UNCOLLECTED STORIES OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

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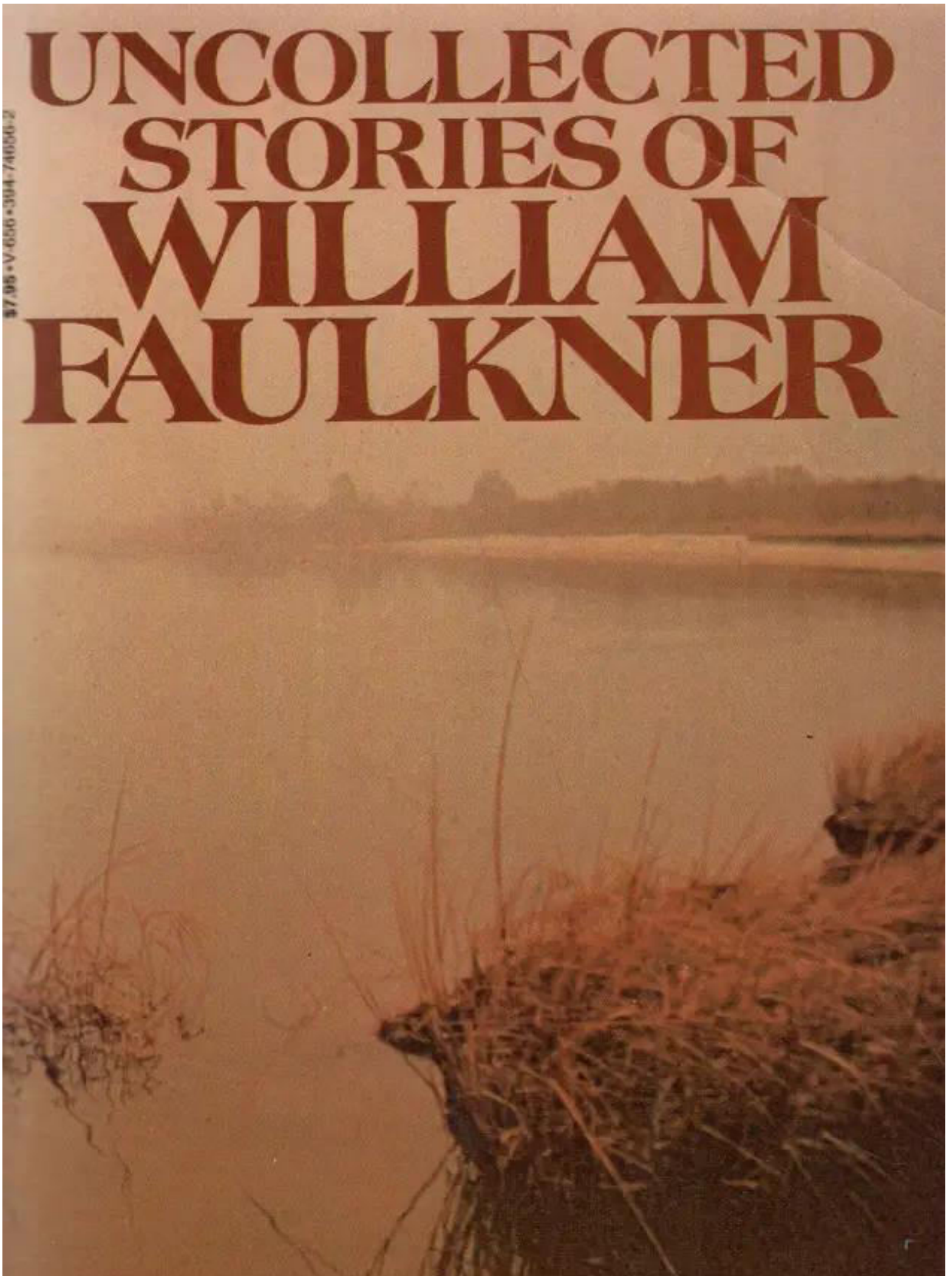

Uncollected Stories, William Faulkner

Uncollected Stories

Contents

Spotted Horses

Scribner’s, June 1931. Later revised for ‘The Hamlet’

I

YES, SIR. FLEM Snopes has filled that whole country full of spotted horses. You can hear folks running them all day and all night, whooping and hollering, and the horses running back and forth across them little wooden bridges ever now and then kind of like thunder. Here I was this morning pretty near half way to town, with the team ambling along and me setting in the buckboard about half asleep, when all of a sudden something come swurging up outen the bushes and jumped the road clean, without touching hoof to it. It flew right over my team, big as a billboard and flying through the air like a hawk. It taken me thirty minutes to stop my team and untangle the harness and the buckboard and hitch them up again.

That Flem Snopes. I be dog if he ain't a case, now. One morning about ten years ago, the boys was just getting settled down on Varner's porch for a little talk and tobacco, when here come Flem out from behind the counter, with his coat off and his hair all parted, like he might have been clerking for Varner for ten years already. Folks all knowed him; it was a big family of them about five miles down the bottom. That year, at least. Share-cropping. They never stayed on any place over a year.

Then they would move on to another place, with the chap or maybe the twins of that year's litter. It was a regular nest of them. But Flem. The rest of them stayed tenant farmers, moving ever year, but here come Flem one day, walking out from behind Jody Varner's counter like he owned it.

And he wasn't there but a year or two before folks knowed that, if him and Jody was both still in that store in ten years more, it would be Jody clerking for Flem Snopes. Why, that fellow could make a nickel where it

wasn’t but four cents to begin with. He skun me in two trades, myself, and the fellow that can do that, I just hope he’ll get rich before I do; that’s all.

All right. So here Flem was, clerking at Varner’s, making a nickel here and there and not telling nobody about it. No, sir. Folks never knowed when Flem got the better of somebody lessen the fellow he beat told it. He’d just set there in the store-chair, chewing his tobacco and keeping his own business to hisself, until about a week later we’d find out it was somebody else’s business he was keeping to hisself — provided the fellow he trimmed was mad enough to tell it. That’s Flem.

We give him ten years to own ever thing Jody Varner had. But he never waited no ten years. I reckon you-all know that gal of Uncle Billy Varner’s, the youngest one; Eula. Jody’s sister. Ever Sunday ever yellow-wheeled buggy and curried riding horse in that country would be hitched to Bill Varner’s fence, and the young bucks setting on the porch, swarming around Eula like bees around a honey pot.

One of these here kind of big, soft-looking gals that could giggle richer than plowed new-ground. Wouldn’t none of them leave before the others, and so they would set there on the porch until time to go home, with some of them with nine and ten miles to ride and then get up tomorrow and go back to the field. So they would all leave together and they would ride in a clump down to the creek ford and hitch them curried horses and yellow-wheeled buggies and get out and fight one another. Then they would get in the buggies again and go on home.

Well, one day about a year ago, one of them yellow-wheeled buggies and one of them curried saddle-horses quit this country. We heard they was heading for Texas. The next day Uncle Billy and Eula and Flem

come in to town in Uncle Bill's surrey, and when they come back, Flem and Eula was married. And on the next day we heard that two more of them yellow-wheeled buggies had left the country. They mought have gone to Texas, too. It's a big place.

Anyway, about a month after the wedding, Flem and Eula went to Texas, too. They was gone pretty near a year. Then one day last month, Eula come back, with a baby. We figgured up, and we decided that it was as well-growed a three-months-old baby as we ever see. It can already pull up on a chair. I reckon Texas makes big men quick, being a big place. Anyway, if it keeps on like it started, it'll be chewing tobacco and voting time it's eight years old.

And so last Friday here come Flem himself. He was on a wagon with another fellow. The other fellow had one of these two-gallon hats and a ivory-handled pistol and a box of gingersnaps sticking out of his hind pocket, and tied to the tail-gate of the wagon was about two dozen of them Texas ponies, hitched to one another with barbed wire. They was colored like parrots and they was quiet as doves, and ere a one of them would kill you quick as a rattlesnake.

Nere a one of them had two eyes the same color, and nere a one of them had ever see a bridle, I reckon; and when that Texas man got down offen the wagon and walked up to them to show how gentle they was, one of them cut his vest clean offen him, same as with a razor.

Flem had done already disappeared; he had went on to see his wife, I reckon, and to see if that ere baby had done gone on to the field to help Uncle Billy plow maybe. It was the Texas man that taken the horses on to Mrs. Littlejohn's lot. He had a little trouble at first, when they come to the gate, because they hadn't never see a fence before,

and when he finally got them in and taken a pair of wire cutters and unhitched them and got them into the barn and poured some shell corn into the trough, they durn nigh tore down the barn. I reckon they thought that shell corn was bugs, maybe. So he left them in the lot and he announced that the auction would begin at sunup to-morrow.

That night we was setting on Mrs. Littlejohn's porch. You-all mind the moon was nigh full that night, and we could watch them spotted varmints swirling along the fence and back and forth across the lot same as minnows in a pond. And then now and then they would all kind of huddle up against the barn and rest themselves by biting and kicking one another. We would hear a squeal, and then a set of hoofs would go Bam! against the barn, like a pistol. It sounded just like a fellow with a pistol, in a nest of cattymounts, taking his time.

II

It wasn't ere a man knowed yet if Flem owned them things or not. They just knowed one thing: that they wasn't never going to know for sho if Flem did or not, or if maybe he didn't just get on that wagon at the edge of town, for the ride or not. Even Eck Snopes didn't know, Flem's own cousin. But wasn't nobody surprised at that. We knowed that Flem would skin Eck quick as he would ere a one of us.

They was there by sunup next morning, some of them come twelve and sixteen miles, with seed-money tied up in tobacco sacks in their overalls, standing along the fence, when the Texas man come out of Mrs. Littlejohn's after breakfast and clumb onto the gate post with that ere white pistol butt sticking outen his hind pocket. He taken a new box of gingersnaps outen his pocket and bit the end offen it like a cigar and spit out the paper, and said the auction was open. And still they was

coming up in wagons and a horse- and mule-back and hitching the teams across the road and coming to the fence. Flem wasn't nowhere in sight.

But he couldn't get them started. He begun to work on Eck, because Eck holp him last night to get them into the barn and feed them that shell corn. Eck got out just in time. He come outen that barn like a chip on the crest of a busted dam of water, and clumb into the wagon just in time.

He was working on Eck when Henry Armstid come up in his wagon. Eck was saying he was skeered to bid on one of them, because he might get it, and the Texas man says, "Them ponies? Them little horses?"

He clumb down offen the gate post and went toward the horses. They broke and run, and him following them, kind of chirping to them, with his hand out like he was fixing to catch a fly, until he got three or four of them cornered. Then he jumped into them, and then we couldn't see nothing for a while because of the dust.

It was a big cloud of it, and them blare-eyed, spotted things swoaring outen it twenty foot to a jump, in forty directions without counting up. Then the dust settled and there they was, that Texas man and the horse. He had its head twisted clean around like a owl's head. Its legs was braced and it was trembling like a new bride and groaning like a saw mill, and him holding its head wrung clean around on its neck so it was snuffing sky.

"Look it over," he says, with his heels dug too and that white pistol sticking outen his pocket and his neck swole up like a spreading adder's

until you could just tell what he was saying, cussing the horse and talking to us all at once: “Look him over, the fiddle-headed son of fourteen fathers.

Try him, buy him; you will get the best—” Then it was all dust again, and we couldn’t see nothing but spotted hide and mane, and that ere Texas man’s boot-heels like a couple of walnuts on two strings, and after a while that two-gallon hat come sailing out like a fat old hen crossing a fence.

When the dust settled again, he was just getting outen the far fence corner, brushing himself off. He come and got his hat and brushed it off and come and clumb onto the gate post again. He was breathing hard. He taken the gingersnap box outen his pocket and et one, breathing hard.

