation and sit with his feet in the Hot Spring so that the sickness in his back could return to the earth."

"That is a good idea," Doom said. "He has been doing this for three days, has he? Then the sickness should be down in his legs by now." When they returned to the Plantation that night, Doom sent for pappy. He asked pappy if the sickness had moved. Pappy said how the sickness moved very slow. "You must sit in the Spring more," Doom said.

"That is what I think," pappy said.

"Suppose you sit in the Spring at night too," Doom said.

"The night air will make it worse," pappy said.

“Not with a fire there,” Doom said. “I will send one of the black people with you to keep the fire burning.”

“Which one of the black people?” pappy said.

“The husband of the woman which I won on the steamboat,” Doom said.

“I think my back is better,” pappy said.

“Let us try it,” Doom said.

“I know my back is better,” pappy said.

“Let us try it, anyway,” Doom said. Just before dark Doom sent four of the People to fix pappy and the black man at the Spring. Herman Basket said the People returned quickly. He said that as they entered the House, pappy entered also.

“The sickness began to move suddenly,” pappy said. “It has reached my feet since noon today.”

“Do you think it will be gone by morning?” Doom said.

“I think so,” pappy said.

“Perhaps you had better sit in the Spring tonight and make sure,” Doom said.

“I know it will be gone by morning,” pappy said.

IV

When it got to be summer, Herman Basket said that the steamboat was out of the river bottom. It had taken them five months to get it out of the bottom, because they had to cut down the trees to make a path for it. But now he said the steamboat could walk faster on the logs.

He told how pappy helped. Pappy had a certain place on one of the ropes near the steamboat that nobody was allowed to take, Herman Basket said. It was just under the front porch of the steamboat where Doom sat in his chair, with a boy with a branch to shade him and another boy with a branch to drive away the flying beasts. The dogs rode on the boat too.

In the summer, while the steamboat was still walking, Herman Basket told how the husband of the woman came to Doom again. "I have done what I could for you," Doom said. "Why don't you go to Crawford and adjust this matter yourself?"

The black man said that he had done that. He said that pappy said to adjust it by a cock-fight, pappy's cock against the black man's, the winner to have the woman, the one who refused to fight to lose by default. The black man said he told pappy he did not have a cock, and that pappy said that in that case the black man lost by default and that the woman belonged to pappy. "And what am I to do?" the black man said.

Doom thought. Then Herman Basket said that Doom called to him and asked him which was pappy's best cock and Herman Basket told Doom that pappy had only one. "That black one?" Doom said.

Herman Basket said he told Doom that was the one. "Ah," Doom said. Herman Basket told how Doom sat in his chair on the porch of the steamboat while it walked, looking down at the People and the black men pulling the ropes, making the steamboat walk. "Go and tell Crawford you have a cock," Doom said to the black man. "Just tell him you will have a cock in the pit. Let it be tomorrow morning.

"We will let the steamboat sit down and rest." The black man went away. Then Herman Basket said that Doom was looking at him, and that he did not look at Doom. Because he said there was but one better cock in the Plantation than pappy's, and that one belonged to Doom. "I think that that puppy was not sick," Doom said. "What do you think?"

Herman Basket said that he did not look at Doom. "That is what I think," he said.

"That is what I would advise," Doom said.

Herman Basket told how the next day the steamboat sat and rested. The pit was in the stable. The People and the black people were there.

Pappy had his cock in the pit. Then the black man put his cock into the pit. Herman Basket said that pappy looked at the black man's cock.

"This cock belongs to Ikkemotubbe," pappy said.

"It is his," the People told pappy. "Ikkemotubbe gave it to him with all to witness."

Herman Basket said that pappy had already picked up his cock. "This is not right," pappy said. "We ought not to let him risk his wife on a cock-fight."

"Then you withdraw?" the black man said.

"Let me think," pappy said. He thought. The People watched. The black man reminded pappy of what he had said about defaulting. Pappy said he did not mean to say that and that he withdrew it. The People told him that he could only withdraw by forfeiting the match. Herman Basket said that pappy thought again. The People watched. "All right," pappy said. "But I am being taken advantage of."

The cocks fought. Pappy's cock fell. Pappy took it up quickly. Herman Basket said it was like pappy had been waiting for his cock to fall so he could pick it quickly up. "Wait," he said. He looked at the People. "Now they have fought. Isn't that true?" The People said that it was true. "So that settles what I said about forfeiting."

Herman Basket said that pappy began to get out of the pit.

"Aren't you going to fight?" the black man said.

"I don't think this will settle anything," pappy said. "Do you?"

Herman Basket told how the black man looked at pappy. Then he quit looking at pappy. He was squatting. Herman Basket said the People looked at the black man looking at the earth between his feet. They watched him take up a clod of dirt, and then they watched the dust come out between the black man's fingers.

"Do you think that this will settle anything?" pappy said.

“No,” the black man said. Herman Basket said that the People could not hear him very good. But he said that pappy could hear him.

“Neither do I,” pappy said. “It would not be right to risk your wife on a cock-fight.”

Herman Basket told how the black man looked up, with the dry dust about the fingers of his hand. He said the black man’s eyes looked red in the dark pit, like the eyes of a fox. “Will you let the cocks fight again?” the black man said.

“Do you agree that it doesn’t settle anything?” pappy said.

“Yes,” the black man said.

Pappy put his cock back into the ring. Herman Basket said that pappy’s cock was dead before it had time to act strange, even. The black man’s cock stood upon it and started to crow, but the black man struck the live cock away and he jumped up and down on the dead cock until it did not look like a cock at all, Herman Basket said.

Then it was fall, and Herman Basket told how the steamboat came to the Plantation and stopped beside the House and died again. He said that for two months they had been in sight of the Plantation, making the steamboat walk on the logs, but now the steamboat was beside the House and the House was big enough to please Doom. He gave an eating.

It lasted a week. When it was over, Herman Basket told how the black man came to Doom a third time. Herman Basket said that the black man’s eyes were red again, like those of a fox, and that they could hear his breathing in the room. “Come to my cabin,” he said to Doom. “I have something to show you.”

“I thought it was about that time,” Doom said. He looked about the room, but Herman Basket told Doom that pappy had just stepped out. “Tell him to come also,” Doom said. When they came to the black man’s cabin, Doom sent two of the People to fetch pappy. Then they

entered the cabin. What the black man wanted to show Doom was a new man.

“Look,” the black man said. “You are the Man. You are to see justice done.”

“What is wrong with this man?” Doom said.

“Look at the color of him,” the black man said. He began to look around the cabin. Herman Basket said that his eyes went red and then brown and then red, like those of a fox. He said they could hear the black man’s breathing. “Do I get justice?” the black man said. “You are the Man.”

“You should be proud of a fine yellow man like this,” Doom said. He looked at the new man. “I don’t see that justice can darken him any,” Doom said. He looked about the cabin also. “Come forward, Crawford,” he said. “This is a man, not a copper snake; he will not harm you.” But Herman Basket said that pappy would not come forward. He said the black man’s eyes went red and then brown and then red when he breathed.

“Yao,” Doom said, “this is not right. Any man is entitled to have his melon patch protected from these wild bucks of the woods. But first let us name this man.” Doom thought. Herman Basket said the black man’s eyes went quieter now, and his breath went quieter too. “We will call him Had-Two-Fathers,” Doom said.

V

Sam Fathers lit his pipe again. He did it deliberately, rising and lifting between thumb and forefinger from his forge a coal of fire. Then he came back and sat down. It was getting late. Caddy and Jason had come back from the creek, and I could see Grandfather and Mr. Stokes talking beside the carriage, and at that moment, as though he had felt my gaze, Grandfather turned and called my name.

“What did your pappy do then?” I said.

“He and Herman Basket built the fence,” Sam Fathers said. “Herman Basket told how Doom made them set two posts into the ground, with a sapling across the top of them. The nigger and pappy were there.

Doom had not told them about the fence then. Herman Basket said it was just like when he and pappy and Doom were boys, sleeping on the same pallet, and Doom would wake them at night and make them get up and go hunting with him, or when he would make them stand up with him and fight with their fists, just for fun, until Herman Basket and pappy would hide from Doom.

“They fixed the sapling across the two posts and Doom said to the nigger: ‘This is a fence. Can you climb it?’

“Herman Basket said the nigger put his hand on the sapling and sailed over it like a bird.

“Then Doom said to pappy: ‘Climb this fence.’

“‘This fence is too high to climb,’ pappy said.

“‘Climb this fence, and I will give you the woman,’ Doom said.

“Herman Basket said pappy looked at the fence a while. ‘Let me go under this fence,’ he said.

“‘No,’ Doom said.

“Herman Basket told me how pappy began to sit down on the ground.

‘It’s not that I don’t trust you,’ pappy said.

“‘We will build the fence this high,’ Doom said.

“‘What fence?’ Herman Basket said.

“‘The fence around the cabin of this black man,’ Doom said.

“‘I can’t build a fence I couldn’t climb,’ pappy said.

“‘Herman will help you,’ Doom said.

“Herman Basket said it was just like when Doom used to wake them and make them go hunting. He said the dogs found him and pappy about noon the next day, and that they began the fence that afternoon. He told me how they had to cut the saplings in the creek bottom and

drag them in by hand, because Doom would not let them use the wagon.

So sometimes one post would take them three or four days. 'Never mind,' Doom said. 'You have plenty of time. And the exercise will make Craw-ford sleep at night.'

"He told me how they worked on the fence all that winter and all the next summer, until after the whisky trader had come and gone. Then it was finished. He said that on the day they set the last post, the nigger came out of the cabin and put his hand on the top of a post (it was a palisade fence, the posts set upright in the ground) and flew out like a bird.

'This is a good fence,' the nigger said. 'Wait,' he said. 'I have something to show you.' Herman Basket said he flew back over the fence again and went into the cabin and came back. Herman Basket said that he was carrying a new man and that he held the new man up so they could see it above the fence. 'What do you think about this for color?' he said."

Grandfather called me again. This time I got up. The sun was already down beyond the peach orchard. I was just twelve then, and to me the story did not seem to have got anywhere, to have had point or end.

Yet I obeyed Grandfather's voice, not that I was tired of Sam Fathers' talking, but with that immediacy of children with which they flee temporarily something which they do not quite understand; that, and the instinctive promptness with which we all obeyed Grandfather, not from concern of impatience or reprimand, but because we all believed that he did fine things, that his waking life passed from one fine (if faintly grandiose) picture to another.

They were in the surrey, waiting for me. I got in; the horses moved at once, impatient too for the stable. Caddy had one fish, about the size of a chip, and she was wet to the waist. We drove on, the team already

trotting. When we passed Mr. Stokes' kitchen we could smell ham cooking.

The smell followed us on to the gate. When we turned onto the road home it was almost sundown. Then we couldn't smell the cooking ham any more. "What were you and Sam talking about?" Grandfather said.

We went on, in that strange, faintly sinister suspension of twilight in which I believed that I could still see Sam Fathers back there, sitting on his wooden block, definite, immobile, and complete, like something looked upon after a long time in a preservative bath in a museum. That was it. I was just twelve then, and I would have to wait until I had passed on and through and beyond the suspension of twilight. Then I knew that I would know. But then Sam Fathers would be dead.

"Nothing, sir," I said. "We were just talking."

The End

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 don't 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

That Evening Sun, William Faulkner

That Evening Sun

I

MONDAY IS NO different from any other weekday in Jefferson now. The streets are paved now, and the telephone and electric companies are cutting down more and more of the shade trees — the water oaks, the maples and locusts and elms — to make room for iron poles bearing clusters of bloated and ghostly and bloodless grapes, and we have a city laundry which makes the rounds on Monday morning, gathering the bundles of clothes into bright-colored, specially-made motor cars: the soiled wearing of a whole week now flees apparitionlike behind alert and irritable electric horns, with a long diminishing noise of rubber and asphalt like tearing silk, and even the Negro women who still take in

white people's washing after the old custom, fetch and deliver it in automobiles.

But fifteen years ago, on Monday morning the quiet, dusty, shady streets would be full of Negro women with, balanced on their steady, turbaned heads, bundles of clothes tied up in sheets, almost as large as cotton bales, carried so without touch of hand between the kitchen door of the white house and the blackened washpot beside a cabin door in Negro Hollow.

Nancy would set her bundle on the top of her head, then upon the bundle in turn she would set the black straw sailor hat which she wore winter and summer. She was tall, with a high, sad face sunken a little where her teeth were missing. Sometimes we would go a part of the way down the lane and across the pasture with her, to watch the balanced bundle and the hat that never bobbed nor wavered, even when she walked down into the ditch and up the other side and stooped through the fence. She would go down on her hands and knees and crawl through the gap, her head rigid, uptilted, the bundle steady as a rock or a balloon, and rise to her feet again and go on.

Sometimes the husbands of the washing women would fetch and deliver the clothes, but Jesus never did that for Nancy, even before father told him to stay away from our house, even when Dilsey was sick and Nancy would come to cook for us.

And then about half the time we'd have to go down the lane to Nancy's cabin and tell her to come on and cook breakfast. We would stop at the ditch, because father told us to not have anything to do with Jesus — he was a short black man, with a razor scar down his face — and we would throw rocks at Nancy's house until she came to the door, leaning her head around it without any clothes on.

"What yawl mean, chunking my house?" Nancy said. "What you little devils mean?"

"Father says for you to come on and get breakfast," Caddy said. "Father says it's over a half an hour now, and you've got to come this minute."

“I aint studying no breakfast,” Nancy said. “I going to get my sleep out.”
“I bet you’re drunk,” Jason said. “Father says you’re drunk. Are you drunk, Nancy?”

“Who says I is?” Nancy said. “I got to get my sleep out. I aint studying no breakfast.”

So after a while we quit chunking the cabin and went back home. When she finally came, it was too late for me to go to school. So we thought it was whisky until that day they arrested her again and they were taking her to jail and they passed Mr Stovall. He was the cashier in the bank and a deacon in the Baptist church, and Nancy began to say:

“When you going to pay me, white man? When you going to pay me, white man? It’s been three times now since you paid me a cent—” Mr Stovall knocked her down, but she kept on saying, “When you going to pay me, white man? It’s been three times now since—” until Mr Stovall kicked her in the mouth with his heel and the marshal caught Mr Stovall back, and Nancy lying in the street, laughing. She turned her head and spat out some blood and teeth and said, “It’s been three times now since he paid me a cent.”

That was how she lost her teeth, and all that day they told about Nancy and Mr Stovall, and all that night the ones that passed the jail could hear Nancy singing and yelling. They could see her hands holding to the window bars, and a lot of them stopped along the fence, listening to her and to the jailer trying to make her stop.

She didn’t shut up until almost daylight, when the jailer began to hear a bumping and scraping upstairs and he went up there and found Nancy hanging from the window bar. He said that it was cocaine and not whisky, because no nigger would try to commit suicide unless he was full of cocaine, because a nigger full of cocaine wasn’t a nigger any longer.

The jailer cut her down and revived her; then he beat her, whipped her. She had hung herself with her dress. She had fixed it all right, but when they arrested her she didn’t have on anything except a dress and so she

didn't have anything to tie her hands with and she couldn't make her hands let go of the window ledge. So the jailer heard the noise and ran up there and found Nancy hanging from the window, stark naked, her belly already swelling out a little, like a little balloon.

When Dilsey was sick in her cabin and Nancy was cooking for us, we could see her apron swelling out; that was before father told Jesus to stay away from the house. Jesus was in the kitchen, sitting behind the stove, with his razor scar on his black face like a piece of dirty string. He said it was a watermelon that Nancy had under her dress.

"It never come off of your vine, though," Nancy said.

"Off of what vine?" Caddy said.

"I can cut down the vine it did come off of," Jesus said.

"What makes you want to talk like that before these chillen?" Nancy said. "Whyn't you go on to work? You done et. You want Mr Jason to catch you hanging around his kitchen, talking that way before these chillen?"

"Talking what way?" Caddy said. "What vine?"

"I cant hang around white man's kitchen," Jesus said. "But white man can hang around mine. White man can come in my house, but I cant stop him. When white man want to come in my house, I aint got no house. I cant stop him, but he cant kick me outen it. He cant do that."

Dilsey was still sick in her cabin." Father told Jesus to stay off our place. Dilsey was still sick. It was a long time. We were in the library after supper.

"Isn't Nancy through in the kitchen yet?" mother said. "It seems to me that she has had plenty of time to have finished the dishes."

"Let Quentin go and see," father said. "Go and see if Nancy is through, Quentin. Tell her she can go on home."

I went to the kitchen. Nancy was through. The dishes were put away and the fire was out. Nancy was sitting in a chair, close to the cold stove. She looked at me.

"Mother wants to know if you are through," I said.

"Yes," Nancy said. She looked at me. "I done finished." She looked at me.

"What is it?" I said. "What is it?"

"I aint nothing but a nigger," Nancy said. "It aint none of my fault."

She looked at me, sitting in the chair before the cold stove, the sailor hat on her head. I went back to the library. It was the cold stove and all, when you think of a kitchen being warm and busy and cheerful. And with a cold stove and the dishes all put away, and nobody wanting to eat at that hour.

"Is she through?" mother said.

"Yessum," I said.

"What is she doing?" mother said.

"She's not doing anything. She's through."

"I'll go and see," father said.

"Maybe she's waiting for Jesus to come and take her home," Caddy said.

"Jesus is gone," I said. Nancy told us how one morning she woke up and Jesus was gone.

"He quit me," Nancy said. "Done gone to Memphis, I reckon. Dodging them city po-lice for a while, I reckon."

"And a good riddance," father said. "I hope he stays there."

"Nancy's scaired of the dark," Jason said.

"So are you," Caddy said.

"I'm not," Jason said.

"Scairy cat," Caddy said.

"I'm not," Jason said.

“You, Candace!” mother said. Father came back.

“I am going to walk down the lane with Nancy,” he said. “She says that Jesus is back.”

“Has she seen him?” mother said.

“No. Some Negro sent her word that he was back in town. I wont be long.”

“You’ll leave me alone, to take Nancy home?” mother said. “Is her safety more precious to you than mine?”

“I wont be long,” father said.

“You’ll leave these children unprotected, with that Negro about?”

“I’m going too,” Caddy said. “Let me go, Father.”

“What would he do with them, if he were unfortunate enough to have them?” father said.

“I want to go, too,” Jason said.

“Jason!” mother said. She was speaking to father. You could tell that by the way she said the name. Like she believed that all day father had been trying to think of doing the thing she wouldn’t like the most, and that she knew all the time that after a while he would think of it.

I stayed quiet, because father and I both knew that mother would want him to make me stay with her if she just thought of it in time. So father didn’t look at me. I was the oldest. I was nine and Caddy was seven and Jason was five.

“Nonsense,” father said. “We wont be long.”

Nancy had her hat on. We came to the lane. “Jesus always been good to me,” Nancy said. “Whenever he had two dollars, one of them was mine.” We walked in the lane. “If I can just get through the lane,” Nancy said, “I be all right then.”

The lane was always dark. “This is where Jason got scared on Hallowe’en,” Caddy said.

"I didn't," Jason said.

"Cant Aunt Rachel do anything with him?" father said. Aunt Rachel was old. She lived in a cabin beyond Nancy's, by herself. She had white hair and she smoked a pipe in the door, all day long; she didn't work any more. They said she was Jesus' mother. Sometimes she said she was and sometimes she said she wasn't any kin to Jesus.

"Yes, you did," Caddy said. "You were scairder than Frony. You were scairder than T.P. even. Scairder than niggers."

"Cant nobody do nothing with him," Nancy said. "He say I done woke up the devil in him and aint but one thing going to lay it down again."

"Well, he's gone now," father said. "There's nothing for you to be afraid of now. And if you'd just let white men alone."

"Let what white men alone?" Caddy said. "How let them alone?"

"He aint gone nowhere," Nancy said. "I can feel him. I can feel him now, in this lane. He hearing us talk, every word, hid somewhere, waiting. I aint seen him, and I aint going to see him again but once more, with that razor in his mouth. That razor on that string down his back, inside his shirt. And then I aint going to be even surprised."

"I wasn't scaired," Jason said.

"If you'd behave yourself, you'd have kept out of this," father said. "But it's all right now. He's probably in St. Louis now. Probably got another wife by now and forgot all about you."

"If he has, I better not find out about it," Nancy said. "I'd stand there right over them, and every time he wropped her, I'd cut that arm off. I'd cut his head off and I'd slit her belly and I'd shove—"

"Hush," father said.

"Slit whose belly, Nancy?" Caddy said.

"I wasn't scaired," Jason said. "I'd walk right down this lane by myself."

"Yah," Caddy said. "You wouldn't dare to put your foot down in it if we were not here too."

Dilsey was still sick, so we took Nancy home every night until mother said, "How much longer is this going on? I to be left alone in this big house while you take home a frightened Negro?"

We fixed a pallet in the kitchen for Nancy. One night we waked up, hearing the sound. It was not singing and it was not crying, coming up the dark stairs. There was a light in mother's room and we heard father going down the hall, down the back stairs, and Caddy and I went into the hall. The floor was cold. Our toes curled away from it while we listened to the sound. It was like singing and it wasn't like singing, like the sounds that Negroes make.

Then it stopped and we heard father going down the back stairs, and we went to the head of the stairs. Then the sound began again, in the stairway, not loud, and we could see Nancy's eyes halfway up the stairs, against the wall. They looked like cat's eyes do, like a big cat against the wall, watching us.

When we came down the steps to where she was, she quit making the sound again, and we stood there until father came back up from the kitchen, with his pistol in his hand. He went back down with Nancy and they came back with Nancy's pallet.

We spread the pallet in our room. After the light in mother's room went off, we could see Nancy's eyes again. "Nancy," Caddy whispered, "are you asleep, Nancy?"

Nancy whispered something. It was oh or no, I dont know which. Like nobody had made it, like it came from nowhere and went nowhere, until it was like Nancy was not there at all; that I had looked so hard at her eyes on the stairs that they had got printed on my eyeballs, like the sun does when you have closed your eyes and there is no sun. "Jesus," Nancy whispered. "Jesus."

"Was it Jesus?" Caddy said. "Did he try to come into the kitchen?"

“Jesus,” Nancy said. Like this: Jeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeesus, until the sound went out, like a match or a candle does.

“It’s the other Jesus she means,” I said.

“Can you see us, Nancy?” Caddy whispered. “Can you see our eyes too?”

“I aint nothing but a nigger,” Nancy said. “God knows. God knows.”

“What did you see down there in the kitchen?” Caddy whispered.

“What tried to get in?”

“God knows,” Nancy said. We could see her eyes. “God knows.”

Dilsey got well. She cooked dinner. “You’d better stay in bed a day or two longer,” father said.

“What for?” Dilsey said. “If I had been a day later, this place would be to rack and ruin. Get on out of here now, and let me get my kitchen straight again.”

Dilsey cooked supper too. And that night, just before dark, Nancy came into the kitchen.

“How do you know he’s back?” Dilsey said. “You aint seen him.”

“Jesus is a nigger,” Jason said.

“I can feel him,” Nancy said. “I can feel him laying yonder in the ditch.”

“Tonight?” Dilsey said. “Is he there tonight?”

“Dilsey’s a nigger too,” Jason said.

“You try to eat something,” Dilsey said.

“I dont want nothing,” Nancy said.

“I aint a nigger,” Jason said.

“Drink some coffee,” Dilsey said. She poured a cup of coffee for Nancy.

“Do you know he’s out there tonight? How come you know it’s tonight?”

“I know,” Nancy said. “He’s there, waiting. I know. I done lived with him too long. I know what he is fixing to do fore he know it himself.”

“Drink some coffee,” Dilsey said. Nancy held the cup to her mouth and blew into the cup. Her mouth pursed out like a spreading adder’s, like a rubber mouth, like she had blown all the color out of her lips with blowing the coffee.

“I aint a nigger,” Jason said. “Are you a nigger, Nancy?”

“I hellborn, child,” Nancy said. “I wont be nothing soon. I going back where I come from soon.”

III

She began to drink the coffee. While she was drinking, holding the cup in both hands, she began to make the sound again. She made the sound into the cup and the coffee splashed out onto her hands and her dress. Her eyes looked at us and she sat there, her elbows on her knees, holding the cup in both hands, looking at us across the wet cup, making the sound. “Look at Nancy,” Jason said. “Nancy cant cook for us now. Dilsey’s got well now.”

“You hush up,” Dilsey said. Nancy held the cup in both hands, looking at us, making the sound, like there were two of them: one looking at us and the other making the sound. “Whyn’t you let Mr Jason telefoam the marshal?” Dilsey said. Nancy stopped then, holding the cup in her long brown hands. She tried to drink some coffee again, but it splashed out of the cup, onto her hands and her dress, and she put the cup down. Jason watched her.

“I cant swallow it,” Nancy said. “I swallows but it wont go down me.”

“You go down to the cabin,” Dilsey said. “Frony will fix you a pallet and I’ll be there soon.”

“Wont no nigger stop him,” Nancy said.

“I aint a nigger,” Jason said. “Am I, Dilsey?”

“I reckon not,” Dilsey said. She looked at Nancy. “I dont reckon so. What you going to do, then?”

Nancy looked at us. Her eyes went fast, like she was afraid there wasn't time to look, without hardly moving at all. She looked at us, at all three of us at one time. "You member that night I stayed in yawls' room?" she said.

She told about how we waked up early the next morning, and played. We had to play quiet, on her pallet, until father woke up and it was time to get breakfast. "Go and ask your maw to let me stay here tonight," Nancy said. "I wont need no pallet. We can play some more."

Caddy asked mother. Jason went too. "I cant have Negroes sleeping in the bedrooms," mother said. Jason cried. He cried until mother said he couldn't have any dessert for three days if he didn't stop. Then Jason said he would stop if Dilsey would make a chocolate cake. Father was there.

"Why dont you do something about it?" mother said. "What do we have officers for?"

"Why is Nancy afraid of Jesus?" Caddy said. "Are you afraid of father, mother?"

"What could the officers do?" father said. "If Nancy hasn't seen him, how could the officers find him?"

"Then why is she afraid?" mother said.

"She says he is there. She says she knows he is there tonight."

"Yet we pay taxes," mother said. "I must wait here alone in this big house while you take a Negro woman home."

"You know that I am not lying outside with a razor," father said.

"I'll stop if Dilsey will make a chocolate cake," Jason said. Mother told us to go out and father said he didn't know if Jason would get a chocolate cake or not, but he knew what Jason was going to get in about a minute. We went back to the kitchen and told Nancy.

"Father said for you to go home and lock the door, and you'll be all right," Caddy said. "All right from what, Nancy? Is Jesus mad at you?"

Nancy was holding the coffee cup in her hands again, her elbows on her knees and her hands holding the cup between her knees. She was looking into the cup. "What have you done that made Jesus mad?" Caddy said.

Nancy let the cup go. It didn't break on the floor, but the coffee spilled out, and Nancy sat there with her hands still making the shape of the cup. She began to make the sound again, not loud. Not singing and not unsinging. We watched her.

"Here," Dilsey said. "You quit that, now. You get ahold of yourself. You wait here. I going to get Versh to walk home with you." Dilsey went out. We looked at Nancy. Her shoulders kept shaking, but she quit making the sound. We watched her. "What's Jesus going to do to you?" Caddy said. "He went away."

Nancy looked at us. "We had fun that night I stayed in yawls' room, didn't we?"

"I didn't," Jason said. "I didn't have any fun."

"You were asleep in mother's room," Caddy said. "You were not there."

"Let's go down to my house and have some more fun," Nancy said.

"Mother wont let us," I said. "It's too late now."

"Dont bother her," Nancy said. "We can tell her in the morning. She wont mind."

"She wouldn't let us," I said.

"Dont ask her now," Nancy said. "Dont bother her now."

"She didn't say we couldn't go," Caddy said.

"We didn't ask," I said.

"If you go, I'll tell," Jason said.

"We'll have fun," Nancy said. "They won't mind, just to my house. I been working for yawl a long time. They won't mind."

"I'm not afraid to go," Caddy said. "Jason is the one that's afraid. He'll tell."

"I'm not," Jason said.

"Yes, you are," Caddy said. "You'll tell."

"I won't tell," Jason said. "I'm not afraid."

"Jason ain't afraid to go with me," Nancy said. "Is you, Jason?"

"Jason is going to tell," Caddy said. The lane was dark. We passed the pasture gate. "I bet if something was to jump out from behind that gate, Jason would holler."

"I wouldn't," Jason said. We walked down the lane. Nancy was talking loud.

"What are you talking so loud for, Nancy?" Caddy said.

"Who; me?" Nancy said. "Listen at Quentin and Caddy and Jason saying I'm talking loud."

"You talk like there was five of us here," Caddy said. "You talk like father was here too."

"Who; me talking loud, Mr Jason?" Nancy said.

"Nancy called Jason 'Mister,'" Caddy said.

"Listen how Caddy and Quentin and Jason talk," Nancy said.

"We're not talking loud," Caddy said. "You're the one that's talking like father—"

"Hush," Nancy said; "hush, Mr Jason."

"Nancy called Jason 'Mister' aguh—"

"Hush," Nancy said. She was talking loud when we crossed the ditch and stooped through the fence where she used to stoop through with the clothes on her head. Then we came to her house. We were going fast then. She opened the door. The smell of the house was like the lamp and the smell of Nancy was like the wick, like they were waiting for one another to begin to smell. She lit the lamp and closed the door and put the bar up. Then she quit talking loud, looking at us.

"What're we going to do?" Caddy said.

“What do yawl want to do?” Nancy said.

“You said we would have some fun,” Caddy said.

There was something about Nancy’s house; something you could smell besides Nancy and the house. Jason smelled it, even. “I don’t want to stay here,” he said. “I want to go home.”

“Go home, then,” Caddy said.

“I don’t want to go by myself,” Jason said.

“We’re going to have some fun,” Nancy said.

“How?” Caddy said.

Nancy stood by the door. She was looking at us, only it was like she had emptied her eyes, like she had quit using them. “What do you want to do?” she said.

“Tell us a story,” Caddy said. “Can you tell a story?”

“Yes,” Nancy said.

“Tell it,” Caddy said. We looked at Nancy. “You don’t know any stories.”

“Yes,” Nancy said. “Yes, I do.”

She came and sat in a chair before the hearth. There was a little fire there. Nancy built it up, when it was already hot inside. She built a good blaze. She told a story. She talked like her eyes looked, like her eyes watching us and her voice talking to us did not belong to her. Like she was living somewhere else, waiting somewhere else.

She was outside the cabin. Her voice was inside and the shape of her, the Nancy that could stoop under a barbed wire fence with a bundle of clothes balanced on her head as though without weight, like a balloon, was there. But that was all. “And so this here queen come walking up to the ditch, where that bad man was hiding. She was walking up to the ditch, and she say, ‘If I can just get past this here ditch,’ was what she say . . .”

“What ditch?” Caddy said. “A ditch like that one out there? Why did a queen want to go into a ditch?”

“To get to her house,” Nancy said. She looked at us. “She had to cross the ditch to get into her house quick and bar the door.”

“Why did she want to go home and bar the door?” Caddy said.

IV

Nancy looked at us. She quit talking. She looked at us. Jason’s legs stuck straight out of his pants where he sat on Nancy’s lap. “I don’t think that’s a good story,” he said. “I want to go home.”

“Maybe we had better,” Caddy said. She got up from the floor. “I bet they are looking for us right now.” She went toward the door.

“No,” Nancy said. “Don’t open it.” She got up quick and passed Caddy. She didn’t touch the door, the wooden bar.

“Why not?” Caddy said.

“Come back to the lamp,” Nancy said. “We’ll have fun. You don’t have to go.”

“We ought to go,” Caddy said. “Unless we have a lot of fun.” She and Nancy came back to the fire, the lamp.

“I want to go home,” Jason said. “I’m going to tell.”

“I know another story,” Nancy said. She stood close to the lamp. She looked at Caddy, like when your eyes look up at a stick balanced on your nose. She had to look down to see Caddy, but her eyes looked like that, like when you are balancing a stick.

“I won’t listen to it,” Jason said. “I’ll bang on the floor.”

“It’s a good one,” Nancy said. “It’s better than the other one.”

“What’s it about?” Caddy said. Nancy was standing by the lamp. Her hand was on the lamp, against the light, long and brown.

“Your hand is on that hot globe,” Caddy said. “Don’t it feel hot to your hand?”

Nancy looked at her hand on the lamp chimney. She took her hand away, slow. She stood there, looking at Caddy, wringing her long hand as though it were tied to her wrist with a string.

"Let's do something else," Caddy said.

"I want to go home," Jason said.

"I got some popcorn," Nancy said. She looked at Caddy and then at Jason and then at me and then at Caddy again. "I got some popcorn."

"I don't like popcorn," Jason said. "I'd rather have candy."

Nancy looked at Jason. "You can hold the popper." She was still wringing her hand; it was long and limp and brown.

"All right," Jason said. "I'll stay a while if I can do that. Caddy can't hold it. I'll want to go home again if Caddy holds the popper."

Nancy built up the fire. "Look at Nancy putting her hands in the fire," Caddy said. "What's the matter with you, Nancy?"

"I got popcorn," Nancy said. "I got some." She took the popper from under the bed. It was broken. Jason began to cry.

"Now we can't have any popcorn," he said.

"We ought to go home, anyway," Caddy said. "Come on, Quentin."

"Wait," Nancy said; "wait. I can fix it. Don't you want to help me fix it?"

"I don't think I want any," Caddy said. "It's too late now."

"You help me, Jason," Nancy said. "Don't you want to help me?"

"No," Jason said. "I want to go home."

"Hush," Nancy said; "hush. Watch. Watch me. I can fix it so Jason can hold it and pop the corn." She got a piece of wire and fixed the popper.

"It won't hold good," Caddy said.

"Yes, it will," Nancy said. "Yawl watch. Yawl help me shell some corn." The popcorn was under the bed too. We shelled it into the popper and Nancy helped Jason hold the popper over the fire.

"It's not popping," Jason said. "I want to go home."

"You wait," Nancy said. "It'll begin to pop. We'll have fun then." She was sitting close to the fire. The lamp was turned up so high it was beginning to smoke.

"Why don't you turn it down some?" I said.

"It's all right," Nancy said. "I'll clean it. Yawl wait. The popcorn will start in a minute."

"I don't believe it's going to start," Caddy said. "We ought to start home, anyway. They'll be worried."

"No," Nancy said. "It's going to pop. Dilsey will tell um yawl with me. I been working for yawl long time. They won't mind if yawl at my house. You wait, now. It'll start popping any minute now."