The hammer-head horse was still running round and round the lot like a merry-go-round at a fair. That was when Henry Armstid come shoving up to the gate in them patched overalls and one of them dangle-armed shirts of hisn.

Hadn’t nobody noticed him until then. We was all watching the Texas man and the horses. Even Mrs. Littlejohn; she had done come out and built a fire under the wash-pot in her back yard, and she would stand at the fence a while and then go back into the house and come out again with a arm full of wash and stand at the fence again. Well, here come Henry shoving up, and then we see Mrs. Armstid right behind him, in that ere faded wrapper and sunbonnet and them tennis shoes. “Git on back to that wagon,” Henry says.

“Henry,” she says.

“Here, boys,” the Texas man says; “make room for missus to git up and see. Come on, Henry,” he says; “here’s your chance to buy that saddle-horse missus has been wanting. What about ten dollars, Henry?”

“Henry,” Mrs. Armstid says. She put her hand on Henry’s arm. Henry knocked her hand down.

“Git on back to that wagon, like I told you,” he says.

Mrs. Armstid never moved. She stood behind Henry, with her hands rolled into her dress, not looking at nothing. “He hain’t no more despair than to buy one of them things,” she says. “And us not five dollars ahead of the pore house, he hain’t no more despair.” It was the truth, too. They ain’t never made more than a bare living offen that place of theirs, and them with four chaps and the very clothes they wears she earns by weaving by the firelight at night while Henry’s asleep.

“Shut your mouth and git on back to that wagon,” Henry says. “Do you want I taken a wagon stake to you here in the big road?”

Well, that Texas man taken one look at her. Then he begun on Eck again, like Henry wasn’t even there. But Eck was skeered. “I can git me a snapping turtle or a water moccasin for nothing. I ain’t going to buy none.”

So the Texas man said he would give Eck a horse. “To start the auction, and because you holp me last night. If you’ll start the bidding on the next horse,” he says, “I’ll give you that fiddle-head horse.”

I wish you could have seen them, standing there with their seed-money in their pockets, watching that Texas man give Eck Snopes a live horse, all fixed to call him a fool if he taken it or not. Finally Eck says he'll take it.

"Only I just starts the bidding," he says. "I don't have to buy the next one lessen I ain't overtopped." The Texas man said all right, and Eck bid a dollar on the next one, with Henry Armstid standing there with his mouth already open, watching Eck and the Texas man like a mad-dog or something. "A dollar," Eck says.

The Texas man looked at Eck. His mouth was already open too, like he had started to say something and what he was going to say had up and died on him. "A dollar?" he says. "One dollar? You mean, one dollar, Eck?"

"Durn it," Eck says; "two dollars, then."

Well, sir, I wish you could a seen that Texas man. He taken out that gingersnap box and held it up and looked into it, careful, like it might have been a diamond ring in it, or a spider. Then he throwed it away and wiped his face with a bandanna. "Well," he says. "Well. Two dollars. Two dollars. Is your pulse all right, Eck?" he says. "Do you have ager-sweats at night, maybe?" he says. "Well," he says, "I got to take it. But are you boys going to stand there and see Eck get two horses at a dollar a head?"

That done it. I be dog if he wasn't nigh as smart as Flem Snopes. He hadn't no more than got the words outen his mouth before here was Henry Armstid, waving his hand. "Three dollars," Henry says. Mrs. Armstid tried to hold him again. He knocked her hand off, shoving up to the gate post.

“Mister,” Mrs. Armstid says, “we got chaps in the house and not corn to feed the stock. We got five dollars I earned my chaps a-weaving after dark, and him snoring in the bed. And he hain’t no more despair.”

“Henry bids three dollars,” the Texas man says. “Raise him a dollar, Eck, and the horse is yours.”

“Henry,” Mrs. Armstid says.

“Raise him, Eck,” the Texas man says.

“Four dollars,” Eck says.

“Five dollars,” Henry says, shaking his fist. He shoved up right under the gate post. Mrs. Armstid was looking at the Texas man too.

“Mister,” she says, “if you take that five dollars I earned my chaps a-weaving for one of them things, it’ll be a curse onto you and yourn during all the time of man.”

But it wasn’t no stopping Henry. He had shoved up, waving his fist at the Texas man. He opened it; the money was in nickels and quarters, and one dollar bill that looked like a cow’s cud. “Five dollars,” he says. “And the man that raises it’ll have to beat my head off, or I’ll beat hisn.”

“All right,” the Texas man says. “Five dollars is bid. But don’t you shake your hand at me.”

III

It taken till nigh sundown before the last one was sold. He got them hotted up once and the bidding got up to seven dollars and a quarter,

but most of them went around three or four dollars, him setting on the gate post and picking the horses out one at a time by mouth-word, and Mrs. Littlejohn pumping up and down at the tub and stopping and coming to the fence for a while and going back to the tub again. She had done got done too, and the wash was hung on the line in the back yard, and we could smell supper cooking. Finally they was all sold; he swapped the last two and the wagon for a buckboard.

We was all kind of tired, but Henry Armstid looked more like a mad-dog than ever. When he bought, Mrs. Armstid had went back to the wagon, setting in it behind them two rabbit-sized, bone-pore mules, and the wagon itself looking like it would fall all to pieces soon as the mules moved. Henry hadn't even waited to pull it outen the road; it was still in the middle of the road and her setting in it, not looking at nothing, ever since this morning.

Henry was right up against the gate. He went up to the Texas man. "I bought a horse and I paid cash," Henry says. "And yet you expect me to stand around here until they are all sold before I can get my horse. I'm going to take my horse outen that lot."

The Texas man looked at Henry. He talked like he might have been asking for a cup of coffee at the table. "Take your horse," he says.

Then Henry quit looking at the Texas man. He begun to swallow, holding onto the gate. "Ain't you going to help me?" he says.

"It ain't my horse," the Texas man says.

Henry never looked at the Texas man again, he never looked at nobody. "Who'll help me catch my horse?" he says. Never nobody said nothing. "Bring the plowline," Henry says. Mrs. Armstid got outen the wagon

and brought the plowline. The Texas man got down offen the post. The woman made to pass him, carrying the rope.

“Don’t you go in there, missus,” the Texas man says.

Henry opened the gate. He didn’t look back. “Come on here,” he says.

“Don’t you go in there, missus,” the Texas man says.

Mrs. Armstid wasn’t looking at nobody, neither, with her hands across her middle, holding the rope. “I reckon I better,” she says. Her and Henry went into the lot. The horses broke and run. Henry and Mrs. Armstid followed.

“Get him into the corner,” Henry says. They got Henry’s horse cornered finally, and Henry taken the rope, but Mrs. Armstid let the horse get out. They hemmed it up again, but Mrs. Armstid let it get out again, and Henry turned and hit her with the rope. “Why didn’t you head him back?” Henry says. He hit her again. “Why didn’t you?” It was about that time I looked around and see Flem Snopes standing there.

It was the Texas man that done something. He moved fast for a big man. He caught the rope before Henry could hit the third time, and Henry whirled and made like he would jump at the Texas man. But he never jumped. The Texas man went and taken Henry’s arm and led him outen the lot. Mrs. Armstid come behind them and the Texas man taken some money outen his pocket and he give it into Mrs. Armstid’s hand. “Get him into the wagon and take him on home,” the Texas man says, like he might have been telling them he enjoyed his supper.

Then here come Flem. “What’s that for, Buck?” Flem says.

“Thinks he bought one of them ponies,” the Texas man says. “Get him on away, missus.”

But Henry wouldn't go. "Give him back that money," he says. "I bought that horse and I aim to have him if I have to shoot him."

And there was Flem, standing there with his hands in his pockets, chewing, like he had just happened to be passing.

"You take your money and I take my horse," Henry says. "Give it back to him," he says to Mrs. Armstid.

"You don't own no horse of mine," the Texas man says. "Get him on home, missus."

Then Henry seen Flem. "You got something to do with these horses," he says. "I bought one. Here's the money for it." He taken the bill outen Mrs. Armstid's hand. He offered it to Flem. "I bought one. Ask him. Here. Here's the money," he says, giving the bill to Flem.

When Flem taken the money, the Texas man dropped the rope he had snatched outen Henry's hand. He had done sent Eck Snopes's boy up to the store for another box of gingersnaps, and he taken the box outen his pocket and looked into it. It was empty and he dropped it on the ground. "Mr. Snopes will have your money for you to-morrow," he says to Mrs. Armstid. "You can get it from him to-morrow. He don't own no horse. You get him into the wagon and get him on home." Mrs. Armstid went back to the wagon and got in. "Where's that ere buckboard I bought?" the Texas man says. It was after sundown then. And then Mrs. Littlejohn come out on the porch and rung the supper bell.

IV

I come on in and et supper. Mrs. Littlejohn would bring in a pan of bread or something, then she would go out to the porch a minute and come back and tell us. The Texas man had hitched his team to the

buckboard he had swapped them last two horses for, and him and Flem had gone, and then she told that the rest of them that never had ropes had went back to the store with I. O. Snopes to get some ropes, and wasn't nobody at the gate but Henry Armstid, and Mrs. Armstid setting in the wagon in the road, and Eck Snopes and that boy of hisn.

"I don't care how many of them fool men gets killed by them things," Mrs. Littlejohn says, "but I ain't going to let Eck Snopes take that boy into that lot again." So she went down to the gate, but she come back without the boy or Eck neither.

"It ain't no need to worry about that boy," I says. "He's charmed." He was right behind Eck last night when Eck went to help feed them. The whole drove of them jumped clean over that boy's head and never touched him. It was Eck that touched him. Eck snatched him into the wagon and taken a rope and frailed the tar outen him.

So I had done et and went to my room and was undressing, long as I had a long trip to make next day; I was trying to sell a machine to Mrs. Bundren up past Whiteleaf; when Henry Armstid opened that gate and went in by hisself. They couldn't make him wait for the balance of them to get back with their ropes. Eck Snopes said he tried to make Henry wait, but Henry wouldn't do it.

Eck said Henry walked right up to them and that when they broke, they run clean over Henry like a hay-mow breaking down. Eck said he snatched that boy of hisn out of the way just in time and that them things went through that gate like a creek flood and into the wagons and teams hitched side the road, busting wagon tongues and snapping harness like it was fishing-line, with Mrs. Armstid still setting in their wagon in the middle of it like something carved outen wood. Then they

scattered, wild horses and tame mules with pieces of harness and single trees dangling offen them, both ways up and down the road.

“There goes ourn, paw!” Eck says his boy said. “There it goes, into Mrs. Littlejohn’s house.” Eck says it run right up the steps and into the house like a boarder late for supper. I reckon so. Anyway, I was in my room, in my underclothes, with one sock on and one sock in my hand, leaning out the window when the commotion busted out, when I heard something run into the melodeon in the hall; it sounded like a railroad engine.

Then the door to my room come sailing in like when you throw a tin bucket top into the wind and I looked over my shoulder and see something that looked like a fourteen-foot pinwheel a-blaring its eyes at me. It had to blare them fast, because I was already done jumped out the window.

I reckon it was anxious, too. I reckon it hadn’t never seen barbed wire or shell corn before, but I know it hadn’t never seen underclothes before, or maybe it was a sewing-machine agent it hadn’t never seen. Anyway, it swirled and turned to run back up the hall and outen the house, when it met Eck Snopes and that boy just coming in, carrying a rope.

It swirled again and run down the hall and out the back door just in time to meet Mrs. Littlejohn. She had just gathered up the clothes she had washed, and she was coming onto the back porch with a armful of washing in one hand and a scrubbing-board in the other, when the horse skidded up to her, trying to stop and swirl again. It never taken Mrs. Littlejohn no time a-tall.