Then Jason got some smoke in his eyes and he began to cry. He dropped the popper into the fire. Nancy got a wet rag and wiped Jason's face, but he didn't stop crying.

"Hush," she said. "Hush." But he didn't hush. Caddy took the popper out of the fire.

"It's burned up," she said. "You'll have to get some more popcorn, Nancy."

"Did you put all of it in?" Nancy said.

"Yes," Caddy said. Nancy looked at Caddy. Then she took the popper and opened it and poured the cinders into her apron and began to sort the grains, her hands long and brown, and we watching her.

"Haven't you got any more?" Caddy said.

"Yes," Nancy said; "yes. Look. This here ain't burnt. All we need to do is—"

"I want to go home," Jason said. "I'm going to tell."

"Hush," Caddy said. We all listened. Nancy's head was already turned toward the barred door, her eyes filled with red lamplight. "Somebody is coming," Caddy said.

Then Nancy began to make that sound again, not loud, sitting there above the fire, her long hands dangling between her knees; all of a sudden water began to come out on her face in big drops, running down her face, carrying in each one a little turning ball of firelight like a spark until it dropped off her chin. "She's not crying," I said.

"I ain't crying," Nancy said. Her eyes were closed. "I ain't crying. Who is it?"

"I don't know," Caddy said. She went to the door and looked out.

"We've got to go now," she said. "Here comes father."

"I'm going to tell," Jason said. "Yawl made me come."

The water still ran down Nancy's face. She turned in her chair. "Listen. Tell him. Tell him we going to have fun. Tell him I take good care of yawl until in the morning. Tell him to let me come home with yawl and sleep on the floor. Tell him I won't need no pallet. We'll have fun. You member last time how we had so much fun?"

"I didn't have fun," Jason said. "You hurt me. You put smoke in my eyes. I'm going to tell."

V

Father came in. He looked at us. Nancy did not get up.

"Tell him," she said.

"Caddy made us come down here," Jason said. "I didn't want to."

Father came to the fire. Nancy looked up at him. "Can't you go to Aunt Rachel's and stay?" he said. Nancy looked up at father, her hands between her knees. "He's not here," father said. "I would have seen him. There's not a soul in sight."

"He in the ditch," Nancy said. "He waiting in the ditch yonder."

"Nonsense," father said. He looked at Nancy. "Do you know he's there?"

"I got the sign," Nancy said.

"What sign?"

"I got it. It was on the table when I come in. It was a hogbone, with blood meat still on it, laying by the lamp. He's out there. When yawl walk out that door, I gone."

"Gone where, Nancy?" Caddy said.

"I'm not a tattletale," Jason said.

"Nonsense," father said.

"He out there," Nancy said. "He looking through that window this minute, waiting for yawl to go. Then I gone."

"Nonsense," father said. "Lock up your house and we'll take you on to Aunt Rachel's."

"Twont do no good," Nancy said. She didn't look at father now, but he looked down at her, at her long, limp, moving hands. "Putting it off wont do no good."

"Then what do you want to do?" father said.

"I don't know," Nancy said. "I can't do nothing. Just put it off. And that don't do no good. I reckon it belong to me. I reckon what I going to get ain't no more than mine."

"Get what?" Caddy said. "What's yours?"

"Nothing," father said. "You all must get to bed."

"Caddy made me come," Jason said.

"Go on to Aunt Rachel's," father said.

"It won't do no good," Nancy said. She sat before the fire, her elbows on her knees, her long hands between her knees. "When even your own kitchen wouldn't do no good. When even if I was sleeping on the floor in the room with your chillen, and the next morning there I am, and blood—"

"Hush," father said. "Lock the door and put out the lamp and go to bed."

"I scared of the dark," Nancy said. "I scared for it to happen in the dark."

“You mean you’re going to sit right here with the lamp lighted?” father said. Then Nancy began to make the sound again, sitting before the fire, her long hands between her knees. “Ah, damnation,” father said. “Come along, chillen. It’s past bedtime.”

“When yawl go home, I gone,” Nancy said. She talked quieter now, and her face looked quiet, like her hands. “Anyway, I got my coffin money saved up with Mr. Lovelady.” Mr. Lovelady was a short, dirty man who collected the Negro insurance, coming around to the cabins or the kitchens every Saturday morning, to collect fifteen cents. He and his wife lived at the hotel.

One morning his wife committed suicide. They had a child, a little girl. He and the child went away. After a week or two he came back alone. We would see him going along the lanes and the back streets on Saturday mornings.

“Nonsense,” father said. “You’ll be the first thing I’ll see in the kitchen tomorrow morning.”

“You’ll see what you’ll see, I reckon,” Nancy said. “But it will take the Lord to say what that will be.”

VI

We left her sitting before the fire.

“Come and put the bar up,” father said. But she didn’t move. She didn’t look at us again, sitting quietly there between the lamp and the fire. From some distance down the lane we could look back and see her through the open door.

“What, Father?” Caddy said. “What’s going to happen?”

“Nothing,” father said. Jason was on father’s back, so Jason was the tallest of all of us. We went down into the ditch. I looked at it, quiet. I couldn’t see much where the moonlight and the shadows tangled.

“If Jesus is hid here, he can see us, cant he?” Caddy said.

“He’s not there,” father said. “He went away a long time ago.”

“You made me come,” Jason said, high; against the sky it looked like father had two heads, a little one and a big one. “I didn’t want to.”

We went up out of the ditch. We could still see Nancy’s house and the open door, but we couldn’t see Nancy now, sitting before the fire with the door open, because she was tired. “I just done got tired,” she said. “I just a nigger. It ain’t no fault of mine.”

But we could hear her, because she began just after we came up out of the ditch, the sound that was not singing and not unsinging. “Who will do our washing now, Father?” I said.

“I’m not a nigger,” Jason said, high and close above father’s head.

“You’re worse,” Caddy said, “you are a tattletale. If something was to jump out, you’d be scairder than a nigger.”

“I wouldn’t,” Jason said.

“You’d cry,” Caddy said.

“Caddy,” father said.

“I wouldn’t!” Jason said.

“Scairy cat,” Caddy said.

“Candace!” father said.

The End

Dry September, William Faulkner

Dry September

I

THROUGH THE BLOODY September twilight, aftermath of sixty-two rainless days, it had gone like a fire in dry grass — the rumor, the story, whatever it was. Something about Miss Minnie Cooper and a Negro.

Attacked, insulted, frightened: none of them, gathered in the barber shop on that Saturday evening where the ceiling fan stirred, without freshening it, the vitiated air, sending back upon them, in recurrent surges of stale pomade and lotion, their own stale breath and odors, knew exactly what had happened.

“Except it wasn’t Will Mayes,” a barber said. He was a man of middle age; a thin, sand-colored man with a mild face, who was shaving a client. “I know Will Mayes. He’s a good nigger. And I know Miss Minnie Cooper, too.”

“What do you know about her?” a second barber said.

“Who is she?” the client said. “A young girl?”

“No,” the barber said. “She’s about forty, I reckon. She aint married. That’s why I dont believe—”

“Believe, hell!” a hulking youth in a sweat-stained silk shirt said. “Wont you take a white woman’s word before a nigger’s?”

“I dont believe Will Mayes did it,” the barber said. “I know Will Mayes.”

“Maybe you know who did it, then. Maybe you already got him out of town, you damn niggerlover.”

“I dont believe anybody did anything. I dont believe anything happened. I leave it to you fellows if them ladies that get old without getting married dont have notions that a man cant—”

“Then you are a hell of a white man,” the client said. He moved under the cloth. The youth had sprung to his feet.

“You dont?” he said. “Do you accuse a white woman of lying?”

The barber held the razor poised above the half-risen client. He did not look around.

“It’s this durn weather,” another said. “It’s enough to make a man do anything. Even to her.”

Nobody laughed. The barber said in his mild, stubborn tone: “I aint accusing nobody of nothing. I just know and you fellows know how a woman that never—”

“You damn niggerlover!” the youth said.

“Shut up, Butch,” another said. “We’ll get the facts in plenty of time to act.”

“Who is? Who’s getting them?” the youth said. “Facts, hell! I—”

“You’re a fine white man,” the client said. “Aint you?” In his frothy beard he looked like a desert rat in the moving pictures. “You tell them, Jack,” he said to the youth. “If there aint any white men in this town, you can count on me, even if I aint only a drummer and a stranger.”

“That’s right, boys,” the barber said. “Find out the truth first. I know Will Mayes.”

“Well, by God!” the youth shouted. “To think that a white man in this town—”

“Shut up, Butch,” the second speaker said. “We got plenty of time.”

The client sat up. He looked at the speaker. “Do you claim that anything excuses a nigger attacking a white woman? Do you mean to tell me you are a white man and you’ll stand for it? You better go back North where you came from. The South dont want your kind here.”

“North what?” the second said. “I was born and raised in this town.”

“Well, by God!” the youth said. He looked about with a strained, baffled gaze, as if he was trying to remember what it was he wanted to say or to do. He drew his sleeve across his sweating face. “Damn if I’m going to let a white woman—”

“You tell them, Jack,” the drummer said. “By God, if they—”

The screen door crashed open. A man stood in the floor, his feet apart and his heavy-set body poised easily. His white shirt was open at the throat; he wore a felt hat. His hot, bold glance swept the group. His name was McLendon. He had commanded troops at the front in France and had been decorated for valor.

“Well,” he said, “are you going to sit there and let a black son rape a white woman on the streets of Jefferson?”

Butch sprang up again. The silk of his shirt clung flat to his heavy shoulders. At each armpit was a dark halfmoon. "That's what I been telling them! That's what I—"

"Did it really happen?" a third said. "This aint the first man scare she ever had, like Hawkshaw says. Wasn't there something about a man on the kitchen roof, watching her undress, about a year ago?"

"What?" the client said. "What's that?" The barber had been slowly forcing him back into the chair; he arrested himself reclining, his head lifted, the barber still pressing him down.

McLendon whirled on the third speaker. "Happen? What the hell difference does it make? Are you going to let the black sons get away with it until one really does it?"

"That's what I'm telling them!" Butch shouted. He cursed, long and steady, pointless.

"Here, here," a fourth said. "Not so loud. Dont talk so loud."

"Sure," McLendon said; "no talking necessary at all. I've done my talking. Who's with me?" He poised on the balls of his feet, roving his gaze.

The barber held the drummer's face down, the razor poised. "Find out the facts first, boys. I know Willy Mayes. It wasn't him. Let's get the sheriff and do this thing right."

McLendon whirled upon him his furious, rigid face. The barber did not look away. They looked like men of different races. The other barbers had ceased also above their prone clients. "You mean to tell me," McLendon said, "that you'd take a nigger's word before a white woman's? Why, you damn niggerloving—"

The third speaker rose and grasped McLendon's arm; he too had been a soldier. "Now, now. Let's figure this thing out. Who knows anything about what really happened?"

"Figure out hell!" McLendon jerked his arm free. "All that're with me get up from there. The ones that aint—" He roved his gaze, dragging his sleeve across his face.

Three men rose. The drummer in the chair sat up. "Here," he said, jerking at the cloth about his neck; "get this rag off me. I'm with him. I don't live here, but by God, if our mothers and wives and sisters—" He smeared the cloth over his face and flung it to the floor. McLendon stood in the floor and cursed the others. Another rose and moved toward him. The remainder sat uncomfortable, not looking at one another, then one by one they rose and joined him.

The barber picked the cloth from the floor. He began to fold it neatly. "Boys, don't do that. Will Mayes never done it. I know."

"Come on," McLendon said. He whirled. From his hip pocket protruded the butt of a heavy automatic pistol. They went out. The screen door crashed behind them reverberant in the dead air.

The barber wiped the razor carefully and swiftly, and put it away, and ran to the rear, and took his hat from the wall.

"I'll be back as soon as I can," he said to the other barbers. "I can't let—" He went out, running. The two other barbers followed him to the door and caught it on the rebound, leaning out and looking up the street after him. The air was flat and dead. It had a metallic taste at the base of the tongue.

"What can he do?" the first said. The second one was saying "Jees Christ, Jees Christ" under his breath. "I'd just as lief be Will Mayes as Hawk, if he gets McLendon riled."

"Jees Christ, Jees Christ," the second whispered.

"You reckon he really done it to her?" the first said.

II

She was thirty-eight or thirty-nine. She lived in a small frame house with her invalid mother and a thin, sallow, unflagging aunt, where each morning between ten and eleven she would appear on the porch in a lace-trimmed boudoir cap, to sit swinging in the porch swing until noon. After dinner she lay down for a while, until the afternoon began to cool.

Then, in one of the three or four new voile dresses which she had each summer, she would go downtown to spend the afternoon in the stores with the other ladies, where they would handle the goods and haggle over the prices in cold, immediate voices, without any intention of buying.

She was of comfortable people — not the best in Jefferson, but good people enough — and she was still on the slender side of ordinary looking, with a bright, faintly haggard manner and dress. When she was young she had had a slender, nervous body and a sort of hard vivacity which had enabled her for a time to ride upon the crest of the town's social life as exemplified by the high school party and church social period of her contemporaries while still children enough to be unclassconscious.

She was the last to realize that she was losing ground; that those among whom she had been a little brighter and louder flame than any other were beginning to learn the pleasure of snobbery — male — and retaliation — female. That was when her face began to wear that bright, haggard look.

She still carried it to parties on shadowy porticoes and summer lawns, like a mask or a flag, with that bafflement of furious repudiation of truth in her eyes. One evening at a party she heard a boy and two girls, all schoolmates, talking. She never accepted another invitation.

She watched the girls with whom she had grown up as they married and got homes and children, but no man ever called on her steadily until the children of the other girls had been calling her “aunty” for several years, the while their mothers told them in bright voices about how popular Aunt Minnie had been as a girl. Then the town began to see her driving on Sunday afternoons with the cashier in the bank.

He was a widower of about forty — a high-colored man, smelling always faintly of the barber shop or of whisky. He owned the first automobile in town, a red runabout; Minnie had the first motoring

bonnet and veil the town ever saw. Then the town began to say: "Poor Minnie." "But she is old enough to take care of herself," others said. That was when she began to ask her old schoolmates that their children call her "cousin" instead of "aunty."

It was twelve years now since she had been relegated into adultery by public opinion, and eight years since the cashier had gone to a Memphis bank, returning for one day each Christmas, which he spent at an annual bachelors' party at a hunting club on the river.

From behind their curtains the neighbors would see the party pass, and during the over-the-way Christmas day visiting they would tell her about him, about how well he looked, and how they heard that he was prospering in the city, watching with bright, secret eyes her haggard, bright face. Usually by that hour there would be the scent of whisky on her breath. It was supplied her by a youth, a clerk at the soda fountain: "Sure; I buy it for the old gal. I reckon she's entitled to a little fun."

Her mother kept to her room altogether now; the gaunt aunt ran the house. Against that background Minnie's bright dresses, her idle and empty days, had a quality of furious unreality. She went out in the evenings only with women now, neighbors, to the moving pictures.

Each afternoon she dressed in one of the new dresses and went downtown alone, where her young "cousins" were already strolling in the late afternoons with their delicate, silken heads and thin, awkward arms and conscious hips, clinging to one another or shrieking and giggling with paired boys in the soda fountain when she passed and went on along the serried store fronts, in the doors of which the sitting and lounging men did not even follow her with their eyes any more.

III

The barber went swiftly up the street where the sparse lights, insect-swirled, glared in rigid and violent suspension in the lifeless air. The day had died in a pall of dust; above the darkened square, shrouded by the

spent dust, the sky was as clear as the inside of a brass bell. Below the east was a rumor of the twice-waxed moon.

When he overtook them McLendon and three others were getting into a car parked in an alley. McLendon stooped his thick head, peering out beneath the top. "Changed your mind, did you?" he said. "Damn good thing; by God, tomorrow when this town hears about how you talked tonight—"

"Now, now," the other ex-soldier said. "Hawkshaw's all right. Come on, Hawk; jump in."

"Will Mayes never done it, boys," the barber said. "If anybody done it. Why, you all know well as I do there aint any town where they got better niggers than us. And you know how a lady will kind of think things about men when there aint any reason to, and Miss Minnie anyway—"

"Sure, sure," the soldier said. "We're just going to talk to him a little; that's all."

"Talk hell!" Butch said. "When we're through with the—"

"Shut up, for God's sake!" the soldier said. "Do you want everybody in town—"

"Tell them, by God!" McLendon said. "Tell every one of the sons that'll let a white woman—"

"Let's go; let's go: here's the other car." The second car slid squealing out of a cloud of dust at the alley mouth. McLendon started his car and took the lead. Dust lay like fog in the street. The street lights hung nimbused as in water. They drove on out of town.

A rutted lane turned at right angles. Dust hung above it too, and above all the land. The dark bulk of the ice plant, where the Negro Mayes was night watchman, rose against the sky. "Better stop here, hadn't we?" the soldier said. McLendon did not reply. He hurled the car up and slammed to a stop, the headlights glaring on the blank wall.

“Listen here, boys,” the barber said; “if he’s here, dont that prove he never done it? Dont it? If it was him, he would run. Dont you see he would?” The second car came up and stopped. McLendon got down; Butch sprang down beside him. “Listen, boys,” the barber said.