“Git outen here, you son,” she says. She hit it across the face with the scrubbing-board; that ere scrubbing-board split as neat as ere a axe could have done it, and when the horse swirled to run back up the hall, she hit it again with what was left of the scrubbing-board, not on the head this time. “And stay out,” she says.

Eck and that boy was half-way down the hall by this time. I reckon that horse looked like a pinwheel to Eck too. “Git to hell outen here, Ad!” Eck says. Only there wasn’t time. Eck dropped flat on his face, but the boy never moved. The boy was about a yard tall maybe, in overhalls just like Eck’s; that horse swoared over his head without touching a hair.

I saw that, because I was just coming back up the front steps, still carrying that ere sock and still in my underclothes, when the horse come onto the porch again. It taken one look at me and swirled again and run to the end of the porch and jumped the banisters and the lot fence like a hen-hawk and lit in the lot running and went out the gate again and jumped eight or ten upside-down wagons and went on down the road. It was a full moon then. Mrs. Armstid was still setting in the wagon like she had done been carved outen wood and left there and forgot.

That horse. It ain’t never missed a lick. It was going about forty miles a hour when it come to the bridge over the creek. It would have had a clear road, but it so happened that Vernon Tull was already using the bridge when it got there. He was coming back from town; he hadn’t heard about the auction; him and his wife and three daughters and Mrs. Tull’s aunt, all setting in chairs in the wagon bed, and all asleep, including the mules.

They waked up when the horse hit the bridge one time, but Tull said the first he knew was when the mules tried to turn the wagon around in the middle of the bridge and he seen that spotted varmint run right twixt the mules and run up the wagon tongue like a squirrel. He said he just had time to hit it across the face with his whip-stock, because about that time the mules turned the wagon around on that ere one-way bridge and that horse clumb across one of the mules and jumped down onto the bridge again and went on, with Vernon standing up in the wagon and kicking at it.

Tull said the mules turned in the harness and clumb back into the wagon too, with Tull trying to beat them out again, with the reins wrapped around his wrist. After that he says all he seen was overturned chairs and womenfolks' legs and white drawers shining in the moonlight, and his mules and that spotted horse going on up the road like a ghost.

The mules jerked Tull outen the wagon and drug him a spell on the bridge before the reins broke. They thought at first that he was dead, and while they was kneeling around him, picking the bridge splinters outen him, here come Eck and that boy, still carrying the rope. They was running and breathing a little hard. "Where'd he go?" Eck says.

V

I went back and got my pants and shirt and shoes on just in time to go and help get Henry Armstid outen the trash in the lot. I be dog if he didn't look like he was dead, with his head hanging back and his teeth showing in the moonlight, and a little rim of white under his eyelids. We could still hear them horses, here and there; hadn't none of them got more than four-five miles away yet, not knowing the country, I

reckon. So we could hear them and folks yelling now and then: “Whooey. Head him!”

We toted Henry into Mrs. Littlejohn’s. She was in the hall; she hadn’t put down the armful of clothes. She taken one look at us, and she laid down the busted scrubbing-board and taken up the lamp and opened a empty door. “Bring him in here,” she says.

We toted him in and laid him on the bed. Mrs. Littlejohn set the lamp on the dresser, still carrying the clothes. “I’ll declare, you men,” she says. Our shadows was way up the wall, tiptoeing too; we could hear ourselves breathing. “Better get his wife,” Mrs. Littlejohn says. She went out, carrying the clothes.

“I reckon we had,” Quick says. “Go get her, somebody.”

“Whyn’t you go?” Winterbottom says.

“Let Ernest git her,” Durley says. “He lives neighbors with them.”

Ernest went to fetch her. I be dog if Henry didn’t look like he was dead. Mrs. Littlejohn come back, with a kettle and some towels. She went to work on Henry, and then Mrs. Armstid and Ernest come in. Mrs. Armstid come to the foot of the bed and stood there, with her hands rolled into her apron, watching what Mrs. Littlejohn was doing, I reckon.

“You men git outen the way,” Mrs. Littlejohn says. “Git outside,” she says. “See if you can’t find something else to play with that will kill some more of you.”

“Is he dead?” Winterbottom says.

“It ain’t your fault if he ain’t,” Mrs. Littlejohn says. “Go tell Will Varner to come up here. I reckon a man ain’t so different from a mule, come long come short. Except maybe a mule’s got more sense.”

We went to get Uncle Billy. It was a full moon. We could hear them, now and then, four mile away: “Whooey. Head him.” The country was full of them, one on ever wooden bridge in the land, running across it like thunder: “Whooey. There he goes. Head him.”

We hadn’t got far before Henry begun to scream. I reckon Mrs. Littlejohn’s water had brung him to; anyway, he wasn’t dead. We went on to Uncle Billy’s. The house was dark. We called to him, and after a while the window opened and Uncle Billy put his head out, peart as a peckerwood, listening.

“Are they still trying to catch them durn rabbits?” he says.

He come down, with his britches on over his night-shirt and his suspenders dangling, carrying his horse-doctoring grip. “Yes, sir,” he says, cocking his head like a woodpecker; “they’re still a-trying.”

We could hear Henry before we reached Mrs. Littlejohn’s. He was going Ah-Ah-Ah. We stopped in the yard. Uncle Billy went on in. We could hear Henry. We stood in the yard, hearing them on the bridges, this-a-way and that: “Whooey. Whooey.”

“Eck Snopes ought to caught hisn,” Ernest says.

“Looks like he ought,” Winterbottom said.

Henry was going Ah-Ah-Ah steady in the house; then he begun to scream. “Uncle Billy’s started,” Quick says. We looked into the hall. We could see the light where the door was. Then Mrs. Littlejohn come out.

“Will needs some help,” she says. “You, Ernest. You’ll do.” Ernest went into the house.

“Hear them?” Quick said. “That one was on Four Mile bridge.” We could hear them; it sounded like thunder a long way off; it didn’t last long:

“Whooey.”

We could hear Henry: “Ah-Ah-Ah-Ah-Ah.”

“They are both started now,” Winterbottom says. “Ernest too.”

That was early in the night. Which was a good thing, because it taken a long night for folks to chase them things right and for Henry to lay there and holler, being as Uncle Billy never had none of this here chloryfoam to set Henry’s leg with. So it was considerate in Flem to get them started early. And what do you reckon Flem’s com-ment was?

That’s right. Nothing. Because he wasn’t there. Hadn’t nobody see him since that Texas man left.

VI

That was Saturday night. I reckon Mrs. Armstid got home about daylight, to see about the chaps. I don’t know where they thought her and Henry was. But lucky the oldest one was a gal, about twelve, big enough to take care of the little ones. Which she did for the next two days. Mrs. Armstid would nurse Henry all night and work in the kitchen

for hern and Henry's keep, and in the afternoon she would drive home (it was about four miles) to see to the chaps. She would cook up a pot of victuals and leave it on the stove, and the gal would bar the house and keep the little ones quiet. I would hear Mrs. Littlejohn and Mrs. Armstid talking in the kitchen. "How are the chaps making out?" Mrs. Littlejohn says.

"All right," Mrs. Armstid says.

"Don't they git skeered at night?" Mrs. Littlejohn says.

"Ina May bars the door when I leave," Mrs. Armstid says. "She's got the axe in bed with her. I reckon she can make out."

I reckon they did. And I reckon Mrs. Armstid was waiting for Flem to come back to town; hadn't nobody seen him until this morning; to get her money the Texas man said Flem was keeping for her. Sho. I reckon she was.

Anyway, I heard Mrs. Armstid and Mrs. Littlejohn talking in the kitchen this morning while I was eating breakfast. Mrs. Littlejohn had just told Mrs. Armstid that Flem was in town. "You can ask him for that five dollars," Mrs. Littlejohn says.

"You reckon he'll give it to me?" Mrs. Armstid says.

Mrs. Littlejohn was washing dishes, washing them like a man, like they was made out of iron. "No," she says. "But asking him won't do no hurt. It might shame him. I don't reckon it will, but it might."

"If he wouldn't give it back, it ain't no use to ask," Mrs. Armstid says.

"Suit yourself," Mrs. Littlejohn says. "It's your money."

I could hear the dishes.

“Do you reckon he might give it back to me?” Mrs. Armstid says. “That Texas man said he would. He said I could get it from Mr. Snopes later.”

“Then go and ask him for it,” Mrs. Littlejohn says.

I could hear the dishes.

“He won’t give it back to me,” Mrs. Armstid says.

“All right,” Mrs. Littlejohn says. “Don’t ask him for it, then.”

I could hear the dishes; Mrs. Armstid was helping. “You don’t reckon he would, do you?” she says. Mrs. Littlejohn never said nothing. It sounded like she was throwing the dishes at one another. “Maybe I better go and talk to Henry about it,” Mrs. Armstid says.

“I would,” Mrs. Littlejohn says. I be dog if it didn’t sound like she had two plates in her hands, beating them together. “Then Henry can buy another five-dollar horse with it. Maybe he’ll buy one next time that will out and out kill him. If I thought that, I’d give you back the money, myself.”

“I reckon I better talk to him first,” Mrs. Armstid said. Then it sounded like Mrs. Littlejohn taken up all the dishes and throwed them at the cook-stove, and I come away.

That was this morning. I had been up to Bundren’s and back, and I thought that things would have kind of settled down. So after breakfast, I went up to the store. And there was Flem, setting in the store-chair and whittling, like he might not have ever moved since he come to clerk for Jody Varner. I. O. was leaning in the door, in his shirt

sleeves and with his hair parted too, same as Flem was before he turned the clerking job over to I. O. It's a funny thing about them Snopes: they all looks alike, yet there ain't ere a two of them that claims brothers.

They're always just cousins, like Flem and Eck and Flem and I. O. Eck was there too, squatting against the wall, him and that boy, eating cheese and crackers outen a sack; they told me that Eck hadn't been home a-tall. And that Lon Quick hadn't got back to town, even.

He followed his horse clean down to Samson's Bridge, with a wagon and a camp outfit. Eck finally caught one of hisn. It run into a blind lane at Freeman's and Eck and the boy taken and tied their rope across the end of the lane, about three foot high. The horse come to the end of the lane and whirled and run back without ever stopping. Eck says it never seen the rope a-tall. He says it looked just like one of these here Christmas pinwheels. "Didn't it try to run again?" I says.

"No," Eck says, eating a bite of cheese offen his knife blade. "Just kicked some."

"Kicked some?" I says.

"It broke its neck," Eck says.

Well, they was squatting there, about six of them, talking, talking at Flem; never nobody knowed yet if Flem had ere a interest in them horses or not. So finally I come right out and asked him. "Flem's done skun all of us so much," I says, "that we're proud of him. Come on, Flem," I says, "how much did you and that Texas man make offen them horses? You can tell us. Ain't nobody here but Eck that bought one of

them; the others ain't got back to town yet, and Eck's your own cousin; he'll be proud to hear, too. How much did you-all make?"

They was all whittling, not looking at Flem, making like they was studying. But you could a heard a pin drop. And I. O. He had been rubbing his back up and down on the door, but he stopped now, watching Flem like a pointing dog. Flem finished cutting the sliver offen his stick. He spit across the porch, into the road. " 'Twarn't none of my horses," he says.

I. O. cackled, like a hen, slapping his legs with both hands. "You boys might just as well quit trying to get ahead of Flem," he said.

Well, about that time I see Mrs. Armstid come outen Mrs. Littlejohn's gate, coming up the road. I never said nothing. I says, "Well, if a man can't take care of himself in a trade, he can't blame the man that trims him."

Flem never said nothing, trimming at the stick. He hadn't seen Mrs. Armstid. "Yes, sir," I says. "A fellow like Henry Armstid ain't got nobody but hisself to blame."

"Course he ain't," I. O. says. He ain't seen her, neither. "Henry Armstid's a born fool. Always is been. If Flem hadn't a got his money, somebody else would."

We looked at Flem. He never moved. Mrs. Armstid come on up the road.

"That's right," I says. "But, come to think of it, Henry never bought no horse." We looked at Flem; you could a heard a match drop. "That Texas man told her to get that five dollars back from Flem next day. I

reckon Flem's done already taken that money to Mrs. Littlejohn's and give it to Mrs. Armstid."

We watched Flem. I. O. quit rubbing his back against the door again. After a while Flem raised his head and spit across the porch, into the dust. I. O. cackled, just like a hen. "Ain't he a beating fellow, now?" I. O. says.

Mrs. Armstid was getting closer, so I kept on talking, watching to see if Flem would look up and see her. But he never looked up. I went on talking about Tull, about how he was going to sue Flem, and Flem setting there, whittling his stick, not saying nothing else after he said they wasn't none of his horses.

Then I. O. happened to look around. He seen Mrs. Armstid. "Psssst!" he says. Flem looked up. "Here she comes!" I. O. says. "Go out the back. I'll tell her you done went in to town to-day."

But Flem never moved. He just set there, whittling, and we watched Mrs. Armstid come up onto the porch, in that ere faded sunbonnet and wrapper and them tennis shoes that made a kind of hissing noise on the porch. She come onto the porch and stopped, her hands rolled into her dress in front, not looking at nothing.

"He said Saturday," she says, "that he wouldn't sell Henry no horse. He said I could get the money from you."

Flem looked up. The knife never stopped. It went on trimming off a sliver same as if he was watching it. "He taken that money off with him when he left," Flem says.

Mrs. Armstid never looked at nothing. We never looked at her, neither, except that boy of Eck's. He had a half-et cracker in his hand, watching her, chewing.

"He said Henry hadn't bought no horse," Mrs. Armstid says. "He said for me to get the money from you today."

"I reckon he forgot about it," Flem said. "He taken that money off with him Saturday." He whittled again. I. O. kept on rubbing his back, slow. He licked his lips. After a while the woman looked up the road, where it went on up the hill, toward the graveyard. She looked up that way for a while, with that boy of Eck's watching her and I. O. rubbing his back slow against the door. Then she turned back toward the steps.

"I reckon it's time to get dinner started," she says.

"How's Henry this morning, Mrs. Armstid?" Winterbottom says.

She looked at Winterbottom; she almost stopped. "He's resting, I thank you kindly," she says.

Flem got up, outen the chair, putting his knife away. He spit across the porch. "Wait a minute, Mrs. Armstid," he says. She stopped again. She didn't look at him. Flem went on into the store, with I. O. done quit rubbing his back now, with his head craned after Flem, and Mrs. Armstid standing there with her hands rolled into her dress, not looking at nothing.

A wagon come up the road and passed; it was Freeman, on the way to town. Then Flem come out again, with I. O. still watching him. Flem had one of these little striped sacks of Jody Varner's candy; I bet he still owes Jody that nickel, too. He put the sack into Mrs. Armstid's hand,

like he would have put it into a hollow stump. He spit again across the porch. “A little sweetening for the chaps,” he says.

“You’re right kind,” Mrs. Armstid says. She held the sack of candy in her hand, not looking at nothing. Eck’s boy was watching the sack, the half-et cracker in his hand; he wasn’t chewing now. He watched Mrs. Armstid roll the sack into her apron. “I reckon I better get on back and help with dinner,” she says. She turned and went back across the porch. Flem set down in the chair again and opened his knife. He spit across the porch again, past Mrs.

Armstid where she hadn’t went down the steps yet. Then she went on, in that ere sunbonnet and wrapper all the same color, back down the road toward Mrs. Littlejohn’s. You couldn’t see her dress move, like a natural woman walking. She looked like a old snag still standing up and moving along on a high water. We watched her turn in at Mrs. Littlejohn’s and go outen sight. Flem was whittling. I. O. begun to rub his back on the door. Then he begun to cackle, just like a durn hen.

“You boys might just as well quit trying,” I. O. says. “You can’t git ahead of Flem. You can’t touch him. Ain’t he a sight, now?”

I be dog if he ain’t. If I had brung a herd of wild cattymounts into town and sold them to my neighbors and kinfolks, they would have lynched me. Yes, sir.

The End

The Hound, William Faulkner

The Hound

Harper's, August 1931. Later revised for 'The Hamlet'

TO COTTON THE shot was the loudest thing he had ever heard in his life. It was too loud to be heard all at once. It continued to build up about the thicket, the dim, faint road, long after the hammerlike blow of the ten-gage shotgun had shocked into his shoulder and long after the smoke of the black powder with which it was charged had dissolved, and after the maddened horse had whirled twice and then turned galloping, diminishing, the empty stirrups clashing against the empty saddle.

It made too much noise. It was outrageous, unbelievable — a gun which he had owned for twenty years. It stunned him with amazed outrage, seeming to press him down into the thicket, so that when he could make the second shot, it was too late and the hound too was gone.

Then he wanted to run. He had expected that. He had coached himself the night before. "Right after it you'll want to run," he told himself. "But you can't run. You got to finish it. You got to clean it up. It will be hard, but you got to do it. You got to set there in the bushes and shut your eyes and count slow until you can make to finish it."

He did that. He laid the gun down and sat where he had lain behind the log. His eyes were closed. He counted slowly, until he had stopped shaking and until the sound of the gun and the echo of the galloping

horse had died out of his ears. He had chosen his place well. It was a quiet road, little used, marked not once in three months save by that departed horse; a short cut between the house where the owner of the horse lived and Varner's store; a quiet, fading, grass-grown trace along the edge of the river bottom, empty save for the two of them, the one squatting in the bushes, the other lying on his face in the road.

Cotton was a bachelor. He lived in a chinked log cabin floored with clay on the edge of the bottom, four miles away. It was dusk when he reached home. In the well-house at the back he drew water and washed his shoes. They were not muddier than usual, and he did not wear them save in severe weather, but he washed them carefully. Then he cleaned the shotgun and washed it too, barrel and stock; why, he could not have said, since he had never heard of finger prints, and immediately afterward he picked up the gun again and carried it into the house and put it away. He kept firewood, a handful of charred pine knots, in the chimney corner.

He built a fire on the clay hearth and cooked his supper and ate and went to bed. He slept on a quilt pallet on the floor; he went to bed by barring the door and removing his overalls and lying down. It was dark after the fire burned out; he lay in the darkness. He thought about nothing at all save that he did not expect to sleep. He felt no triumph, vindication, nothing. He just lay there, thinking about nothing at all, even when he began to hear the dog. Usually at night he would hear dogs, single dogs ranging alone in the bottom, or coon- or cat-hunting packs. Having nothing else to do, his life, his heredity, and his heritage centered within a five-mile radius of Varner's store.

He knew almost any dog he would hear by its voice, as he knew almost any man he would hear by his voice. He knew this dog's voice. It and the galloping horse with the flapping stirrups and the owner of the

horse had been inseparable: where he saw one of them, the other two would not be far away — a lean, rangy brute that charged savagely at anyone who approached its master's house, with something of the master's certitude and overbearance; and to-day was not the first time he had tried to kill it, though only now did he know why he had not gone through with it. "I never knowed my own luck," he said to himself, lying on the pallet. "I never knowed. If I had went ahead and killed it, killed the dog...."

He was still not triumphant. It was too soon yet to be proud, vindicated. It was too soon. It had to do with death. He did not believe that a man could pick up and move that irrevocable distance at a moment's notice. He had completely forgotten about the body. So he lay with his gaunt, underfed body empty with waiting, thinking of nothing at all, listening to the dog. The cries came at measured intervals, timbrous, sourceless, with the sad, peaceful, abject quality of a single hound in the darkness, when suddenly he found himself sitting bolt upright on the pallet.

"Nigger talk," he said. He had heard (he had never known a negro himself, because of the antipathy, the economic jealousy, between his kind and negroes) how negroes claimed that a dog would howl at the recent grave of its master. "Hit's nigger talk," he said all the time he was putting on his overalls and his recently cleaned shoes. He opened the door. From the dark river bottom below the hill on which the cabin sat the howling of the dog came, bell-like and mournful. From a nail just inside the door he took down a coiled plowline and descended the slope.

Against the dark wall of the jungle fireflies winked and drifted; from beyond the black wall came the booming and grunting of frogs. When he entered the timber he could not see his own hand. The footing was treacherous with slime and creepers and bramble. They possessed the

perversity of inanimate things, seeming to spring out of the darkness and clutch him with spiky tentacles. From the musing impenetrability ahead the voice of the hound came steadily. He followed the sound, muddy again; the air was chill, yet he was sweating. He was quite near the sound. The hound ceased. He plunged forward, his teeth drying under his dry lip, his hands clawed and blind, toward the ceased sound, the faint phosphorescent glare of the dog's eyes. The eyes vanished. He stopped, panting, stooped, the plowline in his hand, looking for the eyes. He cursed the dog, his voice a dry whisper. He could hear silence but nothing else.

He crawled on hands and knees, telling where he was by the shape of the trees on the sky. After a time, the brambles raking and slashing at his face, he found a shallow ditch. It was rank with rotted leaves; he waded ankle-deep in the pitch darkness, in something not earth and not water, his elbow crooked before his face. He stumbled upon something; an object with a slack feel. When he touched it, something gave a choked, infantlike cry, and he started back, hearing the creature scuttle away. "Just a possum," he said. "Hit was just a possum."

He wiped his hands on his flanks in order to pick up the shoulders. His flanks were foul with slime. He wiped his hands on his shirt, across his breast, then he picked up the shoulders. He walked backward, dragging it. From time to time he would stop and wipe his hands on his shirt. He stopped beside a tree, a rotting cypress shell, topless, about ten feet tall. He had put the coiled plowline into his bosom. He knotted it about the body and climbed the stump. The top was open, rotted out. He was not a large man, not as large as the body, yet he hauled it up to him hand over hand, bumping and scraping it along the stump, until it lay across the lip like a half-filled meal sack. The knot in the rope had slipped tight. At last he took out his knife and cut the rope and tumbled the body into the hollow stump.

It didn’t fall far. He shoved at it, feeling around it with his hands for the obstruction; he tied the rope about the stub of a limb and held the end of it in his hands and stood on the body and began to jump up and down upon it, whereupon it fled suddenly beneath him and left him dangling on the rope.

He tried to climb the rope, rasping off with his knuckles the rotten fiber, a faint, damp powder of decay like snuff in his nostrils. He heard the stub about which the rope was tied crack and felt it begin to give. He leaped upward from nothing, scrabbling at the rotten wood, and got one hand over the edge. The wood crumbled beneath his fingers; he climbed perpetually without an inch of gain, his mouth cracked upon his teeth, his eyes glaring at the sky.

The wood stopped crumbling. He dangled by his hands, breathing. He drew himself up and straddled the edge. He sat there for a while. Then he climbed down and leaned against the hollow trunk.

When he reached his cabin he was tired, spent. He had never been so tired. He stopped at the door. Fireflies still blew along the dark band of timber, and owls hooted and the frogs still boomed and grunted. “I ain’t never been so tired,” he said, leaning against the house, the wall which he had built log by log. “Like ever thing had got outen hand. Climbing that stump, and the noise that shot made. Like I had got to be somebody else without knowing it, in a place where noise was louder, climbing harder to climb, without knowing it.” He went to bed. He took off the muddy shoes, the overalls, and lay down; it was late then. He could tell by a summer star that came into the square window at two o’clock and after.