“Cut the lights off!” McLendon said. The breathless dark rushed down. There was no sound in it save their lungs as they sought air in the parched dust in which for two months they had lived; then the diminishing crunch of McLendon’s and Butch’s feet, and a moment later McLendon’s voice:

“Will! . . . Will!”

Below the east the wan hemorrhage of the moon increased. It heaved above the ridge, silvering the air, the dust, so that they seemed to breathe, live, in a bowl of molten lead. There was no sound of nightbird nor insect, no sound save their breathing and a faint ticking of contracting metal about the cars. Where their bodies touched one another they seemed to sweat dryly, for no more moisture came. “Christ!” a voice said; “let’s get out of here.”

But they didn’t move until vague noises began to grow out of the darkness ahead; then they got out and waited tensely in the breathless dark. There was another sound: a blow, a hissing expulsion of breath and McLendon cursing in undertone. They stood a moment longer, then they ran forward. They ran in a stumbling clump, as though they were fleeing something. “Kill him, kill the son,” a voice whispered. McLendon flung them back.

“Not here,” he said. “Get him into the car.” “Kill him, kill the black son!” the voice murmured. They dragged the Negro to the car. The barber had waited beside the car. He could feel himself sweating and he knew he was going to be sick at the stomach.

“What is it, captains?” the Negro said. “I aint done nothing. ‘Fore God, Mr John.” Someone produced handcuffs. They worked busily about the Negro as though he were a post, quiet, intent, getting in one another’s way. He submitted to the handcuffs, looking swiftly and constantly

from dim face to dim face. "Who's here, captains?" he said, leaning to peer into the faces until they could feel his breath and smell his sweaty reek. He spoke a name or two. "What you all say I done, Mr John?"

McLendon jerked the car door open. "Get in!" he said.

The Negro did not move. "What you all going to do with me, Mr John? I aint done nothing. White folks, captains, I aint done nothing: I swear 'fore God." He called another name.

"Get in!" McLendon said. He struck the Negro. The others expelled their breath in a dry hissing and struck him with random blows and he whirled and cursed them, and swept his manacled hands across their faces and slashed the barber upon the mouth, and the barber struck him also. "Get him in there," McLendon said. They pushed at him. He ceased struggling and got in and sat quietly as the others took their places.

He sat between the barber and the soldier, drawing his limbs in so as not to touch them, his eyes going swiftly and constantly from face to face. Butch clung to the running board. The car moved on. The barber nursed his mouth with his handkerchief.

"What's the matter, Hawk?" the soldier said.

"Nothing," the barber said. They regained the highroad and turned away from town. The second car dropped back out of the dust. They went on, gaining speed; the final fringe of houses dropped behind.

"Goddamn, he stinks!" the soldier said.

"We'll fix that," the drummer in front beside McLendon said. On the running board Butch cursed into the hot rush of air. The barber leaned suddenly forward and touched McLendon's arm.

"Let me out, John," he said.

"Jump out, niggerlover," McLendon said without turning his head. He drove swiftly. Behind them the sourceless lights of the second car

glared in the dust. Presently McLendon turned into a narrow road. It was rutted with disuse.

It led back to an abandoned brick kiln — a series of reddish mounds and weed- and vine-choked vats without bottom. It had been used for pasture once, until one day the owner missed one of his mules. Although he prodded carefully in the vats with a long pole, he could not even find the bottom of them.

“John,” the barber said.

“Jump out, then,” McLendon said, hurling the car along the ruts. Beside the barber the Negro spoke:

“Mr Henry.”

The barber sat forward. The narrow tunnel of the road rushed up and past. Their motion was like an extinct furnace blast: cooler, but utterly dead. The car bounded from rut to rut.

“Mr Henry,” the Negro said.

The barber began to tug furiously at the door. “Look out, there!” the soldier said, but the barber had already kicked the door open and swung onto the running board. The soldier leaned across the Negro and grasped at him, but he had already jumped. The car went on without checking speed.

The impetus hurled him crashing through dust-sheathed weeds, into the ditch. Dust puffed about him, and in a thin, vicious crackling of sapless stems he lay choking and retching until the second car passed and died away.

Then he rose and limped on until he reached the highroad and turned toward town, brushing at his clothes with his hands. The moon was higher, riding high and clear of the dust at last, and after a while the town began to glare beneath the dust. He went on, limping.

Presently he heard cars and the glow of them grew in the dust behind him and he left the road and crouched again in the weeds until they

passed. McLendon's car came last now. There were four people in it and Butch was not on the running board.

They went on; the dust swallowed them; the glare and the sound died away. The dust of them hung for a while, but soon the eternal dust absorbed it again. The barber climbed back onto the road and limped on toward town.

IV

As she dressed for supper on that Saturday evening, her own flesh felt like fever. Her hands trembled among the hooks and eyes, and her eyes had a feverish look, and her hair swirled crisp and crackling under the comb. While she was still dressing the friends called for her and sat while she donned her sheerest underthings and stockings and a new voile dress. "Do you feel strong enough to go out?" they said, their eyes bright too, with a dark glitter. "When you have had time to get over the shock, you must tell us what happened. What he said and did; everything."

In the leafed darkness, as they walked toward the square, she began to breathe deeply, something like a swimmer preparing to dive, until she ceased trembling, the four of them walking slowly because of the terrible heat and out of solicitude for her. But as they neared the square she began to tremble again, walking with her head up, her hands clenched at her sides, their voices about her murmurous, also with that feverish, glittering quality of their eyes.

They entered the square, she in the center of the group, fragile in her fresh dress. She was trembling worse. She walked slower and slower, as children eat ice cream, her head up and her eyes bright in the haggard banner of her face, passing the hotel and the coatless drummers in chairs along the curb looking around at her: "That's the one: see? The one in pink in the middle." "Is that her? What did they do with the nigger? Did they — ?" "Sure. He's all right." "All right, is he?" "Sure.

He went on a little trip.” Then the drug store, where even the young men lounging in the doorway tipped their hats and followed with their eyes the motion of her hips and legs when she passed.

They went on, passing the lifted hats of the gentlemen, the suddenly ceased voices, deferent, protective. “Do you see?” the friends said. Their voices sounded like long, hovering sighs of hissing exultation. “There’s not a Negro on the square. Not one.”

They reached the picture show. It was like a miniature fairyland with its lighted lobby and colored lithographs of life caught in its terrible and beautiful mutations. Her lips began to tingle. In the dark, when the picture began, it would be all right; she could hold back the laughing so it would not waste away so fast and so soon. So she hurried on before the turning faces, the undertones of low astonishment, and they took their accustomed places where she could see the aisle against the silver glare and the young men and girls coming in two and two against it.

The lights flicked away; the screen glowed silver, and soon life began to unfold, beautiful and passionate and sad, while still the young men and girls entered, scented and sibilant in the half dark, their paired backs in silhouette delicate and sleek, their slim, quick bodies awkward, divinely young, while beyond them the silver dream accumulated, inevitably on and on.

She began to laugh. In trying to suppress it, it made more noise than ever; heads began to turn. Still laughing, her friends raised her and led her out, and she stood at the curb, laughing on a high, sustained note, until the taxi came up and they helped her in.

They removed the pink voile and the sheer underthings and the stockings, and put her to bed, and cracked ice for her temples, and sent for the doctor. He was hard to locate, so they ministered to her with hushed ejaculations, renewing the ice and fanning her. While the ice was fresh and cold she stopped laughing and lay still for a time, moaning only a little. But soon the laughing welled again and her voice rose screaming.

“Shhhhhhhhhhh! Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!” they said, freshening the icepack, smoothing her hair, examining it for gray; “poor girl!” Then to one another: “Do you suppose anything really happened?” their eyes darkly aglitter, secret and passionate. “Shhhhhhhhhhh! Poor girl! Poor Minnie!”

V

It was midnight when McLendon drove up to his neat new house. It was trim and fresh as a birdcage and almost as small, with its clean, green-and-white paint. He locked the car and mounted the porch and entered. His wife rose from a chair beside the reading lamp. McLendon stopped in the floor and stared at her until she looked down.

“Look at that clock,” he said, lifting his arm, pointing. She stood before him, her face lowered, a magazine in her hands. Her face was pale, strained, and weary-looking. “Haven’t I told you about sitting up like this, waiting to see when I come in?”

“John,” she said. She laid the magazine down. Poised on the balls of his feet, he glared at her with his hot eyes, his sweating face.

“Didn’t I tell you?” He went toward her. She looked up then. He caught her shoulder. She stood passive, looking at him.

“Don’t, John. I couldn’t sleep . . . The heat; something. Please, John. You’re hurting me.”

“Didn’t I tell you?” He released her and half struck, half flung her across the chair, and she lay there and watched him quietly as he left the room.

He went on through the house, ripping off his shirt, and on the dark, screened porch at the rear he stood and mopped his head and shoulders with the shirt and flung it away. He took the pistol from his hip and laid it on the table beside the bed, and sat on the bed and removed his shoes, and rose and slipped his trousers off.

He was sweating again already, and he stooped and hunted furiously for the shirt. At last he found it and wiped his body again, and, with his body pressed against the dusty screen, he stood panting. There was no movement, no sound, not even an insect. The dark world seemed to lie stricken beneath the cold moon and the lidless stars.

The End

Mistral, William Faulkner

Mistral

I

IT WAS THE last of the Milanese brandy. I drank, and passed the bottle to Don, who lifted the flask until the liquor slanted yellowly in the narrow slot in the leather jacket, and while he held it so the soldier came up the path, his tunic open at the throat, pushing the bicycle.

He was a young man, with a bold lean face. He gave us a surly good day and looked at the flask a moment as he passed. We watched him disappear beyond the crest, mounting the bicycle as he went out of sight.

Don took a mouthful, then he poured the rest out. It splattered on the parched earth, pocking it for a fading moment. He shook the flask to the ultimate drop. "Salut," he said, returning the flask. "Thanks, O gods. My Lord, if I thought I'd have to go to bed with any more of that in my stomach."

"It's too bad, the way you have to drink it," I said. "Just have to drink it." I stowed the flask away and we went on, crossing the crest. The path began to descend, still in shadow.

The air was vivid, filled with sun which held a quality beyond that of mere light and heat, and a sourceless goat bell somewhere beyond the next turn of the path, distant and unimpeded.

"I hate to see you lugging the stuff along day after day," Don said.

"That's the reason I do. You couldn't drink it, and you wouldn't throw it away."

"Throw it away? It cost ten lire. What did I buy it for?"

"God knows," Don said. Against the sun-filled valley the trees were like the bars of a grate, the path a gap in the bars, the valley blue and sunny. The goat bell was somewhere ahead. A fainter path turned off at right angles, steeper than the broad one which we were following. "He went that way," Don said.

"Who did?" I said. Don was pointing to the faint mark of bicycle tires where they had turned into the fainter path.

"See."

"This one must not have been steep enough for him," I said.

"He must have been in a hurry."

"He sure was, after he made that turn."

"Maybe there's a haystack at the bottom."

"Or he could run on across the valley and up the other mountain and then run back down that one and up this one again until his momentum gave out."

"Or until he starved to death," Don said.

"That's right," I said. "Did you ever hear of a man starving to death on a bicycle?"

"No," Don said. "Did you?"

"No," I said. We descended. The path turned, and then we came upon the goat bell. It was on a laden mule cropping with delicate tinkling jerks at the pathside near a stone shrine. Beside the shrine sat a man in

corduroy and a woman in a bright shawl, a covered basket beside her. They watched us as we approached.

“Good day, signor,” Don said. “Is it far?”

“Good day, signori,” the woman said. The man looked at us. He had blue eyes with dissolving irises, as if they had been soaked in water for a long time. The woman touched his arm, then she made swift play with her fingers before his face. He said, in a dry metallic voice like a cicada’s:

“Good day, signori.”

“He doesn’t hear any more,” the woman said. “No, it is not far. From yonder you will see the roofs.”

“Good,” Don said. “We are fatigued. Might one rest here, signora?”

“Rest, signori,” the woman said. We slipped our packs and sat down. The sun slanted upon the shrine, upon the serene, weathered figure in the niche and upon two bunches of dried mountain asters lying there.

The woman was making play with her fingers before the man’s face. Her other hand in repose upon the basket beside her was gnarled and rough. Motionless, it had that rigid quality of unaccustomed idleness, not restful so much as quite spent, dead. It looked like an artificial hand attached to the edge of the shawl, as if she had donned it with the shawl for conventional complement. The other hand, the one with which she talked to the man, was swift and supple as a prestidigitator’s.

The man looked at us. “You walk, signori,” he said in his light, cadenceless voice.

“Sì,” we said. Don took out the cigarettes. The man lifted his hand in a slight, deprecatory gesture. Don insisted. The man bowed formally, sitting, and fumbled at the pack. The woman took the cigarette from the pack and put it into his hand. He bowed again as he accepted a light. “From Milano,” Don said. “It is far.”

“It is far,” the woman said. Her fingers rippled briefly. “He has been there,” she said.

"I was there, signori," the man said. He held the cigarette carefully between thumb and forefinger. "One takes care to escape the carriages."

"Yes." Don said. "Those without horses."

"Without horses," the woman said. "There are many. Even here in the mountains we hear of it."

"Many," Don said. "Always whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh."

"Sì," the woman said. "Even here I have seen it." Her hand rippled in the sunlight. The man looked at us quietly, smoking. "It was not like that when he was there, you see," she said.

"I am there long time ago, signori," he said. "It is far." He spoke in the same tone she had used, the same tone of grave and courteous explanation.

"It is far," Don said. We smoked. The mule crooped with delicate, jerking tinkles of the bell. "But we can rest yonder," Don said, extending his hand toward the valley swimming blue and sunny beyond the precipice where the path turned. "A bowl of soup, wine, a bed?"

The woman watched us across that serene and topless rampart of the deaf, the cigarette smoking close between thumb and finger. The woman's hand flickered before his face. "Sì," he said; "sì. With the priest: why not? The priest will take them in." He said something else, too swift for me. The woman removed the checked cloth which covered the basket, and took out a wineskin. Don and I bowed and drank in turn, the man returning the bows.

"Is it far to the priest's?" Don said.

The woman's hand flickered with unbelievable rapidity. Her other hand, lying upon the basket, might have belonged to another body. "Let them wait for him there, then," the man said. He looked at us. "There is a funeral today. You will find him at the church. Drink, signori."

We drank in decorous turn, the three of us. The wine was harsh and sharp and potent. The mule crooped, its small bell tinkling, its shadow

long in the slanting sun, across the path. "Who is it that's dead, signora?" Don said.

"He was to have married the priest's ward after this harvest," the woman said; "the banns were read and all. A rich man, and not old. But two days ago, he died."

The man watched her lips. "Tchk. He owned land, a house: so do I. It is nothing."

"He was rich," the woman said. "Because he was both young and fortunate, my man is jealous of him."

"But not now," the man said. "Eh, signori?"

"To live is good," Don said. He said, e bello.

"It is good," the man said; he also said, bello.

"He was to have married the priest's niece, you say," Don said.

"She is no kin to him," the woman said. "The priest just raised her. She was six when he took her, without people, kin, of any sort. The mother was workhouse-bred. She lived in a hut on the mountain yonder. It was not known who the father was, although the priest tried for a long while to persuade one of them to marry her for the child's—"

"One of which?" Don said.

"One of those who might have been the father, signor. But it was never known which one it was, until in 1916. He was a young man, a laborer; the next day we learned that the mother had gone too, to the war also, for she was never seen again by those who knew her until one of our boys came home after Caporetto, where the father had been killed, and told how the mother had been seen in a house in Milano that was not a good house.

So the priest went and got the child. She was six then, brown and lean as a lizard. She was hidden on the mountain when the priest got there; the house was empty. The priest pursued her among the rocks and captured her like a beast: she was half naked and without shoes and it winter time."

“So the priest kept her,” Don said. “Stout fellow.”

“She had no people, no roof, no crust to call hers save what the priest gave her. But you would not know it. Always with a red or a green dress for Sundays and feast days, even at fourteen and fifteen, when a girl should be learning modesty and industry, to be a crown to her husband.

The priest had told that she would be for the church, and we wondered when he would make her put such away for the greater glory of God. But at fourteen and fifteen she was already the brightest and loudest and most tireless in the dances, and the young men already beginning to look after her, even after it had been arranged between her and him who is dead yonder.”

“The priest changed his mind about the church and got her a husband instead,” Don said.

“He found for her the best catch in this parish, signor. Young, and rich, with a new suit each year from the Milano tailor. Then the harvest came, and what do you think, signori? she would not marry him.”

“I thought you said the wedding was not to be until after this harvest,” Don said. “You mean, the wedding had already been put off a year before this harvest?”

“It had been put off for three years. It was made three years ago, to be after that harvest. It was made in the same week that Giulio Farinzale was called to the army. I remember how we were all surprised, because none had thought his number would come up so soon, even though he was a bachelor and without ties save an uncle and aunt.”

“Is that so?” Don said. “Governments surprise everybody now and then. How did he get out of it?”

“He did not get out of it.”

“Oh. That’s why the wedding was put off, was it?”

The woman looked at Don for a minute. "Giulio was not the fiancé's name."

"Oh, I see. Who was Giulio?"

The woman did not answer at once. She sat with her head bent a little. The man had been watching their lips when they spoke. "Go on," he said; "tell them. They are men: they can listen to women's tittle-tattle with the ears alone. They cackle, signori; give them a breathing spell, and they cackle like geese, Drink."