Then, as if it had waited for him to get settled and comfortable, the hound began to howl again. Lying in the dark, he heard the first cry come up from the river bottom, mournful, timbrous, profound.

Five men in overalls squatted against the wall of Varner's store. Cotton made the sixth. He sat on the top step, his back against a gnawed post which supported the wooden awning of the veranda. The seventh man sat in the single splint chair; a fat, slow man in denim trousers and a collarless white shirt, smoking a cob pipe. He was past middle-age. He was sheriff of the county. The man about whom they were talking was named Houston.

"He hadn't no reason to run off," one said. "To disappear. To send his horse back home with a empty saddle. He hadn't no reason. Owning his own land, his house. Making a good crop ever year. He was as well-fixed as ere a man in the county. A bachelor too. He hadn't no reason to disappear. You can mark it. He never run. I don't know what; but Houston never run."

"I don't know," a second said. "You can't tell what a man has got in his mind. Houston might a had reason that we don't know, for making it look like something had happened to him. For clearing outen the country and leaving it to look like something had happened to him.

It's been done before. Folks before him has had reason to light out for Texas with a changed name."

Cotton sat a little below their eyes, his face lowered beneath his worn, stained, shabby hat. He was whittling at a stick, a piece of pine board.

"But a fellow can't disappear without leaving no trace," a third said. "Can he, Sheriff?"

“Well, I don’t know,” the Sheriff said. He removed the cob pipe and spat neatly across the porch into the dust. “You can’t tell what a man will do when he’s pinched. Except it will be something you never thought of. Never counted on. But if you can find just what pinched him you can pretty well tell what he done.”

“Houston was smart enough to do ere a thing he taken a notion to,” the second said. “If he’d wanted to disappear, I reckon we’d a known about what we know now.”

“And what’s that?” the third said.

“Nothing,” the second said.

“That’s a fact,” the first said. “Houston was a secret man.”

“He wasn’t the only secret man around here,” a fourth said. To Cotton it sounded sudden, since the fourth man had said no word before. He sat against the post, his hat slanted forward so that his face was invisible, believing that he could feel their eyes. He watched the sliver peel slow and smooth from the stick, ahead of his worn knife-blade. “I got to say something,” he told himself.

“He warn’t no smarter than nobody else,” he said. Then he wished he had not spoken. He could see their feet beneath his hat-brim. He trimmed the stick, watching the knife, the steady sliver. “It’s got to trim off smooth,” he told himself. “It don’t dast to break.” He was talking; he could hear his voice: “Swelling around like he was the biggest man in the county.

Setting that ere dog on folks' stock." He believed that he could feel their eyes, watching their feet, watching the sliver trim smooth and thin and unhurried beneath the knife blade. Suddenly he thought about the gun, the loud crash, the jarring shock. "Maybe I'll have to kill them all," he said to himself — a mild man in worn overalls, with a gaunt face and lack-luster eyes like a sick man, whittling a stick with a thin hand, thinking about killing them.

"Not them; just the words, the talk." But the talk was familiar, the intonation, the gestures; but so was Houston. He had known Houston all his life: that prosperous and overbearing man. "With a dog," Cotton said, watching the knife return and bite into another sliver. "A dog that et better than me. I work, and eat worse than his dog. If I had been his dog, I would not have … We're better off without him," he said, blurted. He could feel their eyes, sober, intent.

"He always did rile Ernest," the first said.

"He taken advantage of me," Cotton said, watching the infallible knife. "He taken advantage of ever man he could."

"He was a overbearing man," the Sheriff said.

Cotton believed that they were still watching him, hidden behind their detached voices.

"Smart, though," the third said.

"He wasn't smart enough to win that suit against Ernest over that hog."

"That's so. How much did Ernest get outen that lawing? He ain't never told, has he?"

Cotton believed that they knew how much he had got from the suit. The hog had come into his lot one October. He penned it up; he tried by inquiry to find the owner. But none claimed it until he had wintered it on his corn. In the spring Houston claimed the hog. They went to court. Houston was awarded the hog, though he was assessed a sum for the wintering of it, and one dollar as pound-fee for a stray. “I reckon that’s Ernest’s business,” the Sheriff said after a time.

Again Cotton heard himself talking, blurting. “It was a dollar,” he said, watching his knuckles whiten about the knife handle. “One dollar.” He was trying to make his mouth stop talking. “After all I taken offen him.…”

“Juries does queer things,” the Sheriff said, “in little matters. But in big matters they’re mostly right.”

Cotton whittled, steady and deliberate. “At first you’ll want to run,” he told himself. “But you got to finish it. You got to count a hundred, if it needs, and finish it.”

“I heard that dog again last night,” the third said.

“You did?” the Sheriff said.

“It ain’t been home since the day the horse come in with the saddle empty,” the first said.

“It’s out hunting, I reckon,” the Sheriff said. “It’ll come in when it gets hungry.”

Cotton trimmed at the stick. He did not move.

“Niggers claim a hound’ll howl till a dead body’s found,” the second said.

“I’ve heard that,” the Sheriff said. After a time a car came up and the Sheriff got into it. The car was driven by a deputy. “We’ll be late for supper,” the Sheriff said. The car mounted the hill; the sound died away. It was getting toward sundown.

“He ain’t much bothered,” the third said.

“Why should he be?” the first said. “After all, a man can leave his house and go on a trip without telling everybody.”

“Looks like he’d a unsaddled that mare, though,” the second said. “And there’s something the matter with that dog. It ain’t been home since, and it ain’t treed. I been hearing it ever night. It ain’t treed. It’s howling. It ain’t been home since Tuesday. And that was the day Houston rid away from the store here on that mare.”

Cotton was the last one to leave the store. It was after dark when he reached home. He ate some cold bread and loaded the shotgun and sat beside the open door until the hound began to howl. Then he descended the hill and entered the bottom.

The dog’s voice guided him; after a while it ceased, and he saw its eyes. They were now motionless; in the red glare of the explosion he saw the beast entire in sharp relief. He saw it in the act of leaping into the ensuing welter of darkness; he heard the thud of its body. But he couldn’t find it. He looked carefully, quartering back and forth, stopping to listen.

But he had seen the shot strike it and hurl it backward, and he turned aside for about a hundred yards in the pitch darkness and came to a slough. He flung the shotgun into it, hearing the sluggish splash,

watching the vague water break and recover, until the last ripple died. He went home and to bed.

He didn't go to sleep though, although he knew he would not hear the dog. "It's dead," he told himself, lying on his quilt pallet in the dark. "I saw the bullets knock it down. I could count the shot. The dog is dead." But still he did not sleep. He did not need sleep; he did not feel tired or stale in the mornings, though he knew it was not the dog. He knew he would not hear the dog again, and that sleep had nothing to do with the dog. So he took to spending the nights sitting up in a chair in the door, watching the fireflies and listening to the frogs and the owls.

He entered Varner's store. It was in mid-afternoon; the porch was empty, save for the clerk, whose name was Snopes. "Been looking for you for two-three days," Snopes said. "Come inside."

Cotton entered. The store smelled of cheese and leather and new earth. Snopes went behind the counter and reached from under the counter a shotgun. It was caked with mud. "This is yourn, ain't it?" Snopes said. "Vernon Tull said it was. A nigger squirl hunter found it in a slough."

Cotton came to the counter and looked at the gun. He did not touch it; he just looked at it. "It ain't mine," he said.

"Ain't nobody around here got one of them old Hadley ten-gages except you," Snopes said. "Tull says it's yourn."

"It ain't none of mine," Cotton said. "I got one like it. But mine's to home."

Snopes lifted the gun. He breeched it. "It had one empty and one load in it," he said. "Who you reckon it belongs to?"

“I don’t know,” Cotton said. “Mine’s to home.” He had come to purchase food. He bought it: crackers, cheese, a tin of sardines. It was not dark when he reached home, yet he opened the sardines and ate his supper. When he lay down he did not even remove his overalls. It was as though he waited for something, stayed dressed to move and go at once. He was still waiting for whatever it was when the window turned gray and then yellow and then blue; when, framed by the square window, he saw against the fresh morning a single soaring speck. By sunrise there were three of them, and then seven.

All that day he watched them gather, wheeling and wheeling, drawing their concentric black circles, watching the lower ones wheel down and down and disappear below the trees. He thought it was the dog. “They’ll be through by noon,” he said. “It wasn’t a big dog.”

When noon came they had not gone away; there were still more of them, while still the lower ones dropped down and disappeared below the trees. He watched them until dark came, until they went away, flapping singly and sluggishly up from beyond the trees. “I got to eat,” he said. “With the work I got to do to-night.” He went to the hearth and knelt and took up a pine knot, and he was kneeling, nursing a match into flame, when he heard the hound again; the cry deep, timbrous, unmistakable, and sad. He cooked his supper and ate.

With his axe in his hand he descended through his meager corn patch. The cries of the hound could have guided him, but he did not need it. He had not reached the bottom before he believed that his nose was guiding him. The dog still howled. He paid it no attention, until the beast sensed him and ceased, as it had done before; again he saw its eyes. He paid no attention to them. He went to the hollow cypress

trunk and swung his axe into it, the axe sinking helve-deep into the rotten wood. While he was tugging at it something flowed silent and savage out of the darkness behind him and struck him a slashing blow.

The axe had just come free; he fell with the axe in his hand, feeling the hot reek of the dog's breath on his face and hearing the click of its teeth as he struck it down with his free hand. It leaped again; he saw its eyes now. He was on his knees, the axe raised in both hands now. He swung it, hitting nothing, feeling nothing; he saw the dog's eyes, crouched. He rushed at the eyes; they vanished. He waited a moment, but heard nothing. He returned to the tree.

At the first stroke of the axe the dog sprang at him again. He was expecting it, so he whirled and struck with the axe at the two eyes and felt the axe strike something and whirl from his hands. He heard the dog whimper, he could hear it crawling away. On his hands and knees he hunted for the axe until he found it.

He began to chop at the base of the stump, stopping between blows to listen. But he heard nothing, saw nothing. Overhead the stars were swinging slowly past; he saw the one that looked into his window at two o'clock. He began to chop steadily at the base of the stump.

The wood was rotten; the axe sank helve-deep at each stroke, as into sand or mud; suddenly Cotton knew that it was not imagination he smelled. He dropped the axe and began to tear at the rotten wood with his hands. The hound was beside him, whimpering; he did not know it was there, not even when it thrust its head into the opening, crowding against him, howling.

“Git away,” he said, still without being conscious that it was the dog. He dragged at the body, feeling it slough upon its own bones, as though it were too large for itself; he turned his face away, his teeth glared, his breath furious and outraged and restrained. He could feel the dog surge against his legs, its head in the orifice, howling.

When the body came free, Cotton went over backward. He lay on his back on the wet ground, looking up at a faint patch of starry sky. “I ain’t never been so tired,” he said. The dog was howling, with an abject steadiness. “Shut up,” Cotton said. “Hush. Hush.” The dog didn’t hush. “It’ll be daylight soon,” Cotton said to himself. “I got to get up.”

He got up and kicked at the dog. It moved away, but when he stooped and took hold of the legs and began to back away, the dog was there again, moaning to itself. When he would stop to rest, the dog would howl again; again he kicked at it. Then it began to be dawn, the trees coming spectral and vast out of the miasmic darkness. He could see the dog plainly. It was gaunt, thin, with a long bloody gash across its face.

“I’ll have to get shut of you,” he said. Watching the dog, he stooped and found a stick. It was rotten, foul with slime. He clutched it. When the hound lifted its muzzle to howl, he struck. The dog whirled; there was a long fresh scar running from shoulder to flank. It leaped at him, without a sound; he struck again. The stick took it fair between the eyes. He picked up the ankles and tried to run.

It was almost light. When he broke through the undergrowth upon the river bank the channel was invisible; a long bank of what looked like cotton batting, though he could hear the water beneath it somewhere. There was a freshness here; the edges of the mist licked into curling tongues. He stooped and lifted the body and hurled it into the bank of

mist. At the instant of vanishing he saw it — a sluggish sprawl of three limbs instead of four, and he knew why it had been so hard to free from the stump.

“I’ll have to make another trip,” he said; then he heard a pattering rush behind him. He didn’t have time to turn when the hound struck him and knocked him down. It didn’t pause. Lying on his back, he saw it in midair like a bird, vanish into the mist with a single short, choking cry.

He got to his feet and ran. He stumbled and caught himself and ran again. It was full light. He could see the stump and the black hole which he had chopped in it; behind him he could hear the swift, soft feet of the dog. As it sprang at him he stumbled and fell and saw it soar over him, its eyes like two cigar-coals; it whirled and leaped at him again before he could rise.

He struck at its face with his bare hands and began to run. Together they reached the tree. It leaped at him again, slashing his arm as he ducked into the tree, seeking that member of the body which he did not know was missing until after he had released it into the mist, feeling the dog surging about his legs. Then the dog was gone. Then a voice said:

“We got him. You can come out, Ernest.”

The countyseat was fourteen miles away. They drove to it in a battered Ford. On the back seat Cotton and the Sheriff sat, their inside wrists locked together by handcuffs. They had to drive for two miles before they reached the highroad. It was hot, ten o’clock in the morning. “You want to swap sides out of the sun?” the Sheriff said.

“I’m all right,” Cotton said.

At two o'clock they had a puncture. Cotton and the Sheriff sat under a tree while the driver and the second deputy went across a field and returned with a glass jar of buttermilk and some cold food. They ate, repaired the tire, and went on.

When they were within three or four miles of town, they began to pass wagons and cars going home from market day in town, the wagon teams plodding homeward in their own inescapable dust. The Sheriff greeted them with a single gesture of his fat arm. "Home for supper, anyway," he said. "What's the matter, Ernest? Feeling sick? Here, Joe; pull up a minute."

"I'll hold my head out," Cotton said. "Never mind." The car went on. Cotton thrust his head out the V strut of the top stanchion. The Sheriff shifted his arm, giving him play. "Go on," Cotton said, "I'll be all right."

The car went on. Cotton slipped a little farther down in the seat. By moving his head a little he could wedge his throat into the apex of the iron V, the uprights gripping his jaws beneath the ears. He shifted again until his head was tight in the vise, then he swung his legs over the door, trying to bring the weight of his body sharply down against his imprisoned neck. He could hear his vertebrae; he felt a kind of rage at his own toughness; he was struggling then against the jerk on the manacle, the hands on him.

Then he was lying on his back beside the road, with water on his face and in his mouth, though he could not swallow. He couldn't speak, trying to curse, cursing in no voice. Then he was in the car again, on the smooth street where children played in the big, shady yards in small

bright garments, and men and women went home toward supper, to plates of food and cups of coffee in the long twilight of summer.

They had a doctor for him in his cell. When the doctor had gone he could smell supper cooking somewhere — ham and hot bread and coffee. He was lying on a cot; the last ray of copper sunlight slid through a narrow window, stippling the bars upon the wall above his head. His cell was near the common room, where the minor prisoners lived, the ones who were in jail for minor offenses or for three meals a day; the stairway from below came up into that room.

It was occupied for the time by a group of negroes from the chain-gang that worked the streets, in jail for vagrancy or for selling a little whiskey or shooting craps for ten or fifteen cents. One of the negroes was at the window above the street, yelling down to someone. The others talked among themselves, their voices rich and murmurous, mellow and singsong. Cotton rose and went to the door of his cell and held to the bars, looking at the negroes.

“Hit,” he said. His voice made no sound. He put his hand to his throat; he produced a dry croaking sound, at which the negroes ceased talking and looked at him, their eyeballs rolling. “It was all right,” Cotton said, “until it started coming to pieces on me. I could a handled that dog.” He held his throat, his voice harsh, dry, and croaking. “But it started coming to pieces on me....”

“Who him?” one of the negroes said. They whispered among themselves, watching him, their eyeballs white in the dusk.

“It would a been all right,” Cotton said, “but it started coming to pieces....”

“Hush up, white man,” one of the negroes said. “Don’t you be telling us no truck like that.”

“Hit would a been all right,” Cotton said, his voice harsh, whispering. Then it failed him again altogether. He held to the bars with one hand, holding his throat with the other, while the negroes watched him, huddled, their eyeballs white and sober.

Then with one accord they turned and rushed across the room, toward the staircase; he heard slow steps and then he smelled food, and he clung to the bars, trying to see the stairs. “Are they going to feed them niggers before they feed a white man?” he said, smelling the coffee and the ham.

The End

Lizards in Jamshyd’s Courtyard, William Faulkner

Lizards in Jamshyd’s Courtyard

Saturday Evening Post, February 1932. Later revised for ‘The Hamlet’

I

ALONG TOWARD MID-AFTERNOON the wagons, the saddle horses and mules would begin to arrive. From both directions they came up the valley, each in its own slow dust, with a quality profound and dramatic, like the painted barge which they hauled across the stage in Ben Hur.

They came, slow, deliberate, behind the bobbing mule ears, with upon their occupants — the men, the women, the young and the old — a quality not festive, since it was too profoundly undivergent, but of holiday, of escape and of immolation like that of people going to the theater to see tragedy, to turn from the broad valley highway into the old road, the peaceful and healing scar.

So peaceful the road was, so healed of the old scars of man's old restlessness, that almost with the turning the road appeared to have run immediately into another land, another world; the weathered wagons, the plow-galled mules, the men and the women in overalls and awkward gingham, into another time, another afternoon without time or name.

For almost sixty years the road had been unmarked by wheel or hoof, so that now, where the sand darkened into the shallow water of the branch, the recent thick marks of rims and iron shoes were as startling as shouts in a church.

Beyond the branch, where there was now no trace of the vanished bridge, the road began to mount. It ran straight as a plumb line, bordered by a shaggy hedgerow of spaced cedars three and four feet thick now, the boughs locked and massed now, mounting to where, out of a jungle of formal cedars, a fading dilapidation of broad formal grounds and gardens, the gaunt and austere skeleton of a huge house lifted its broken roof and topless chimneys.

It was known as the Old Frenchman's place, after its builder, who had straightened the river bed and reclaimed four thousand acres of jungle bottom land for his slaves to raise cotton on — a huge square house which the anonymous builder's nameless and unrecorded successors had been pulling down for firewood since the Civil War, set in grounds laid out by an imported English architect a hundred years ago, upon a knoll overlooking the broad acres parceled now into small shiftless farms among his shiftless and illiterate heirs at large.

They did not even remember his name. They did not know for certain if his anonymous dust lay with that of his blood and of the progenitors of saxophone players in Harlem honky-tonks, beneath the weathered and illegible headstones on a smaller knoll four hundred yards away.

All that was left of him was the old mark of the river bed, and the road, and the skeleton of the house, and the legend of the gold which his slaves buried somewhere when Grant passed through the land on his Vicksburg campaign; so that for sixty years three generations of sons and grandsons, lurking into the place at night and on foot, had turned under the original surface time and again, hunting for the gold and the silver, the money and the plate.

The place was owned now by Varner, who was the principal landowner of the community; he had bought it for the taxes and kept it under the same condition.

The fresh tracks did not go on as far as the house. They went on to where, beside and along the fence to what had once been a garden, the wagons themselves stood and drew up in turn and stopped. The women kept their seats on the splint chairs in the wagon beds.

The men, though, descended and went to the fence and leaned there where the earlier arrivals already stood, watching the man who was digging in the garden. He was digging alone, spading the earth steadily down the slope toward the ditch, working with a certain unflagging fury. He had been digging there for a week. His name was Henry Armstid.

They had been watching him for a week, coming by wagon and on horse and mule back for ten miles, to gather, with lips full of snuff, along the fence with the decorum of a formal reception, the rapt and static interest of a crowd watching a magician at a fair. On the first day, when the first rider descended and came to the fence, Armstid turned and ran at him with the lifted shovel, cursing in a harsh, light whisper, and drove the man away.

But he had quit that, and he appeared to be not even aware of them as on the successive days they gathered along the fence, talking a little among themselves in sparse syllables, watching Armstid spade the surface of the garden steadily down the slope toward the ditch, working steadily back and forth across the hillside.

Along toward sundown they would begin to watch the road, until sometime before dark the last wagon would arrive. It contained a single occupant; a weathered and patched wagon drawn by two rabbit-like mules, creaking terrifically on crazy and dishing wheels.

Then the spectators would stop talking and they would turn and watch quietly while the occupant, a woman in a gray shapeless garment and a faded sunbonnet, descended and lifted down a tin pail and approached

the fence beyond which Armstid still had not looked up, had not faltered in his labor.

She would set the pail into the corner of the fence and then stand there for a time, motionless, the gray garment falling in rigid folds to her stained tennis shoes, her hands rolled together into a fold of the garment. She just stood there. She did not appear to look at Armstid, to look at anything. She was his wife; the pail she brought contained cold food.

She never stayed long. He never looked up when she came and they never spoke, and after a while she would return to the crazy wagon and get in and drive away. Then the spectators would begin to drift away, mounting their wagons and creaking also supperward, barnward, leaving Henry alone again, spading himself into the waxing twilight with the regularity of a mechanical toy and with something monstrous in his unflagging effort, as if the toy were too light for what it had been set to do, and too tightly wound.

In the long forenoons, squatting with their slow tobacco on the porch of Varner's store two miles away, or in halted wagons along the quiet roads and lanes, or in the fields or at the cabin doors about the slow, laborious land, they talked about it.

"Still at it, is he?"

"Sho. Still at it."

"Reckon he's aiming to kill himself there in that garden."

"Well, it won't be no loss to her."

“It’s a fact. Save her a trip ever’ day, toting him food.”

“I notice she don’t never stay long out there when she comes.”

“She has to get back home to get supper for them chaps of theirn and to take care of the stock.”

“I reckon she won’t be sorry.”

“Sho. It’s a fact.”

“That Flem Snopes. I’ll declare.”

“He’s a sight, sho. Yes, sir. Wouldn’t no other man but him done it.”

“Couldn’t no other man done it. Anybody might a-fooled Henry Armstid. But couldn’t nobody but Flem a-fooled Suratt.”

“That’s a fact, that’s a fact. Sho.”

II

Suratt was a sewing-machine agent. He traveled the country in a buckboard, to the rear of which was attached a sheet-iron dog kennel painted to resemble a house. It had two painted windows on each side, in each of which a painted woman’s face simpered above a painted sewing machine, and into the kennel a sewing machine neatly fitted.

On successive days and two counties apart, the buckboard and the sturdy mismatched team might be seen tethered in the nearest shade, and Suratt’s affable, ready face and neat, tieless blue shirt one of the squatting group on the porch of a crossroads store. Or — and still squatting — among the women surrounded by laden clotheslines and

blackened wash pots at springs and wells, or decorous in a splint chair in cabin dooryards, talking and listening.

He had a regular itinerary, selling perhaps three machines a year, and the rest of the time trading in land and livestock, in secondhand farm tools and musical instruments, or whatever came to his hand. He had an affable and impenetrable volubility, a gift for anecdote and gossip. He never forgot names and he knew everyone, man, mule and dog, in fifty miles. He was believed to be well fixed.