"He was the one she used to meet by the river in the evenings; he was younger still: that was why we were surprised that his number should be called so soon. Before we had thought she was old enough for such, she was meeting him. And hiding it from the priest as skillfully as any grown woman could—" For an instant the man's washed eyes glinted at us, quizzical.

"She was meeting this Giulio all the while she was engaged to the other one?" Don said.

"No. The engagement was later. We had not thought her old enough for such yet. When we heard about it, we said how an anonymous child is like a letter in the post office: the envelope might look like any other envelope, but when you open it . . . And the holy can be fooled by sin as quickly as you or I, signori. Quicker, because they are holy."

"Did he ever find it out?" Don said.

"Yes. It was not long after. She would slip out of the house at dusk; she was seen, and the priest was seen, hidden in the garden to watch the house: a servant of the holy God forced to play watchdog for the world to see. It was not good, signori."

"And then the young man got called suddenly to the army," Don said.

"Is that right?"

"It was quite sudden; we were all surprised. Then we thought that it was the hand of God, and that now the priest would send her to the convent. Then in that same week we learned that it was arranged

between her and him who is dead yonder, to be after the harvest, and we said it was the hand of God that would confer upon her a husband beyond her deserts in order to protect His servant. For the holy are susceptible to evil, even as you and I, signori; they too are helpless before sin without God's aid."

"Tchk, tchk," the man said. "It was nothing. The priest looked at her, too," he said. "For a man is a man, even under a cassock. Eh, signori?" "You would say so," the woman said. "You without grace." "And the priest looked at her, too," Don said.

"It was his trial, his punishment, for having been too lenient with her. And the punishment was not over: the harvest came, and we heard that the wedding was put off for a year: what do you think of that, signori? that a girl, come from what she had come from, to be given the chance which the priest had given her to save her from herself, from her blood . . .

We heard how they quarreled, she and the priest, of how she defied him, slipping out of the house after dark and going to the dances where her fiancé might see her or hear of it at any time."

"Was the priest still looking at her?" Don said.

"It was his punishment, his expiation. So the next harvest came, and it was put off again, to be after the next harvest; the banns were not even begun. She defied him to that extent, signori, she, a pauper, and we all saying, 'When will her fiancé hear of it, learn that she is no good, when there are daughters of good houses who had learned modesty and seemliness?'"

"You have unmarried daughters, signora?" Don said.

"Sì. One. Two have I married, one still in my house. A good girl, signori, if I do say it."

"Tchk, woman," the man said.

"That is readily believed," Don said. "So the young man had gone to the army, and the wedding was put off for another year."

“And another year, signori. And then a third year. Then it was to be after this harvest; within a month it was to have been. The banns were read; the priest read them himself in the church, the third time last Sunday, with him there in his new Milano suit and she beside him in the shawl he had given her — it cost a hundred lire — and a golden chain, for he gave her gifts suitable for a queen rather than for one who could not name her own father, and we believed that at last the priest had served his expiation out and that the evil had been lifted from his house at last, since the soldier’s time would also be up this fall. And now the fiancé is dead.”

“Was he very sick?” Don said.

“It was very sudden. A hale man; one you would have said would live a long time. One day he was well, the second day he was quite sick. The third day he was dead. Perhaps you can hear the bell, with listening, since you have young ears.” The opposite mountains were in shadow. Between, the valley lay invisible still. In the sunny silence the mule’s bell tinkled in random jerks. “For it is in God’s hands,” the woman said. “Who will say that his life is his own?”

“Who will say?” Don said. He did not look at me. He said in English: “Give me a cigarette.”
“You’ve got them.”
“No, I haven’t.”
“Yes, you have. In your pants pocket.”

He took out the cigarettes. He continued to speak in English. “And he died suddenly. And he got engaged suddenly. And at the same time, Giulio got drafted suddenly. It would have surprised you. Everything was sudden except somebody’s eagerness for the wedding to be. There didn’t seem to be any hurry about that, did there?”

“I don’t know. I no spika.”

“In fact, they seemed to stop being sudden altogether until about time for Giulio to come home again. Then it began to be sudden again. And so I think I’ll ask if priests serve on the draft boards in Italy.” The old man watched his lips, his washed gaze grave and intent. “And if this path is the main path down the mountain, and that bicycle turned off into that narrow one back there, what do you think of that, signori?”

“I think it was fine. Only a little sharp to the throat. Maybe we can get something down there to take away the taste.”

The man was watching our lips; the woman’s head was bent again; her stiff hand smoothed the checked cover upon the basket. “You will find him at the church, signori,” the man said.

“Yes,” Don said. “At the church.”

We drank again. The man accepted another cigarette with that formal and unfailing politeness, conferring upon the action something finely ceremonious yet not incongruous. The woman put the wineskin back into the basket and covered it again. We rose and took up our packs.

“You talk swiftly with the hand, signora,” Don said.

“He reads the lips too. The other we made lying in the bed in the dark. The old do not sleep so much. The old lie in bed and talk. It is not like that with you yet.”

“It is so. You have made the padrone many children, signora?”

“Sì. Seven. But we are old now. We lie in bed and talk.”

II

Before we reached the village the bell had begun to toll. From the gaunt steeple of the church the measured notes seemed to blow free as from a winter branch, along the wind. The wind began as soon as the sun went down.

We watched the sun touch the mountains, whereupon the sky lost its pale, vivid blueness and took on a faintly greenish cast, like glass, against which the recent crest, where the shrine faded with the dried

handful of flowers beneath the fading crucifix, stood black and sharp. Then the wind began: a steady moving wall of air full of invisible particles of something.

Before it the branches leaned without a quiver, as before the pressure of an invisible hand, and in it our blood began to cool at once, even before we had stopped walking where the path became a cobbled street.

The bell still tolled. "Funny hour for a funeral," I said. "You'd think he would have kept a long time at this altitude. No need to be hurried into the ground like this."

"He got in with a fast gang," Don said. The church was invisible from here, shut off by a wall. We stood before a gate, looking into a court enclosed by three walls and roofed by a vine on a raftered trellis. It contained a wooden table and two backless benches. We stood at the gate, looking into the court, when Don said. "So this is Uncle's house."

"Uncle?"

"He was without ties save an uncle and aunt," Don said. "Yonder, by the door." The door was at the bottom of the court. There was a fire beyond it, and beside the door a bicycle leaned against the wall. "The bicycle, unconscious," Don said.

"Is that a bicycle?"

"Sure. That's a bicycle." It was an old-style machine, with high back-swept handlebars like gazelle horns. We looked at it.

"The other path is the back entrance," I said. "The family entrance." We heard the bell, looking into the court.

"Maybe the wind doesn't blow in there," Don said. "Besides, there's no hurry. We couldn't see him anyway, until it's over."

"These places are hotels sometimes." We entered. Then we saw the soldier. When we approached the table he came to the door and stood

against the firelight, looking at us. He wore a white shirt now. But we could tell him by his legs. Then he went back into the house.

“So Malbrouck is home,” Don said.

“Maybe he came back for the funeral.” We listened to the bell. The twilight was thicker inside. Overhead the leaves streamed rigid on the wind, stippled black upon the livid translucent sky. The strokes of the bell sounded as though they too were leaves flattening away upon an inviolable vine in the wind.

“How did he know there was going to be one?” Don said.

“Maybe the priest wrote him a letter.”

“Maybe so,” Don said. The firelight looked good beyond the door. Then a woman stood in it, looking at us. “Good day, padrona,” Don said.

“Might one have a mouthful of wine here?” She looked at us, motionless against the firelight. She was tall. She stood tall and motionless against the firelight, not touching the door. The bell tolled.

“She used to be a soldier too,” Don said. “She was a sergeant.”

“Maybe she was the colonel who ordered Malbrouck to go home.”

“No. He wasn’t moving fast enough when he passed us up yonder, for it to have been her.” Then the woman spoke:

“It is so, signori. Rest yourselves.” She went back into the house. We slipped our packs and sat down. We looked at the bicycle.

“Cavalry,” Don said. “Wonder why he came the back way.”

“All right,” I said.

“All right what?”

“All right. Wonder.”

“Is that a joke?”

“Sure. That’s a joke. It’s because we are old. We lie in the draft. That’s a joke too.”

“Tell me something that’s not a joke.”

“All right.”

“Did you hear the same thing I think I heard up there?”

“No spika. I love Italy. I love Mussolini.” The woman brought the wine. She set it on the table and was turning away. “Ask her,” I said. “Why don’t you?”

“All right. I will. — You have military in the house, signora?”

The woman looked at him. “It is nothing, signor. It is my nephew returned.”

“Finished, signora?”

“Finished, signor.”

“Accept our felicitations. He has doubtless many friends who will rejoice at his return.” She was thin, not old, with cold eyes, looking down at Don with brusque attention, waiting. “You have a funeral in the village today.” She said nothing at all. She just stood there, waiting for Don to get done talking. “He will be mourned,” Don said.

“Let us hope so,” she said. She made to go on; Don asked her about lodgings. There were none, she answered with immediate finality. Then we realized that the bell had ceased. We could hear the steady whisper of the wind in the leaves overhead.

“We were told that the priest—” Don said.

“Yes? You were told that the priest.”

“That we might perhaps find lodgings there.”

“Then you would do well to see the priest, signor.” She returned to the house. She strode with the long stride of a man into the firelight, and disappeared. When I looked at Don, he looked away and reached for the wine.

“Why didn’t you ask her some more?” I said. “Why did you quit so soon?”

“She was in a hurry. Her nephew is just home from the army, she said. He came in this afternoon. She wants to be with him, since he is without ties.”

“Maybe she’s afraid he’ll be drafted.”

“Is that a joke too?”

“It wouldn’t be to me.” He filled the glasses. “Call her back. Tell her you heard that her nephew is to marry the priest’s ward. Tell her we want to give them a present. A stomach pump. That’s not a joke, either.”

“I know it’s not.” He filled his glass carefully. “Which had you rather do, or stay at the priest’s tonight?”

“Salut,” I said.

“Salut.” We drank. The leaves made a dry, wild, continuous sound.

“Wish it was still summer.”

“It would be pretty cold tonight, even in a barn.”

“Yes. Glad we don’t have to sleep in a barn tonight.”

“It wouldn’t be so bad, after we got the hay warm and got to sleep.”

“We don’t have to, though. We can get a good sleep and get an early start in the morning.”

I filled the glasses. “I wonder how far it is to the next village.”

“Too far.” We drank. “I wish it were summer. Don’t you?”

“Yes.” I emptied the bottle into the glasses. “Have some wine.” We raised our glasses. We looked at one another. The particles in the wind seemed to drive through the clothing, through the flesh, against the bones, penetrating the brick and plaster of the walls to reach us.

“Salut.”

“We said that before,” Don said.

“All right. Salut, then.”

“Salut.”

We were young: Don, twenty-three; I, twenty-two. And age is so much a part of, so inextricable from, the place where you were born or bred.

So that away from home, some distance away — space or time or experience away — you are always both older and eternally younger than yourself, at the same time.

We stood in the black wind and watched the funeral — priest, coffin, a meager clump of mourners — pass, their garments, and particularly the priest's rusty black, ballooning ahead of them, giving an illusion of unseemly haste, as though they were outstripping themselves across the harsh green twilight (the air was like having to drink iced lemonade in the winter time) and into the church. "We'll be out of the wind too," Don said.

"There's an hour of light yet."

"Sure; we might even reach the crest by dark." He looked at me. Then I looked away. The red tiles of the roofs were black, too, now. "We'll be out of the wind." Then the bell began to toll again. "We don't know anything. There's probably not anything.

Anyway, we don't know it. We don't have to know it. Let's get out of the wind." It was one of those stark, square, stone churches, built by those harsh iron counts and bishops of Lombardy. It was built old; time had not even mellowed it, could not ever mellow it, not all of time could have.

They might have built the mountains too and invented the twilight in a dungeon underground, in the black ground. And beside the door the bicycle leaned. We looked at it quietly as we entered the church and we said quietly, at the same time:

"Beaver."

"He's one of the pallbearers," Don said. "That's why he came home." The bell tolled. We passed through the chancel and stopped at the back of the church. We were out of the wind now, save for the chill eddies of it that licked in at our backs. We could hear it outside, ripping the slow strokes of the bell half-born out of the belfry, so that by the time we

heard them, they seemed to have come back as echoes from a far distance.

The nave, groined upward into the gloom, dwarfed the meager clot of bowed figures. Beyond them, above the steady candles, the Host rose, soaring into sootlike shadows like festooned cobwebs, with a quality sorrowful and triumphant, like wings.

There was no organ, no music, no human sound at all at first. They just knelt there among the dwarfing gloom and the cold, serene, faint light of the candles. They might have all been dead. "It'll be dark long before they can get done," Don whispered.

"Maybe it's because of the harvest," I whispered. "They probably have to work all day. The living can't wait on the dead, you know."

"But, if he was as rich as they told us he was, it seems like . . ."
"Who buries the rich? Do the rich do it, or do the poor do it?"

"The poor do it," Don whispered. Then the priest was there, above the bowed heads. We had not seen him at first, but now he was there, shapeless, blurring out of the shadows below the candles, his face like a smudge, a thumb print, upon the gloom where the Host rose in a series of dissolving gleams like a waterfall; his voice filled the church, slow, steady, like wings beating against the cold stone, upon the resonance of wind in which the windless candles stood as though painted.

"And so he looked at her," Don whispered. "He had to sit across the table from her, say, and watch her. Watch her eating the food that made her change from nothing and become everything, knowing she had no food of her own and that it was his food that was doing it, and not for him changing.

You know: girls: they are not anything, then they are everything. You watch them become everything before your eyes. No, not eyes: it's the same in the dark. You know it before they do; it's not their becoming everything that you dread: it's their finding it out after you have long

known it: you die too many times. And that's not right. Not fair. I hope I'll never have a daughter."

"That's incest," I whispered.

"I never said it wasn't. I said it was like fire. Like watching the fire lean up and away rushing."

"You must either watch a fire, or burn up in it. Or not be there at all. Which would you choose?"

"I don't know. If it was a girl, I'd rather burn up in it."

"Than to not be there at all, even?"

"Yes." Because we were young. And the young seem to be impervious to anything except trifles. We can invest trifles with a tragic profundity, which is the world. Because, after all, there's nothing particularly profound about reality.

Because when you reach reality, along about forty or fifty or sixty, you find it to be only six feet deep and eighteen feet square.

Then it was over. Outside again, the wind blew steadily down from the black hills, hollowing out the green glass bowl of the sky.

We watched them file out of the church and carry the coffin into the churchyard. Four of them carried iron lanterns and in the dusk they clotted quietly antic about the grave while the wind leaned steadily upon them and upon the lantern flames, and blew fine dust into the grave as though all nature were quick to hide it.

Then they were done. The lanterns bobbed into motion, approaching, and we watched the priest. He crossed the churchyard toward the presbytery at a scuttling gait, blown along in his gusty black. The soldier was in mufti now. He came out of the throng, striding also with that long-limbed thrust like his aunt. He looked briefly at us with his bold surly face and got on the bike and rode away. "He was one of the pallbearers," Don said. "And what do you think of that, signori?"

"No spika," I said. "I love Italy. I love Mussolini."

"You said that before."

“All right. Salut, then.”

Don looked at me. His face was quite sober. “Salut,” he said. Then he looked toward the presbytery, hitching his pack forward. The door of the presbytery was closed.

“Don,” I said. He stopped, looking at me. The mountains had lost all perspective; they appeared to lean in toward us. It was like being at the bottom of a dead volcano filled with that lost savage green wind dead in its own motion and full of its own driving and unsleeping dust. We looked at one another.

“All right, damn it,” Don said. “You say what to do next, then.” We looked at one another. After a while the wind would sound like sleep, maybe. If you were warm and close between walls, maybe.

“All right,” I said.

“Why can’t you mean, all right? Damn it, we’ve got to do something. This is October; it’s not summer. And we don’t know anything. We haven’t heard anything. We don’t speak Italian. We love Italy.”

“I said, all right,” I said. The presbytery was of stone too, bleak in a rank garden. We were halfway up the flagged path when a casement beneath the eaves opened and somebody in white looked down at us and closed the shutter again. It was done all in one movement. Again we said together, quietly:

“Beaver.” But it was too dark to see much, and the casement was closed again. It had not taken ten seconds.

“Only we should have said, Beaverette,” Don said.

“That’s right. Is that a joke?”

“Yes. That’s a joke.” A wooden-faced peasant woman opened the door. She held a candle, the flame leaning inward from the wind. The hall behind her was dark; a stale, chill smell came out of it. She stood there, the harsh planes of her face in sharp relief, her eyes two caverns in which two little flames glittered, looking at us.

“Go on,” I said. “Tell her something.”

“We were told that his reverence, signora,” Don said, “that we might—”
“The candle leaned and recovered. She raised the other hand and sheltered it, blocking the door with her body. “We are travelers, en promenade; we were told — supper and a bed . . .”

When we followed her down the hall we carried with us in our ears the long rush of the recent wind, like in a sea shell. There was no light save the candle which she carried. So that, behind her, we walked in gloom out of which the serrated shadow of a stair on one wall reared dimly into the passing candle and dissolved in mounting serrations, carrying the eye with it up the wall where there was not any light. “Pretty soon it’ll be too dark to see anything from that window,” Don said.

“Maybe she won’t have to, by then.”