His itinerary brought him to Varner's store every six weeks. One day he arrived two weeks ahead of schedule. While across the county he had bought, for twenty dollars, of a Northerner who was establishing a ranch to breed native goats, a contract to sell the Northerner a hundred goats which Suratt knew to be owned near Varner's store, in the Frenchman's Bend country.

Of the four or five men squatting along the porch of the store Suratt made his guarded inquiries, larding them skillfully into his anecdote, and got the information which he wanted. The next morning he drove out to the first goat owner.

"Wish you'd got here yesterday," the man said. "I done already sold them goats."

"The devil you have," Suratt said. "Who to?"

"Flem Snopes."

"Flem Snopes?"

Snopes was the man who ran Varner's store. Varner himself — he was a politician, a veterinary, a Methodist lay preacher — was hardly ever seen about the store. Snopes had been running the store for two or three years — a squat man who might have been any age between twenty-five and fifty, with a round full face and dull eyes, who sat all day, between the infrequent customers, in a tilted chair in the door, chewing and whittling and saying no word.

All that was known of him was known on hearsay, and that not his own; it was not even known what his exact relation to Varner and the store was, whether clerk, partner or what. He had been sitting in his usual chair, chewing and whittling, while Suratt was getting his information about the goats.

"He come out here last night and bought all I had," the goat owner said.

"You mean, he come out here after dark?"

"About nine o'clock it was. I reckon he couldn't leave the store sooner."

"Sho," Suratt said. "I reckon not." The second goat owner lived four miles away. Suratt drove it in thirty-two minutes. "I come out to see if you sold your goats at ten o'clock last night, or was it half-past ten?"

"Why, yes," the man said. "It was along about midnight when Flem got here. How did you know?"

"I knowed I had the best team," Suratt said. "That's how. Good-by."

"What's your hurry? I got a couple of shotes I might sell."

“Sho, now,” Suratt said. “They wouldn’t do me no good. Soon as they belonged to me they would get elephant-sized overnight, and bust. This here country’s too rich for me.”

He did not call on the other goat owner at all. He returned to Jefferson without passing Varner’s store. Three miles from town, a single goat balanced with somnolent precariousness upon the roof of a barn. Beside the fence a small boy in overalls watched Suratt draw up and stop.

“What did Flem Snopes offer you for that goat, bud?” Suratt said.

“Sir?” the boy said.

Suratt drove on. Three days later Snopes gave Suratt twenty-one dollars for the contract for which Suratt had paid twenty. He put the twenty dollars away in a tobacco sack and held the other dollar in his hand. He chucked it, caught it, the squatting men along the wall watching him. Snopes had sat again, whittling.

“Well, at least I ain’t skunked.” Suratt said. The others guffawed, save Snopes. Suratt looked about at them, bleak, sardonic, humorous too. Two children, a boy and a girl, mounted the steps, carrying a basket. Suratt gave them the dollar. “Here, chillens,” he said. “Here’s something Mr. Snopes sent you.”

It was three years after that when Suratt learned that Snopes had bought the Old Frenchman place from Varner. Suratt knew the place. He knew it better than anyone suspected. Perhaps once a year he drove three or four miles out of his way to pass the place, entering from the back. Why he took that precaution he could not have said; he

probably would have believed it was not to be seen doing something by which he had no expectation of gaining anything.

Once a year he halted his buckboard before the house and sat in the buckboard to contemplate the austere skeleton somnolent in the summer sunlight, a little sinister, thinking of the generations of men who had dug for gold there, contemplating the inscrutable desolation of cedar and brier and crapemyrtle and calycanthus gone lush and wild, sensing out of the sunny and sinister silence the ancient spent and hopeful lusts, the optimism, the effluvium of the defunct greed and despair, the spent and secret nocturnal sweat left upon the place by men as quiet now as the man who had unwittingly left behind him a monument more enduring than any obituary either carved or cast.

“It’s bound to be there, somewhere,” Suratt told himself. “It’s bound to.” Then he would drive on to Varner’s store two miles away or to Jefferson twelve miles away, having carried away with him something of that ancient air, that old splendor, confusing it though he did with the fleshly gratifications, the wherewith to possess them, in his peasant’s mind. “It’s bound to. Folks wouldn’t keep on digging for it if it wasn’t there somewhere. It wouldn’t be right to keep on letting them. No, sir.”

When he learned that Snopes had bought the place, Suratt was eating dinner in Jefferson in the restaurant which he and his brother-in-law owned. He sat on a backless and friction-smooth stool, his elbows on the friction-smooth counter, eating steak and potatoes. He became motionless, humped forward in the attitude of eating, the laden knife blade arrested halfway to his mouth, his eyes profoundly concentrant. “If Flem Snopes bought that place, he knows something about it that even Will Varner never knowed. Flem Snopes wouldn’t buy a nickel

mousetrap withouten he knowed beforehand it would make him back a dime."

He reached Varner's store in mid-afternoon. Snopes was sitting in the chair, chewing, whittling minutely at a piece of soft pine. There was about him, his white shirt, his blue denim trousers braced thick and smooth, a profound inertia impervious to haste like that of a cow, to the necessity for haste like an idol. "That's what makes me so mad about it," Suratt told himself. "That he can set still and know what I got to work so hard to find out.

That I got to work fast to learn it and ain't got time to work fast because I don't know if I got time to make a mistake by working fast. And him just setting still." But when he mounted the steps there was upon his brown, lean face its usual expression — alert, quizzical, pleasant, impenetrable and immediate. He greeted in rotation the men who squatted along the wall.

"Well, boys," he said, "I hear Flem has done bought himself a farm. You fixing to start a goat ranch of your own, Flem? Or maybe it's just a home for the folks you trims trading." Then he said, getting his sober and appreciative laugh while Snopes chewed slowly and trimmed minutely at the stick with the profound impenetrability of an idol or a cow, "Well, if Flem knowed any way to make anything offen that old place, he'd be too durn close-mouthed to tell himself about it."

III

The three men crouched in the weeds along the ditch at the foot of the garden. The shaggy slope rose before them in the darkness to the crest

where the broken roof and topless chimneys of the house stood sharp against the sky. In one of the windows a single star showed, like a feeble candle set upon the ledge. They lay in the weeds, listening to the sigh and recover of an invisible shovel halfway up the garden slope.

“Didn’t I tell you?” Suratt whispered. “Didn’t I? Is there e’er a man or woman in this country that don’t know Flem Snopes wouldn’t pay a nickel for nothing if he didn’t know all the time he would make a dime back?”

“How do I know it’s Flem?” the second said. His name was Vernon Tull. He was a well-to-do bachelor.

“Ain’t I watched him?” Suratt said. “Ain’t I laid here in these weeds two nights now and watched him come out here and dig? Ain’t I waited until he left, and crawled up there and found every place where he had done filled the hole up again and smoothed the dirt back to hide it?”

“But how do I know it’s Flem?” Vernon said.

“If you knowed, would you believe it was something buried there?” Suratt whispered. The third man was Henry Armstid. He lay between them, glaring up the dark slope; they could feel him trembling like a dog. Now and then he cursed in a dry whisper. He lived on a small mortgaged farm, which he and his wife worked like two men.

During one season, having lost one of his mules, he and his wife did the plowing, working day about in the second trace beside the other mule. The land was either poor land or they were poor managers.

It made for them less than a bare living, which the wife eked out by weaving by the firelight after dark. She wove fancy objects of colored string saved from packages and of bits of cloth given her by the women in Jefferson, where, in a faded gingham wrapper and sunbonnet and tennis shoes, she peddled the objects from door to door on the market days. They had four children, all under six years of age, the youngest an infant in arms.

They lay there in the weeds, the darkness, hearing the shovel. After a while it ceased. “He’s done found it,” Henry said. He surged suddenly between them. They grasped his arms.

“Stop!” Suratt whispered. “Stop! Help hold him, Vernon.” They held him until he ceased and lay again between them, rigid, glaring, cursing. “He ain’t found it yet.” Suratt whispered.

“He knows it’s there somewhere; he’s done found the paper maybe that tells. But he’s got to hunt for it same as we will. He knows it’s in that ’ere garden, but he’s got to hunt for it same as us. Ain’t we done watched him?” They spoke in hissing whispers, rigid, panting, glaring up the starlit slope.

“How do I know it’s Flem?” Vernon said.

“Just watch, that’s all,” Suratt whispered. They crouched; the shadowy, deliberate motion of the digger mounted the slope. It was the sound made by a lazy man rather than by a cautious one. Suratt gripped Henry. “Watch, now!” he whispered. They breathed with hissing exhalations, in passionate and dying sighs.

Then the man came into sight. For a moment he came into relief against the sky upon the crest of the knoll, as though he had paused

there for an instant. “There!” Suratt whispered. “Ain’t that Flem Snopes? Do you believe now?”

Vernon drew his breath quietly in like a man preparing to sleep. “It’s a fact,” he said. He spoke quietly, soberly. “It’s Flem.”

“Do you believe now?” Suratt whispered. “Do you? Do you believe now?” Between them, Henry lay cursing in a dry whisper. Beneath Vernon’s and Suratt’s arms his arms felt like wire cables vibrating faintly.

“All we got to do,” Suratt said, “is to find where it’s at tomorrow night, and then get it.”

“Tomorrow night, hell!” Henry said. “Let’s get up there now and find it. That’s what we got to do. Before he—”

They argued with him, violent, sibilant, expostulant. They held him flat on the ground between them, cursing. “We got to find where it is the first time and dig it up,” Suratt said. “We got to get Uncle Dick. Can’t you see that? Can’t you see we got to find it the first time? That we can’t be caught looking?”

“We got to get Uncle Dick,” Vernon said. “Hush, Henry. Hush, now.”

They returned the next night with Uncle Dick. When Vernon and Suratt, carrying the second shovel and the pick and half carrying Uncle Dick between them, climbed up out of the ditch at the foot of the garden, they could hear Henry already digging.

After concealing the buckboard in the branch bottom they had had to run to keep even within hearing of Henry, and so Uncle Dick could not yet stand alone. Yet they released him at once, whereupon he sank to the ground at their feet, from where his invisible breathing rose in reedy gasps, and as one Vernon and Suratt glared into the darkness toward the hushed, furious sound of Henry's shovel.

"We got to make him quit until Uncle Dick's ready," Suratt said. They ran toward the sound, shoulder to shoulder in the stumbling dark. Suratt spoke to Henry. Henry did not cease to dig. Suratt grasped at the shovel. Henry whirled, the shovel raised like an ax; they glared at each other, their faces strained with sleeplessness and weariness and lust. It was Suratt's fourth night without having removed his clothes; Vernon's and Henry's second.

"Touch it," Henry whispered. "Touch it."

"Wait, Henry," Suratt said. "Let Uncle Dick find where it's at."

"Get away," Henry said. "I warn you. Get outen my hole."

Uncle Dick was sitting up when Suratt and Vernon returned running and plunged down beside him and began to scrabble in the dark weeds for the second shovel. Suratt found the pick and learned the blade with his hand in one motion and flung it behind him into the darkness again, and plunged down again just as Vernon found the shovel. They struggled for it, their breathing harsh, mute, repressed. "Leave go," Suratt whispered. "Leave go." They clutched the shovel between them. Out of the darkness came the unflagging sound of Henry's digging.

"Wait," Uncle Dick said. He got stiffly to his feet — a shriveled little old man in a filthy frock coat, with a long white beard. Between sunup and

sundown Suratt, seventy-two hours without having removed his clothes, drove thirty miles to fetch him from where he lived alone in a mud-daubed hut in a cane swamp.