“Maybe so.” The woman opened a door; we entered a lighted room. It contained a table on which sat a candle in an iron candlestick, a carafe of wine, a long loaf, a metal box with a slotted cover. The table was set for two. We slung our packs into the corner and watched her set another place and fetch another chair from the hall. But that made only three places and we watched her take up her candle and go out by a second door. Then Don looked at me. “Maybe we’ll see her, after all.”

“How do you know he doesn’t eat?”

“When? Don’t you know where he’ll be?” I looked at him. “He’ll have to stay out there in the garden.”

“How do you know?”

“The soldier was at the church. He must have seen him. Must have heard—” We looked at the door, but it was the woman. She had three bowls. “Soup, signora?” Don said.

“Sì. Soup.”

“Good. We have come far.” She set the bowls on the table. “From Milano.” She looked briefly over her shoulder at Don.

“You’d better have stayed there,” she said. And she went out. Don and I looked at one another. My ears were still full of wind.

“So he is in the garden,” Don said.

“How do you know he is?”

After a while Don quit looking at me. “I don’t know.”

“No. You don’t know. And I don’t know. We don’t want to know. Do we?”

“No. No spika.”

“I mean, sure enough.”

“That’s what I mean,” Don said. The whisper in our ears seemed to fill the room with wind. Then we realized that it was the wind that we heard, the wind itself we heard, even though the single window was shuttered tight. It was as though the quiet room were isolated on the ultimate peak of space, hollowed murmurous out of chaos and the long dark fury of time. It seemed strange that the candle flame should stand so steady above the wick.

III

So we did not see him until we were in the house. Until then he had been only a shabby shapeless figure, on the small size, scuttling through the blowing dusk at the head of the funeral, and a voice. It was as though neither of them was any part of the other: the figure in blowing black, and the voice beating up the still air above the candles, detached and dispassionate, tireless and spent and forlorn.

There was something precipitate about the way he entered, like a diver taking a full breath in the act of diving. He did not look at us and he was already speaking, greeting us and excusing his tardiness in one breath, in a low rapid voice. Still, without having ceased to speak or having looked at us, he motioned toward the other chairs and seated himself and bowed his head over his plate and began a Latin grace without a break in his voice; again his voice seemed to rush slow and effortless just above the sound of the wind, like in the church.

It went on for some time; so that after a while I raised my head. Don was watching me, his eyebrows arched a little; we looked toward the priest and saw his hands writhing slowly on either side of his plate. Then the woman spoke a sharp word behind me; I had not heard her enter: a gaunt woman, not tall, with a pale, mahogany-colored face that might have been any age between twenty-five and sixty.

The priest stopped. He looked at us for the first time, out of weak, rushing eyes. They were brown and irisless, like those of an old dog. Looking at us, it was as though he had driven them up with whips and held them so, in cringing and rushing desperation. "I forget," he said. "There come times—" Again the woman snapped a word at him, setting a tureen on the table, the shadow of her arm falling across his face and remaining there: but we had already looked away.

The long wind rushed past the stone eaves; the candle flame stood steady as a sharpened pencil in the still sound of the wind. We heard her filling the bowls, yet she still stood for a time, the priest's face in the shadow of her arm; she seemed to be holding us all so until the moment — whatever it was — had passed. She went out. Don and I began to eat. We did not look toward him. When he spoke at last, it was in a tone of level, polite uninterest. "You have come far, signori?"

"From Milano," we both said.

"Before that, Firenze," Don said. The priest's head was bent over his bowl. He ate rapidly. Without looking up he gestured toward the loaf. I pushed it along to him. He broke the end off and went on eating.

"Ah," he said. "Firenze. That is a city. More — what do you say? — spirituel than our Milano." He ate hurriedly, without finesse. His robe was turned back over a flannel undershirt, the sleeves were. His spoon clattered; at once the woman entered with a platter of broccoli.

She removed the bowls. He reached his hand. She handed him the carafe and he filled the glasses without looking up and lifted his with a brief phrase. But he had only feigned to drink; he was watching my face

when I looked at him. I looked away; I heard him clattering at the dish and Don was looking at me too.

Then the woman's shoulder came between us and the priest. "There come times—" he said. He clattered at the dish. When the woman spoke to him in that shrill, rapid patois he thrust his chair back and for an instant we saw his driven eyes across her arm. "There come times—" he said, raising his voice.

Then she drowned the rest of it, getting completely between us and Don and I stopped looking and heard them leave the room. The steps ceased. Then we could hear only the wind.

"It was the burial service," Don said. Don was a Catholic. "That grace was."

"Yes," I said. "I didn't know that."

"Yes. It was the burial service. He got mixed up."

"Sure," I said. "That's it. What do we do now?" Our packs lay in the corner. Two packs can look as human, as utterly human and spent, as two shoes. We were watching the door when the woman entered. But she wasn't going to stop. She didn't look at us.

"What shall we do now, signora?" Don said.

"Eat." She did not stop. Then we could hear the wind again.

"Have some wine," Don said. He raised the carafe, then he held it poised above my glass, and we listened. The voice was beyond the wall, maybe two walls, in a sustained rush of indistinguishable words. He was not talking to anyone there: you could tell that. In whatever place he was, he was alone: you could tell that. Or maybe it was the wind.

Maybe in any natural exaggerated situation — wind, rain, drouth — man is always alone. It went on for longer than a minute while Don held the carafe above my glass. Then he poured. We began to eat. The voice was muffled and sustained, like a machine might have been making it.

"If it were just summer," I said.

"Have some wine." He poured. We held our poised glasses. It sounded just like a machine. You could tell that he was alone. Anybody could have. "That's the trouble," Don said. "Because there's not anybody there. Not anybody in the house."

"The woman."

"So are we." He looked at me.

"Oh," I said.

"Sure. What better chance could she have wanted, have asked for? He was in here at least five minutes. And he just back from the army after three years. The first day he is home, and then afternoon and then twilight and then darkness. You saw her there. Didn't you see her up there?"

"He locked the door. You know he locked it."

"This house belongs to God: you can't have a lock on it. You didn't know that."

"That's right. I forgot you're a Catholic. You know things. You know a lot, don't you?"

"No. I don't know anything. I no spika too. I love Italy too." The woman entered. She didn't bring anything this time. She came to the table and stood there, her gaunt face above the candle, looking down at us.

"Look, then," she said. "Will you go away?"

"Go away?" Don said. "Not stop here tonight?" She looked down at us, her hand lying on the table. "Where could we stop? Who would take us in? One cannot sleep on the mountain in October, signora."

"Yes," she said. She was not looking at us now. Through the walls we listened to the voice and to the wind.

"What is this, anyway?" Don said. "What goes on here, signora?"

She looked at him gravely, speculatively, as if he were a child. "You are seeing the hand of God, signorino," she said. "Pray God that you are too young to remember it." Then she was gone. And after a while the voice ceased, cut short off like a thread. And then there was just the wind.

"As soon as we get out of the wind, it won't be so bad," I said.

"Have some wine." Don raised the carafe. It was less than half full.

"We'd better not drink any more."

"No." He filled the glasses. We drank. Then we stopped. It began again, abruptly, in full stride, as though silence were the thread this time. We drank. "We might as well finish the broccoli, too."

"I don't want any more."

"Have some wine then."

"You've already had more than I have."

"All right." He filled my glass. I drank it. "Now, have some wine."

"We ought not to drink it all."

He raised the carafe. "Two more glasses left. No use in leaving that."

"There aren't two glasses left."

"Bet you a lira."

"All right. But let me pour."

"All right." He gave me the carafe. I filled my glass and reached toward his. "Listen," he said. For about a minute now the voice had been rising and falling, like a wheel running down. This time it didn't rise again; there was only the long sound of the wind left. "Pour it," Don said.

I poured. The wine mounted three quarters. It began to dribble away.

"Tilt it up." I did so. A single drop hung for a moment, then fell into the glass. "Owe you a lira," Don said.

The coins rang loud in the slotted box. When he took it up from the table and shook it, it made no sound. He took the coins from his pocket

and dropped them through the slot. He shook it again. "Doesn't sound like quite enough. Cough up."

I dropped some coins through the slot; he shook the box again. "Sounds all right now." He looked at me across the table, his empty glass bottom-up before him. "How about a little wine?"

When we rose I took my pack from the corner. It was on the bottom. I had to tumble Don's aside. He watched me. "What are you going to do with that?" he said. "Take it out for a walk?" "I don't know," I said. Past the cold invisible eaves the long wind steadily sighed. Upon the candle the flame stood like the balanced feather on the long white nose of a clown.

The hall was dark; there was no sound in it. There was nothing in it save the cold smell of sunless plaster and silence and the smell of living, of where people have, and will have, lived. We carried our packs low and close against our legs like we had stolen them.

We went on to the door and opened it, entering the black wind again. It had scoured the sky clear and clean, hollowing it out of the last of light, the last of twilight. We were halfway to the gate when we saw him. He was walking swiftly back and forth beside the wall. His head was bare, his robes ballooning about him. When he saw us he did not stop. He didn't hurry, either. He just turned and went back beside the wall and turned again, walking fast. We waited at the gate.

We thanked him for the food, he motionless in his whipping robes, his head bent and averted a little, as a deaf man listens. When Don knelt at his feet he started back as though Don had offered to strike him. Then I felt like a Catholic too and I knelt too and he made the sign hurriedly above us, upon the black-and-green wind and dusk, like he would have made it in water.

When we passed out the gate and looked back we could still see, against the sky and the blank and lightless house, his head rushing back and forth like a midget running along the top of the wall.

IV

The café was on the lee side of the street; we sat out of the wind. But we could see gusts and eddies of trash swirl along the gutter, and an occasional tongue of it licked chill across our legs, and we could hear the steady rushing of it in the high twilight among the roofs. On the curb two musicians from the hills — a fiddler and a piper — sat, playing a wild and skirling tune. Now and then they stopped to drink, then they resumed the same tune.

It was without beginning and seemingly without end, the wild unmusic of it swirling along the wind with a quality at once martial and sad. The waiter fetched us brandy and coffee, his dirty apron streaming suddenly and revealing beneath it a second one of green baize and rigid as oxidized copper.

At the other table five young men sat, drinking and ringing separately small coins onto the waiter's tray, which he appeared to count by the timbre of the concussion before tilting them into his waistcoat in one motion, and a long-flanked young peasant woman stopped to hear the music, a child riding her hip.

She set the child down and it scuttled under the table where the young men sat, they withdrawing their legs to permit it, while the woman was not looking. She was looking at the musicians, her face round and tranquil, her mouth open a little.

"Let's have some wine," Don said.

"All right," I said. "I like Italy," I said. We had another brandy. The woman was trying to cajole the child from under the table. One of the young men extracted it and gave it back to her. People stopped in the street to hear the music, and a high two-wheeled cart, full of fagots and drawn by a woman and a diminutive mule, passed without stopping, and then the girl came up the street in her white dress, and I didn't feel like a Catholic any more.

She was all in white, coatless, walking slender and supple. I didn't feel like anything any more, watching her white dress swift in the twilight, carrying her somewhere or she carrying it somewhere: anyway, it was going too, moving when she moved and because she moved, losing her when she would be lost because it moved when she moved and went with her to the instant of loss.

I remember how, when I learned about Thaw and White and Evelyn Nesbitt, how I cried. I cried because Evelyn, who was a word, was beautiful and lost or I would never have heard of her. Because she had to be lost for me to find her and I had to find her to lose her.

And when I learned that she was old enough to have a grown daughter or son or something, I cried, because I had lost myself then and I could never again be hurt by loss. So I watched the white dress, thinking, She'll be as near me in a second as she'll ever be and then she'll go on away in her white dress forevermore, in the twilight forevermore.

Then I felt Don watching her too and then we watched the soldier spring down from the bike. They came together and stopped and for a while they stood there in the street, among the people, facing one another but not touching. Maybe they were not even talking, and it didn't matter how long; it didn't matter about time. Then Don was nudging me.

"The other table," he said. The five young men had all turned; their heads were together, now and then a hand, an arm, secret, gesticulant, their faces all one way. They leaned back, without turning their faces, and the waiter stood, tray on hip — a squat, sardonic figure older than Grandfather Lust himself — looking also.

At last they turned and went on up the street together in the direction from which he had come, he leading the bicycle. Just before they passed from sight they stopped and faced one another again among the people, the heads, without touching at all. Then they went on. "Let's have some wine," Don said.

The waiter set the brandies on the table, his apron like a momentary board on the wind. "You have military in town," Don said.

"That's right," the waiter said. "One."

"Well, one is enough," Don said. The waiter looked up the street. But they were gone now, with her white dress shaping her stride, her girl-white, not for us.

"Too many, some say." He looked much more like a monk than the priest did, with his long thin nose and his bald head. He looked like a devastated hawk. "You're stopping at the priest's, eh?"

"You have no hotel," Don said.

The waiter made change from his waistcoat, ringing the coins deliberately upon the table. "What for? Who would stop here, without he walked? Nobody walks except you English."

"We're Americans."

"Well." He raised his shoulders faintly. "That's your affair." He was not looking at us exactly; not at Don, that is. "Did you try Cavalcanti's?"

"A wineshop at the edge of town? The soldier's aunt, isn't it? Yes. But she said—"

The waiter was watching him now. "She didn't send you to the priest?"

"No."

"Ah," the waiter said. His apron streamed suddenly. He fought it down and scoured the top of the table with it. "Americans, eh?"

"Yes," Don said. "Why wouldn't she tell us where to go?"

The waiter scoured the table. "That Cavalcanti. She's not of this parish."

"Not?"

"Not since three years. The padrone belongs to that one beyond the mountain." He named a village which we had passed in the forenoon.

"I see," Don said. "They aren't natives."

"Oh, they were born here. Until three years ago they belonged to this parish."

"But three years ago they changed."

“They changed.” He found another spot on the table. He removed it with the apron. Then he examined the apron. “There are changes and changes; some further than others.”

“The padrona changed further than across the mountain, did she?”

“The padrona belongs to no parish at all.” He looked at us. “Like me.”

“Like you?”

“Did you try to talk to her about the church?” He watched Don. “Stop there tomorrow and mention the church to her.”

“And that happened three years ago,” Don said. “That was a year of changes for them.”

“You said it. The nephew to the army, the padrone across the mountain, the padrona . . . All in one week, too. Stop there tomorrow and ask her.”

“What do they think here about all these changes?”

“What changes?”

“These recent changes.”

“How recent?” He looked at Don. “There’s no law against changes.”

“No. Not when they’re done like the law says. Sometimes the law has a look, just to see if they were changed right. Isn’t that so?”

The waiter had assumed an attitude of sloven negligence, save his eyes, his long face. It was too big for him, his face was. “How did you know he was a policeman?”

“Policeman?”

“You said soldier; I knew you meant policeman and just didn’t speak the language good. But you’ll pick it up with practice.” He looked at Don. “So you made him too, did you? Came in here this afternoon; said he was a shoe-drummer. But I made him.”

“Here already,” Don said. “I wonder why he didn’t stop the . . . before they . . .”

“How do you know he’s a policeman?” I said.

The waiter looked at me. "I don't care whether he is or not, buddy. Which had you rather do? think a man is a cop and find he's not, or think he's not a cop, and find he is?"

"You're right," Don said. "So that's what they say here."

"They say plenty. Always have and always will. Like any other town."

"What do you say?" Don said.

"I don't say. You don't either."

"No."

"It's no skin off of my back. If they want to drink, I serve them; if they want to talk, I listen. That keeps me as busy as I want to be all day."

"You're right," Don said. "It didn't happen to you."

The waiter looked up the street; it was almost full dark. He appeared not to have heard. "Who sent for the cop, I wonder?" Don said.

"When a man's got jack, he'll find plenty of folks to help him make trouble for folks even after he's dead," the waiter said. Then he looked at us. "I?" he said. He leaned; he slapped his chest lightly.

He looked quickly at the other table, then he leaned down and hissed: "I am atheist, like in America," and stood back and looked at us. "In America, all are atheists. We know." He stood there in his dirty apron, with his long, weary, dissolute face while we rose in turn and shook hands with him gravely, the five young men turning to look.

He flipped his other hand at us, low against his flank. "Rest, rest," he hissed. He looked over his shoulder at the young men. "Sit down," he whispered. He jerked his head toward the doorway behind us, where the padrona sat behind the bar. "I've got to eat, see?"

He scuttled away and returned with two more brandies, carrying them with his former sloven, precarious skill, as if he had passed no word with us save to take the order. "It's on me," he said. "Put it down."

“Now, what?” Don said. The music had ceased; from across the street we watched the fiddler, fiddle under arm, standing before the table where the young men sat, his other hand and the clutched hat gesticulant. The young woman was already going up the street, the child riding her hip again, its head nodding to a somnolent rhythm, like a man on an elephant. “Now, what?”

“I don’t care.”

“Oh, come on.”

“No.”

“There’s no detective here. He never saw one. He wouldn’t know a detective. There aren’t any detectives in Italy: can you imagine an official Italian in plain clothes for a uniform?”

“No.”

“She’ll show us where the bed is, and in the morning early—”

“No. You can, if you want to. But I’m not.”

He looked at me. Then he swung his pack onto his shoulder. “Good night. See you in the morning. At the café yonder.”

“All right.” He did not look back. Then he turned the corner. I stood in the wind. Anyway, I had the coat. It was a shooting coat of Harris tweed; we had paid eleven guineas for it, wearing it day about while the other wore the sweater.

In the Tyrol last summer Don held us up three days while he was trying to make the girl who sold beer at the inn. He wore the coat for three successive days, swapping me a week, to be paid on demand.

On the third day the girl’s sweetheart came back. He was as big as a silo, with a green feather in his hat. We watched him pick her over the bar with one hand. I believe she could have done Don the same way: all yellow and pink and white she was, like a big orchard.

Or like looking out across a snowfield in the early sunlight. She could have done it at almost any hour for three days too, by just reaching out her hand. Don gained four pounds while we were there.

V

Then I came into the full sweep of the wind. The houses were all dark, yet there was still a little light low on the ground, as though the wind held it there flattened to the earth and it had been unable to rise and escape. The walls ceased at the beginning of the bridge; the river looked like steel.

I thought I had already come into the full sweep of the wind, but I hadn't. The bridge was of stone, balustrades and roadway and all, and I squatted beneath the lee of the weather rail. I could hear the wind above and beneath, coming down the river in a long sweeping hum, like through wires. I squatted there, waiting. It wasn't very long.

He didn't see me at first, until I rose. "Did you think to have the flask filled?" he said.

"I forgot. I intended to. Damn the luck. Let's go back—"

"I got a bottle. Which way now?"

"I don't care. Out of the wind. I don't care." We crossed the bridge. Our feet made no sound on the stones, because the wind blew it away. It flattened the water, scoured it; it looked just like steel.

It had a sheen, holding light like the land between it and the wind, reflecting enough to see by. But it swept all sound away before it was made almost, so that when we reached the other side and entered the cut where the road began to mount, it was several moments before we could hear anything except our ears; then we heard. It was a smothered whimpering sound that seemed to come out of the air overhead. We stopped. "It's a child," Don said. "A baby."

"No: an animal. An animal of some sort." We looked at one another in the pale darkness, listening.

“It’s up there, anyway,” Don said. We climbed up out of the cut. There was a low stone wall enclosing a field, the field a little luminous yet, dissolving into the darkness. Just this side of the darkness, about a hundred yards away, a copse stood black, blobbed shapeless on the gloom.

The wind rushed up across the field and we leaned on the wall, listening into it, looking at the copse. But the sound was nearer than that, and after a moment we saw the priest.

He was lying on his face just inside the wall, his robes over his head, the black blur of his gown moving faintly and steadily, either because of the wind or because he was moving under them. And whatever the sound meant that he was making, it was not meant to be listened to, for his voice ceased when we made a noise. But he didn’t look up, and the faint shuddering of his gown didn’t stop.

Shuddering, writhing, twisting from side to side — something. Then Don touched me. We went on beside the wall. “Get down easier here,” he said quietly. The pale road rose gradually beneath us as the hill flattened. The copse was a black blob. “Only I didn’t see the bicycle.”

“Then go back to Cavalcanti’s,” I said. “Where in hell do you expect to see it?”

“They would have hidden it. I forgot. Of course they would have hidden it.”

“Go on,” I said. “Don’t talk so goddamn much.”

“Unless they thought he would be busy with us and wouldn’t—” he ceased and stopped. I jolted into him and then I saw it too, the handlebars rising from beyond the wall like the horns of a hidden antelope.

Against the gloom the blob of the copse seemed to pulse and fade, as though it breathed, lived. For we were young, and night, darkness, is terrible to young people, even icy driving blackness like this. Young

people should be so constituted that with sunset they would enter a coma state, by slumber shut safe from the darkness, the secret nostalgic sense of frustration and of objectless and unappeasable desire.

“Get down, damn you,” I said. With his high hunched pack, his tight sweater, he was ludicrous; he looked like a clown; he was terrible and ugly and sad all at once, since he was ludicrous and, without the coat, he would be so cold. And so was I: ugly and terrible and sad. “This damn wind.

This damn wind.” We regained the road. We were sheltered for the moment, and he took out the bottle and we drank. It was fiery stuff. “Talk about my Milan brandy,” I said. “That damn wind. That damn wind. That damn wind.”

“Give me a cigarette.”

“You’ve got them.”

“I gave them to you.”

“You’re a goddamn liar. You didn’t.” He found them in his pocket. But I didn’t wait.

“Don’t you want one? Better light it here, while we are . . .” I didn’t wait. The road rose, became flush with the field. After a while I heard him just behind me, and we entered the wind. I could see past my shoulder his cigarette shredding away in fiery streamers upon the unimpeded rush of the mistral, that black chill wind full of dust like sparks of ice.

The End

Divorce in Naples, William Faulkner

Divorce in Naples

I

WE WERE SITTING at a table inside: Monckton and the bosun and Carl and George and me and the women, the three women of that abject glittering kind that seamen know or that know seamen. We were talking English and they were not talking at all. By that means they could speak constantly to us above and below the sound of our voices in a tongue older than recorded speech and time too.

Older than the thirty-four days of sea time which we had but completed, anyway. Now and then they spoke to one another in Italian. The women in Italian, the men in English, as if language might be the sex difference, the functioning of the vocal cords the inner bidding until the dark pairing time. The men in English, the women in Italian: a decorum as of two parallel streams separated by a levee for a little while.

We were talking about Carl, to George.

“Why did you bring him here, then?” the bosun said.

“Yes,” Monckton said. “I sure wouldn’t bring my wife to a place like this.”

George cursed Monckton: not with a word or even a sentence; a paragraph. He was a Greek, big and black, a full head taller than Carl; his eyebrows looked like two crows in overlapping flight. He cursed us all with immediate thoroughness and in well-nigh faultless classic Anglo-Saxon, who at other times functioned in the vocabulary of an eight-year-old by-blow of a vaudeville comedian and a horse, say.

“Yes, sir,” the bosun said. He was smoking an Italian cigar and drinking ginger beer; the same tumbler of which, incidentally, he had been engaged with for about two hours and which now must have been about the temperature of a ship’s showerbath. “I sure wouldn’t bring my girl to a dive like this, even if he did wear pants.”

Carl meanwhile had not stirred. He sat serene among us, with his round yellow head and his round eyes, looking like a sophisticated baby against the noise and the glitter, with his glass of thin Italian beer and

the women murmuring to one another and watching us and then Carl with that biding and inscrutable foreknowledge which they do not appear to know that they possess.

“Èinnocente,” one said; again they murmured, contemplating Carl with musing, secret looks. “He may have fooled you already,” the bosun said. “He may have slipped through a porthole on you any time these three years.”

George glared at the bosun, his mouth open for cursing. But he didn’t curse. Instead he looked at Carl, his mouth still open. His mouth closed slowly. We all looked at Carl. Beneath our eyes he raised his glass and drank with contained deliberation.

“Are you still pure?” George said. “I mean, sho enough.”

Beneath our fourteen eyes Carl emptied the glass of thin, bitter, three per cent beer. “I been to sea three years,” he said. “All over Europe.”

George glared at him, his face baffled and outraged. He had just shaved; his close blue jowls lay flat and hard as a prizefighter’s or a pirate’s, up to the black explosion of his hair. He was our second cook. “You damn lying little bastard,” he said.

The bosun raised his glass of ginger beer with an exact replica of Carl’s drinking. Steadily and deliberately, his body thrown a little back and his head tilted, he poured the ginger beer over his right shoulder at the exact speed of swallowing, still with that air of Carl’s, that grave and cosmopolitan swagger. He set the glass down, and rose. “Come on,” he said to Monckton and me, “let’s go. Might as well be board ship if we’re going to spend the evening in one place.”

Monckton and I rose. He was smoking a short pipe. One of the women was his, another the bosun’s. The third one had a lot of gold teeth. She could have been thirty, but maybe she wasn’t. We left her with George and Carl. When I looked back from the door, the waiter was just fetching them some more beer.

II

They came into the ship together at Galveston, George carrying a portable victrola and a small parcel wrapped in paper bearing the imprint of a well-known ten-cent store, and Carl carrying two bulging imitation leather bags that looked like they might weigh forty pounds apiece.

George appropriated two berths, one above the other like a Pullman section, cursing Carl in a harsh, concatenant voice a little overburred with v's and r's and ordering him about like a nigger, while Carl stowed their effects away with the meticulousness of an old maid, producing from one of the bags a stack of freshly laundered drill serving jackets that must have numbered a dozen.

For the next thirty-four days (he was the messboy) he wore a fresh one for each meal in the saloon, and there were always two or three recently washed ones drying under the poop awning.

And for thirty-four evenings, after the galley was closed, we watched the two of them in pants and undershirts, dancing to the victrola on the after well deck above a hold full of Texas cotton and Georgia resin. They had only one record for the machine and it had a crack in it, and each time the needle clucked George would stamp on the deck. I don't think that either one of them was aware that he did it.

It was George who told us about Carl. Carl was eighteen, from Philadelphia. They both called it Philly; George in a proprietorial tone, as if he had created Philadelphia in order to produce Carl, though it later appeared that George had not discovered Carl until Carl had been to sea for a year already.

And Carl himself told some of it: a fourth or fifth child of a first generation of Scandinavian-American shipwrights, brought up in one of an identical series of small frame houses a good trolley ride from salt water, by a mother or an older sister: this whom, at the age of fifteen

and weighing perhaps a little less than a hundred pounds, some ancestor long knocking his quiet bones together at the bottom of the sea (or perhaps havened by accident in dry earth and become restive with ease and quiet) had sent back to the old dream and the old unrest three or maybe four generations late.

“I was a kid, then,” Carl told us, who had yet to experience or need a shave. “I thought about everything but going to sea. I thought once I’d be a ballplayer or maybe a prize fighter. They had pictures of them on the walls, see, when Sis would send me down to the corner after the old man on a Saturday night. Jeez, I’d stand outside on the street and watch them go in, and I could see their legs under the door and hear them and smell the sawdust and see the pictures of them on the walls through the smoke. I was a kid then, see. I hadn’t been nowhere then.”

We asked George how he had ever got a berth, even as a messman, standing even now about four inches over five feet and with yet a face that should have followed monstrances up church aisles, if not looked down from one of the colored windows themselves.

“Why shouldn’t he have come to sea?” George said. “Ain’t this a free country? Even if he ain’t nothing but a damn mess.” He looked at us, black, serious. “He’s a virgin, see? Do you know what that means?” He told us what it meant. Someone had evidently told him what it meant not so long ago, told him what he used to be himself, if he could remember that far back, and he thought that perhaps we didn’t know the man, or maybe he thought it was a new word they had just invented.

So he told us what it meant. It was in the first night watch and we were on the poop after supper, two days out of Gibraltar, listening to Monckton talking about cauliflower. Carl was taking a shower (he always took a bath after he had cleared the saloon after supper. George, who only cooked, never bathed until we were in port and the petite cleared) and George told us what it meant.

Then he began to curse. He cursed for a long time.

“Well, George,” the bosun said, “suppose you were one, then? What would you do?”

“What would I do?” George said. “What wouldn’t I do?” He cursed for some time, steadily. “It’s like the first cigarette in the morning,” he said. “By noon, when you remember how it tasted, how you felt when you was waiting for the match to get to the end of it, and when that first drag—” He cursed, long, impersonal, like a chant.

Monckton watched him: not listened: watched, nursing his pipe. “Why, George,” he said, “you’re by way of being almost a poet.”

There was a swipe, some West India Docks crum; I forget his name.

“Call that lobbing the tongue?” he said. “You should hear a Lymus mate laying into a fo’c’sle of bloody Portygee ginneys.”

“Monckton wasn’t talking about the language,” the bosun said.

“Any man can swear.” He looked at George. “You’re not the first man that ever wished that, George. That’s something that has to be was because you don’t know you are when you are.” Then he paraphrased unwitting and with unprintable aptness Byron’s epigram about women’s mouths. “But what are you saving him for? What good will it do you when he stops being?”

George cursed, looking from face to face, baffled and outraged.

“Maybe Carl will let George hold his hand at the time,” Monckton said. He reached a match from his pocket. “Now, you take Brussels sprouts—”

“You might get the Old Man to quarantine him when we reach Naples,” the bosun said.

George cursed.

“Now, you take Brussels sprouts,” Monckton said.

It took us some time that night, to get either started or settled down. We — Monckton and the bosun and the two women and I — visited four more cafés, each like the other one and like the one where we had left George and Carl — same people, same music, same thin, colored drinks. The two women accompanied us, with us but not of us, biding and acquiescent, saying constantly and patiently and without words that it was time to go to bed. So after a while I left them and went back to the ship. George and Carl were not aboard.

The next morning they were not there either, though Monckton and the bosun were, and the cook and the steward swearing up and down the galley; it seemed that the cook was planning to spend the day ashore himself.

So they had to stay aboard all day. Along toward midafternoon there came aboard a smallish man in a soiled suit who looked like one of those Columbia day students that go up each morning on the East Side subway from around Chatham Square. He was hatless, with an oiled pompadour. He had not shaved recently, and he spoke no English in a pleasant, deprecatory way that was all teeth. But he had found the right ship and he had a note from George, written on the edge of a dirty scrap of newspaper, and we found where George was. He was in jail.

The steward hadn't stopped cursing all day, anyhow. He didn't stop now, either. He and the messenger went off to the consul's. The steward returned a little after six o'clock, with George. George didn't look so much like he had been drunk; he looked dazed, quiet, with his wild hair and a blue stubble on his jaw.

He went straight to Carl's bunk and he began to turn Carl's meticulous covers back one by one like a traveler examining the bed in a third-class European hotel, as if he expected to find Carl hidden among them. "You mean," he said, "he ain't been back? He ain't been back a-tall?"

“We haven’t seen him,” we told George. “The steward hasn’t seen him either. We thought he was in jail with you.”

He began to replace the covers; that is, he made an attempt to draw them one by one up the bed again in a kind of detached way, as if he were not conscious, sentient. “They run,” he said in a dull tone. “They ducked out on me. I never thought he’d done it. I never thought he’d done me this way. It was her. She was the one made him do it. She knew what he was, and how I . . .” Then he began to cry, quietly, in that dull, detached way. “He must have been sitting there with his hand in her lap all the time. And I never suspected.

She kept on moving her chair closer and closer to his. But I trusted him. I never suspected nothing. I thought he wouldn’t do anything serious without asking me first, let alone . . . I trusted him.”

It appeared that the bottom of George’s glass had distorted their shapes enough to create in George the illusion that Carl and the woman were drinking as he drank, in a serious but celibate way. He left them at the table and went back to the lavatory; or rather, he said that he realized suddenly that he was in the lavatory and that he had better be getting back, concerned not over what might transpire while he was away, but over the lapse, over his failure to be present at his own doings which the getting to the lavatory inferred. So he returned to the table, not yet alarmed; merely concerned and amused. He said he was having a fine time.

So at first he believed that he was still having such a good time that he could not find his own table. He found the one which he believed should be his, but it was vacant save for three stacks of saucers, so he made one round of the room, still amused, still enjoying himself; he was still enjoying himself when he repaired to the center of the dance floor where, a head above the dancers, he began to shout “Porteus ahoy!” in a loud voice, and continued to do so until a waiter who spoke English came and removed him and led him back to that same vacant table bearing the three stacks of saucers and the three glasses, one of which he now recognized as his own.

But he was still enjoying himself, though not so much now, believing himself to be the victim of a practical joke, first on the part of the management, and it appeared that he must have created some little disturbance, enjoying himself less and less all the while, the center of an augmenting clump of waiters and patrons.

When at last he did realize, accept the fact, that they were gone, it must have been pretty bad for him: the outrage, the despair, the sense of elapsed time, an unfamiliar city at night in which Carl must be found, and that quickly if it was to do any good. He tried to leave, to break through the crowd, without paying the score. Not that he would have beaten the bill; he just didn't have time. If he could have found Carl within the next ten minutes, he would have returned and paid the score twice over: I am sure of that.

And so they held him, the wild American, a cordon of waiters and clients — women and men both — and he dragging a handful of coins from his pockets ringing onto the tile floor. Then he said it was like having your legs swarmed by a pack of dogs: waiters, clients, men and women, on hands and knees on the floor, scrabbling after the rolling coins, and George slapping about with his big feet, trying to stamp the hands away.

Then he was standing in the center of an abrupt wide circle, breathing a little hard, with the two Napoleons in their swords and pallbearer gloves and Knights of Pythias bonnets on either side of him. He did not know what he had done; he only knew that he was under arrest. It was not until they reached the Prefecture, where there was an interpreter, that he learned that he was a political prisoner, having insulted the king's majesty by placing foot on the king's effigy on a coin. They put him in a forty-foot dungeon, with seven other political prisoners, one of whom was the messenger.

"They taken my belt and my necktie and the strings out of my shoes," he told us dully. "There wasn't nothing in the room but a barrel

fastened in the middle of the floor and a wooden bench running all the way round the walls.

I knew what the barrel was for right off, because they had already been using it for that for some time. You was expected to sleep on the bench when you couldn't stay on your feet no longer. When I stooped over and looked at it close, it was like looking down at Forty-second Street from a airplane. They looked just like Yellow cabs. Then I went and used the barrel. But I used it with the end of me it wasn't intended to be used with."

Then he told about the messenger. Truly, Despair, like Poverty, looks after its own. There they were: the Italian who spoke no English, and George who scarcely spoke any language at all; certainly not Italian. That was about four o'clock in the morning. Yet by daylight George had found the one man out of the seven who could have served him or probably would have.

"He told me he was going to get out at noon, and I told him I would give him ten lire as soon as I got out, and he got me the scrap of paper and the pencil (this, in a bare dungeon, from among seven men stripped to the skin of everything save the simplest residue of clothing necessary for warmth: of money, knives, shoelaces, even pins and loose buttons) and I wrote the note and he hid it and they left him out and after about four hours they come and got me and there was the steward."

"How did you talk to him, George?" the bosun said. "Even the steward couldn't find out anything until they got to the consul's."

"I don't know," George said. "We just talked. That was the only way I could tell anybody where I was at."

We tried to get him to go to bed, but he wouldn't do it. He didn't even shave. He got something to eat in the galley and went ashore. We watched him go down the side.

"Poor bastard," Monckton said.

“Why?” the bosun said. “What did he take Carl there for? They could have gone to the movies.”

“I wasn’t thinking about George,” Monckton said.

“Oh,” the bosun said. “Well, a man can’t keep on going ashore anywhere, let alone Europe, all his life without getting ravaged now and then.”

“Good God,” Monckton said. “I should hope not.”

George returned at six o’clock the next morning. He still looked dazed, though still quite sober, quite calm. Overnight his beard had grown another quarter inch. “I couldn’t find them,” he said quietly. “I couldn’t find them nowheres.”

He had to act as messman now, taking Carl’s place at the officers’ table, but as soon as breakfast was done, he disappeared; we heard the steward cursing him up and down the ship until noon, trying to find him. Just before noon he returned, got through dinner, departed again. He came back just before dark.

“Found him yet?” I said. He didn’t answer. He stared at me for a while with that blank look. Then he went to their bunks and hauled one of the imitation leather bags down and tumbled all of Carl’s things into it and crushed down the lid upon the dangling sleeves and socks and hurled the bag out onto the well deck, where it tumbled once and burst open, vomiting the white jackets and the mute socks and the underclothes. Then he went to bed, fully dressed, and slept fourteen hours. The cook tried to get him up for breakfast, but it was like trying to rouse up a dead man.

When he waked he looked better. He borrowed a cigarette of me and went and shaved and came back and borrowed another cigarette. “Hell with him,” he said. “Leave the bastard go. I don’t give a damn.”

That afternoon he put Carl’s things back into his bunk. Not carefully and not uncarefully: he just gathered them up and dumped them into the berth and paused for a moment to see if any of them were going to fall out, before turning away.

IV

It was just before daylight. When I returned to the ship about midnight, the quarters were empty. When I waked just before daylight, all the bunks save my own were still vacant. I was lying in a halfdoze, when I heard Carl in the passage. He was coming quietly; I had scarcely heard him before he appeared in the door. He stood there for a while, looking no larger than an adolescent boy in the halflight, before he entered. I closed my eyes quickly. I heard him, still on tiptoe, come to my bunk and stand above me for a while. Then I heard him turn away. I opened my eyes just enough to watch him.

He undressed swiftly, ripping his clothes off, ripping off a button that struck the bulkhead with a faint click. Naked, in the wan light, he looked smaller and frailer than ever as he dug a towel from his bunk where George had tumbled his things, flinging the other garments aside with a kind of dreadful haste. Then he went out, his bare feet whispering in the passage.

I could hear the shower beyond the bulkhead running for a long time; it would be cold now, too.

But it ran for a long time, then it ceased and I closed my eyes again until he had entered. Then I watched him lift from the floor the undergarment which he had removed and thrust it through a porthole quickly, with something of the air of a recovered drunkard putting out of sight an empty bottle. He dressed and put on a fresh white jacket and combed his hair, leaning to the small mirror, looking at his face for a long time.

And then he went to work. He worked about the bridge deck all day long; what he could have found to do there we could not imagine. But the crew's quarters never saw him until after dark. All day long we watched the white jacket flitting back and forth beyond the open doors or kneeling as he polished the brightwork about the companions.

He seemed to work with a kind of fury. And when he was forced by his duties to come topside during the day, we noticed that it was always on the port side, and we lay with our starboard to the dock. And about the galley or the after deck George worked a little and loafed a good deal, not looking toward the bridge at all.

“That’s the reason he stays up there, polishing that brightwork all day long,” the bosun said. “He knows George can’t come up there.”

“It don’t look to me like George wants to,” I said.

“That’s right,” Monckton said. “For a dollar George would go up to the binnacle and ask the Old Man for a cigarette.”

“But not for curiosity,” the bosun said.

“You think that’s all it is?” Monckton said. “Just curiosity?”

“Sure,” the bosun said. “Why not?”

“Monckton’s right,” I said. “This is the most difficult moment in marriage: the day after your wife has stayed out all night.”

“You mean the easiest,” the bosun said. “George can quit him now.”

“Do you think so?” Monckton said.

We lay there five days. Carl was still polishing the brightwork in the bridge-deck companions. The steward would send him out on deck, and go away; he would return and find Carl still working on the port side and he would make him go to starboard, above the dock and the Italian boys in bright, soiled jerseys and the venders of pornographic postcards.

But it didn’t take him long there, and then we would see him below again, sitting quietly in his white jacket in the stale gloom, waiting for supertime. Usually he would be darning socks.

George had not yet said one word to him; Carl might not have been aboard at all, the very displacement of space which was his body, impedeless and breathable air. It was now George’s turn to stay away from the ship most of the day and all of the night, returning a little

drunk at three and four o'clock, to waken everyone by hand, save Carl, and talk in gross and loud recapitulation of recent and always different women before climbing into his bunk.

As far as we knew, they did not even look at one another until we were well on our way to Gibraltar.

Then Carl's fury of work slacked somewhat. Yet he worked steadily all day, then, bathed, his blond hair wet and smooth, his slight body in a cotton singlet, we would see him leaning alone in the long twilight upon the rail midships or forward. But never about the poop where we smoked and talked and where George had begun again to play the single record on the victrola, committing, unrequested and anathemaed, cold-blooded encore after encore.

Then one night we saw them together. They were leaning side by side on the poop rail. That was the first time Carl had looked astern, looked toward Naples since that morning when he returned to the ship, and even now it was the evening on which the Gates of Hercules had sunk into the waxing twilight and the River Ocean began to flow down into the darkling sea and overhead the crosstrees swayed in measured and slow recover against the tall night and the low new moon.

"He's all right now," Monckton said. "The dog's gone back to his vomit."

"I said he was all right all the time," the bosun said. "George didn't give a damn."

"I wasn't talking about George," Monckton said. "George hasn't made the grade yet."

V

George told us. "He'd keep on moping and mooning, see, and I'd keep on trying to talk to him, to tell him I wasn't mad no more. Jeez, it had to come some day; a man can't be a angel all your life. But he wouldn't even look back that way. Until all of a sudden he says one night:

“‘What do you do to them?’ I looked at him. ‘How does a man treat them?’

“‘You mean to tell me,’ I says, ‘that you spent three days with her and she ain’t showed you that?’

“‘I mean, give them,’ he says. ‘Don’t men give—’

“‘Jeez Christ,’ I says, ‘you done already give her something they would have paid you money for it in Siam. Would have made you the prince or the prime minister at the least. What do you mean?’

“‘I don’t mean money,’ he says. ‘I mean . . .’

“‘Well,’ I says, ‘if you was going to see her again, if she was going to be your girl, you’d give her something. Bring it back to her. Like something to wear or something: they don’t care much what, them foreign women, hustling them wops all their life that wouldn’t give them a full breath if they was a toy balloon; they don’t care much what it is. But you ain’t going to see her again, are you?’

“‘No,’ he says. ‘No,’ he says. ‘No.’ And he looked like he was fixing to jump off the boat and swim on ahead and wait for us at Hatteras.

“‘So you don’t want to worry about that,’ I says. Then I went and played the vic again, thinking that might cheer him up, because he ain’t the first, for Christ’s sake; he never invented it. But it was the next night; we was at the poop rail then — the first time he had looked back — watching the phosrus along the logline, when he says:

“‘Maybe I got her into trouble.’

“‘Doing what?’ I says. ‘With what? With the police? Didn’t you make her show you her petite?’ Like she would have needed a ticket, with that face full of gold; Jeez, she could have rode the train on her face alone; maybe that was her savings bank instead of using her stocking.

“‘What ticket?’ he says. So I told him. For a minute I thought he was crying, then I seen that he was just trying to not puke. So I knew what the trouble was, what had been worrying him. I remember the first

time it come as a surprise to me. 'Oh,' I says, 'the smell. It don't mean nothing,' I says; you don't want to let that worry you. It ain't that they smell bad,' I says, 'that's just the Italian national air.'"

And then we thought that at last he really was sick. He worked all day long, coming to bed only after the rest of us were asleep and snoring, and I saw him in the night get up and go topside again, and I followed and saw him sitting on a windlass. He looked like a little boy, still, small, motionless in his underclothes.

But he was young, and even an old man can't be sick very long with nothing but work to do and salt air to breathe; and so two weeks later we were watching him and George dancing again in their undershirts after supper on the after well deck while the victrola lifted its fatuous and reiterant ego against the waxing moon and the ship snored and hissed through the long seas off Hatteras. They didn't talk; they just danced, gravely and tirelessly as the nightly moon stood higher and higher up the sky.

Then we turned south, and the Gulf Stream ran like blue ink alongside, bubbled with fire by night in the softening latitudes, and one night off Tortugas the ship began to tread the moon's silver train like an awkward and eager courtier, and Carl spoke for the first time after almost twenty days.

"George," he said, "do me a favor, will you?"

"Sure, bud," George said, stamping on the deck each time the needle clucked, his black head shoulders above Carl's sleek pale one, the two of them in decorous embrace, their canvas shoes hissing in unison: "Sure," George said. "Spit it out."

"When we get to Galveston, I want you to buy me a suit of these pink silk teddybears that ladies use. A little bigger than I'd wear, see?"

The End

Carcassonne, William Faulkner

Carcassonne

AND ME ON a buckskin pony with eyes like blue electricity and a mane like tangled fire, galloping up the hill and right off into the high heaven of the world

His skeleton lay still. Perhaps it was thinking about this. Anyway, after a time it groaned. But it said nothing. which is certainly not like you he thought you are not like yourself. but I can't say that a little quiet is not pleasant

He lay beneath an unrolled strip of tarred roofing made of paper. All of him that is, save that part which suffered neither insects nor temperature and which galloped unflagging on the destinationless pony, up a piled silver hill of cumulae where no hoof echoed nor left print, toward the blue precipice never gained. This part was neither flesh nor unflesh and he tingled a little pleasantly with its lackful contemplation as he lay beneath the tarred paper bedclothing.

So were the mechanics of sleeping, of denning up for the night, simplified. Each morning the entire bed rolled back into a spool and stood erect in the corner. It was like those glasses, reading glasses which old ladies used to wear, attached to a cord that rolls onto a spindle in a neat case of unmarked gold; a spindle, a case, attached to the deep bosom of the mother of sleep.

He lay still, savoring this. Beneath him Rincon followed its fatal, secret, nightly pursuits, where upon the rich and inert darkness of the streets lighted windows and doors lay like oily strokes of broad and overladen brushes. From the docks a ship's siren unsourced itself. For a moment it was sound, then it compassed silence, atmosphere, bringing upon the eardrums a vacuum in which nothing, not even silence, was. Then it

ceased, ebbed; the silence breathed again with a clashing of palm fronds like sand hissing across a sheet of metal.

Still his skeleton lay motionless. Perhaps it was thinking about this and he thought of his tarred paper bed as a pair of spectacles through which he nightly perused the fabric of dreams:

Across the twin transparencies of the spectacles the horse still gallops with its tangled welter of tossing flames. Forward and back against the taut roundness of its belly its legs swing, rhythmically reaching and overreaching, each spurning overreach punctuated by a flicking limberness of shod hooves.

He can see the saddlegirth and the soles of the rider's feet in the stirrups. The girth cuts the horse in two just back of the withers, yet it still gallops with rhythmic and unflagging fury and without progression, and he thinks of that riderless Norman steed which galloped against the Saracen Emir, who, so keen of eye, so delicate and strong the wrist which swung the blade, severed the galloping beast at a single blow, the several halves thundering on in the sacred dust where him of Bouillon and Tancred too clashed in sullen retreat; thundering on through the assembled foes of our meek Lord, wrapped still in the fury and the pride of the charge, not knowing that it was dead.

The ceiling of the garret slanted in a ruined pitch to the low eaves. It was dark, and the body consciousness, assuming the office of vision, shaped in his mind's eye his motionless body grown phosphorescent with that steady decay which had set up within his body on the day of his birth. the flesh is dead living on itself subsisting consuming itself thriftily in its own renewal will never die for I am the Resurrection and the Life Of a man, the worm should be lusty, lean, hairedover.

Of women, of delicate girls briefly like heard music in tune, it should be suavely shaped, falling feeding into prettinesses, feeding. what though to Me but as a seething of new milk Who am the Resurrection and the Life

It was dark. The agony of wood was soothed by these latitudes; empty rooms did not creak and crack. Perhaps wood was like any other skeleton though, after a time, once reflexes of old compulsions had spent themselves.

Bones might lie under seas, in the caverns of the sea, knocked together by the dying echoes of waves. Like bones of horses cursing the inferior riders who bestrode them, bragging to one another about what they would have done with a first-rate rider up. But somebody always crucified the first-rate riders. And then it's better to be bones knocking together to the spent motion of falling tides in the caverns and the grottoes of the sea.

where him of Bouillon and Tancred too

His skeleton groaned again. Across the twin transparencies of the glassy floor the horse still galloped, unflagging and without progress, its destination the barn where sleep was stabled. It was dark. Luis, who ran the cantina downstairs, allowed him to sleep in the garret. But the Standard Oil Company, who owned the garret and the roofing paper, owned the darkness too; it was Mrs Widdrington's, the Standard Oil Company's wife's, darkness he was using to sleep in.

She'd make a poet of you too, if you did not work anywhere. She believed that, if a reason for breathing were not acceptable to her, it was no reason. With her, if you were white and did not work, you were either a tramp or a poet. Maybe you were. Women are so wise. They have learned how to live unconfused by reality, impervious to it. It was dark.

and knock my bones together and together It was dark, a darkness filled with a fairy pattering of small feet, stealthy and intent. Sometimes the cold patter of them on his face waked him in the night, and at his movement they scurried invisibly like an abrupt disintegration of dead leaves in a wind, in whispering arpeggios of minute sound, leaving a thin but definite effluvium of furtiveness and voracity.

At times, lying so while daylight slanted grayly along the ruined pitch of the eaves, he watched their shadowy flickings from obscurity to obscurity, shadowy and huge as cats, leaving along the stagnant silences those whisperings gusts of fairy feet.

Mrs Widdrington owned the rats too. But wealthy people have to own so many things. Only she didn't expect the rats to pay for using her darkness and silence by writing poetry. Not that they could not have, and pretty fair verse probably. Something of the rat about Byron: allocutions of stealthful voracity; a fairy pattering of little feet behind a bloody arras where fell where fell where I was King of Kings but the woman with the woman with the dog's eyes to knock my bones together and together

"I would like to perform something," he said, shaping his lips soundlessly in the darkness, and the galloping horse filled his mind again with soundless thunder. He could see the saddlegirth and the soles of the rider's stirrured feet, and he thought of that Norman steed, bred of many fathers to bear iron mail in the slow, damp, green valleys of England, maddened with heat and thirst and hopeless horizons filled with shimmering nothingness, thundering along in two halves and not knowing it, fused still in the rhythm of accrued momentum. Its head was mailed so that it could not see forward at all, and from the center of the plates projected a — projected a —

"Chamfron," his skeleton said.

"Chamfron." He mused for a time, while the beast that did not know that it was dead thundered on as the ranks of the Lamb's foes opened in the sacred dust and let it through. "Chamfron," he repeated. Living, as it did, a retired life, his skeleton could know next to nothing of the world. Yet it had an astonishing and exasperating way of supplying him with bits of trivial information that had temporarily escaped his mind.

"All you know is what I tell you," he said.

"Not always," the skeleton said. "I know that the end of life is lying still. You haven't learned that yet. Or you haven't mentioned it to me, anyway."

“Oh, I’ve learned it,” he said. “I’ve had it dinned into me enough. It isn’t that. It’s that I don’t believe it’s true.”

The skeleton groaned.

“I don’t believe it, I say,” he repeated.

“All right, all right,” the skeleton said testily. “I shan’t dispute you. I never do. I only give you advice.”

“Somebody has to, I guess,” he agreed sourly. “At least, it looks like it.” He lay still beneath the tarred paper, in a silence filled with fairy patterings. Again his body slanted and slanted downward through opaline corridors groined with ribs of dying sunlight upward dissolving dimly, and came to rest at last in the windless gardens of the sea. About him the swaying caverns and the grottoes, and his body lay on the rippled floor, tumbling peacefully to the wavering echoes of the tides.

I want to perform something bold and tragical and austere he repeated, shaping the soundless words in the pattering silence me on a buckskin pony with eyes like blue electricity and a mane like tangled fire, galloping up the hill and right off into the high heaven of the world Still galloping, the horse soars outward; still galloping, it thunders up the long blue hill of heaven, its tossing mane in golden swirls like fire. Steed and rider thunder on, thunder punily diminishing: a dying star upon the immensity of darkness and of silence within which, steadfast, fading, deepbreasted and grave of flank, muses the dark and tragic figure of the Earth, his mother.

The End