He had no other name, and he antedated all who knew him. He made and sold nostrums and charms, and they said that he ate not only frogs and snakes but bugs as well — anything that he could catch. “Wait,” he said in a reedy, quavering voice. “Ther air anger in the yearth. Ye must make that ’ere un quit a-bruisin’ hit, so the Lord kin show whar hit’s hid at.”

“That’s so,” Suratt said. “It won’t work unless the ground is quiet. I forgot.”

When they approached, Henry stood erect in his pit and threatened them with the shovel and cursed them, but Uncle Dick walked up and touched him.

“Ye kin dig and ye kin dig, young man,” he said. “Fer what’s rendered to the yearth, the yearth will keep withouten the will of the Lord air revealed.”

Henry desisted then and lowered the shovel. Uncle Dick drove them back to the ditch. From his coat he produced a forked peach branch, from the end of which, dangling on a bit of string, swung an empty brass cartridge containing a gold-filled human tooth. He held them there for five minutes, stooping now and then to lay his hand flat on the ground.

Then with the three of them at his heels — Henry rigid, silent; Suratt and Vernon speaking now and then in short, hissing whispers — he

went to the fence corner and grasped the two prongs of the branch in his hands and stood there for a moment, muttering to himself.

They moved like a procession, with something at once outrageously pagan and orthodoxly funereal about them, working slowly back and forth across the garden, mounting the slope in overlapping traverses. Near the spot where they had watched the man digging last night Uncle Dick began to slow. The others clumped at his back, breathing with thick, tense breaths. “Tech my elbers,” Uncle Dick said. They did so. Inside his sleeves his arms — arms thin and frail and dead as rotten wood — were jerking a little.

Henry began to curse, pointless. Uncle Dick stopped; when they jarred into him they felt his whole thin body straining. Suratt made a sound with his mouth and touched the twig and found it curved into a rigid down-pointing bar, the string taut as wire. Uncle Dick staggered; his arms sprang free. The twig lay dead at his feet until Henry, digging furiously with his bare hands, flung it away. He was still cursing. He was cursing the ground, the earth.

They got the tools and began to dig, swiftly, hurling the dirt aside, while Uncle Dick, shapeless in his shapeless garment, appeared to muse upon them with detached interest. Suddenly the three of them became utterly still in their attitudes, then they leaped into the hole and struggled silently over something.

“Stop it!” Suratt whispered. “Stop it! Ain’t we all three pardners alike?”

But Henry clung to the object and at last Vernon and Suratt desisted and stood away. Henry was half stooped, clutching the object to his middle, glaring at them.

“Let him keep it,” Vernon said. “Don’t you know that ain’t all? Come here, Uncle Dick.”

Uncle Dick was motionless behind them. His head was turned toward the ditch, toward where they had hidden. “What?” Suratt whispered. They were all three motionless, rigid, stooped a little. “Do you see something? Is it somebody hiding yonder?”

“I feel four bloods lust-running,” Uncle Dick said. “Hit’s four sets of blood here lusting for dross.”

They crouched, rigid. “Well, ain’t it four of us right here?” Vernon said.

“Uncle Dick don’t care nothing about money,” Suratt said. “If it’s somebody hiding there—”

They were running then, the tools clutched, plunging and stumbling down the slope.

“Kill him,” Henry said. “Watch every bush and kill him.”

“No,” Suratt said, “catch him first.”

They halted at the ditch bank. They could hear Henry beating along the ditch. But they found nothing.

“Maybe Uncle Dick never seen nobody,” Vernon said.

“He’s gone, anyway,” Suratt said. “Maybe it—” He ceased. He and Vernon stared at each other; above their held breath they heard the horse. It was going at a gallop, the sound clear but faint, diminishing. Then it ceased. They stared at each other in the darkness, across their breath. “That means we got till daylight,” Suratt said. “Come on.”

Twice more Uncle Dick's twig sprang and bent; twice more they exhumed small bulging canvas sacks solid and unmistakable even in the dark.

"Now," Suratt said, "we got a hole apiece and till daylight to do it in. Dig, boys."

When the east began to gray they had found nothing more. At last they made Henry see reason and quit, and they filled up the holes and removed the traces of their labor. They opened the bags in the gray light. Vernon's and Suratt's contained each twenty-five silver dollars. Henry wouldn't tell what his contained. He crouched over it some distance away, his back toward them. Vernon and Suratt closed the sacks and looked at each other quietly, their blood cool now with weariness, with sleeplessness and fatigue.

"We got to buy it," Suratt said. "We got to buy it tomorrow."

"You mean today," Vernon said. Beneath a tree, in the wan light, Uncle Dick lay sleeping. He slept quiet as a child, not even snoring.

"That's right," Suratt said. "It's today now."

IV

When at noon the next day Suratt drove up to the store, there was a stranger squatting among the others on the porch. His name was Eustace Grimm, from the adjoining county — a youngish man, also in overalls, with a snuff stick in his mouth. Snopes sat in the tilted chair in the doorway, whittling.

Suratt descended and tethered his team. “Morning, gentlemen,” he said.

They replied. “Be durn if you don’t look like you ain’t been to bed in a week, Suratt,” one said. “What you up to now? Lon Quick said his boy seen your team hid out in the bottom below Armstid’s two mornings ago, but I told him I didn’t reckon them horses had done nothing to hide from. I wasn’t so sho about you, I told him.”

Suratt joined the laugh readily. “I reckon not. I reckon I’m still smart enough to not be caught by nobody around here except Flem Snopes. ‘Course I take a back seat for Flem.” He mounted the steps. Snopes had not looked up. Suratt looked briefly from face to face, his gaze pausing for an instant at Eustace Grimm, then going on. “To tell the truth, I am getting pretty durn tired of traipsing all over the country to make a living. Be durn if I ain’t sometimes a good mind to buy me a piece of land and settle down like folks.”

“You might buy that Old What-you-call-it place from Flem,” Grimm said. He was watching Suratt. Suratt looked at him. When he spoke his tone was immediate, far superior to merely casual.

“That’s a fact. I might do that.” He looked at Grimm. “What you doing way up here, Eustace? Ain’t you strayed a right smart?”

“I come up to see if I couldn’t trade Flem outen—”

Snopes spoke. His voice was not cold so much as utterly devoid of any inflection. “Reckon you better get on to dinner, Eustace,” he said. “Mrs. Littlejohn’ll be ringing the bell soon. She don’t like to be kept waiting.”

Grimm looked at Snopes, his mouth still slacked for talk. He rose. Suratt looked at Snopes, too, who had not raised his head from his whittling. Suratt looked at Grimm again. Grimm had closed his mouth. He was moving toward the steps.

“If it’s goats you’re aiming to trade Flem for,” Suratt said, “I can warn you to look out.”

The others laughed, sober, appreciative. Grimm descended the steps. “That depends on how smart the fellow is that trades with Flem,” he said. “I reckon Flem don’t only need goats—”

“Tell her I’ll be there in ten minutes,” Snopes said. Again Grimm paused, looking back, his mouth slacked for speech; again he closed it.

“All right,” he said. He went on. Suratt watched him. Then he looked at Snopes.

“Flem,” he said, “you sholy ain’t going to unload that Old Frenchman place on a poor fellow like Eustace Grimm? Boys, we hadn’t ought to stand for it. I reckon Eustace has worked pretty hard for every cent he’s got, and he won’t be no match for Flem.”

Snopes whittled with tedious deliberation, his jaw thrusting steadily.

“Of course, a smart fellow like Flem might make something offen that old place, but Eustace now — Let me tell you what I heard about one of them Grimms down there last month; it might be Eustace they tell it on.” He achieved his anecdote skillfully above the guffaws. When he had finished it Snopes rose, putting his knife away. He crossed the porch, waddling thickly in his denim trousers braced neatly over his white shirt, and descended the steps. Suratt watched him.

“If it’s that time, I reckon I better move too,” Suratt said. “Might have to go into town this evening.” He descended the steps. Snopes had gone on. “Here, Flem,” Suratt said. “I’m going past Littlejohn’s. I’ll give you a free ride that far. Won’t cost you a cent.”

Again the squatting men on the porch guffawed, watching Suratt and Snopes like four or five boys twelve years old might watch and listen to two boys fourteen years old. Snopes stopped. He did not look back. He stood there, chewing with steady unhaste, until Suratt swung the buckboard up and cramped the wheel; then he got in. They drove on.

“So you done sold that old place,” Suratt said. They drove at a walk. Mrs. Littlejohn’s house was a quarter of a mile down the road. In the middle distance Eustace Grimm walked, his back toward them. “That ’ere Frenchman place,” Suratt said.

Snopes spat over the wheel. “Dickering,” he said.

“Oh,” Suratt said. “Can’t get Eustace to close with you?” They drove on. “What’s Eustace want with that place? I thought his folks owned a right smart of land down yonder.”

“Heard so,” Snopes said.

They drove on. Grimm’s figure was a little nearer. Suratt drew the team down to a slower walk. “Well, if a man just give what that old place is worth, I reckon most anybody could buy it.” They drove on. “Still, for a man that just wanted a place to settle down, a fellow that depended on outside work for his living—”

Snopes spat over the wheel.

“Yes, sir,” Suratt said. “For a fellow that just aimed to fix him up a home, say. Like me. A fellow like that might give you two hundred for it. Just the house and garden and orchard, say.” The red dust coiled slow beneath the slow hoofs and wheels. Grimm had almost reached Mrs. Littlejohn’s gate. “What would you take for that much of it?”

“Don’t aim to sell unless I sell the whole place,” Snopes said. “Ain’t in no rush to sell that.”

“Yes?” Suratt said. “What was you asking Eustace Grimm for the whole place?”

“Ain’t asked him nothing yet. Just listened to him.”

“Well, what would you ask me, say?”

“Three thousand,” Snopes said.

“Three which?” Suratt said. He laughed, slapping his leg. He laughed for some time. “If you ain’t a sight. Three thousand.” They drove on. Grimm had reached Mrs. Littlejohn’s gate. Suratt quit laughing. “Well, I hope you get it. If Eustace can’t quite meet that, I might could find you a buyer at three hundred, if you get in a tight to sell.”

“Ain’t in no rush to sell,” Snopes said. “I’ll get out here.” Grimm had paused at the gate. He was looking back at them from beneath his hat brim, with a gaze at once attentive and veiled.

That afternoon Suratt, Vernon and Henry made Snopes three joint notes for one thousand dollars each.

Vernon was good for his. Suratt gave a lien on his half of the restaurant which he and his brother-in-law owned in Jefferson. Henry gave a

second mortgage on his farm and a chattel mortgage on his stock and fixtures, including a new stove which his wife had bought with her weaving money, and a mile of barbed-wire fence.

They reached their new property just before sundown. When they arrived a wagon, the mules still — or already — in the traces, stood on the lawn, and then Eustace Grimm came around the corner of the house and stood there, watching them. Henry ordered him off the place. He got into the wagon and they began to dig at once, though it was still light. They dug for some little time before they found that Grimm had not yet departed. He was sitting in the wagon in the road, watching them across the fence, until Henry rushed at him with his shovel. Then he drove on.

Vernon and Suratt had stopped also. Vernon watched Grimm's back as he rattled on down the road in the slow wagon. "Ain't he some kin to them Snopeses?" Vernon said. "A in-law or something?"

"What?" Suratt said. They watched the wagon disappear in the dusk. "I didn't know that."

"Come on," Vernon said. "Henry's getting ahead of us." They began to dig again. It was dark soon, but they could still hear one another.

They dug steadily for two nights, two brief summer darks broken by the daylight intervals of fitful sleep on the bare floor of their house, where even to the ground floor the sunlight reached in patchy splashes at noon. In the sad light of the third dawn Suratt stopped and straightened his back. Twenty feet away, Henry, in his pit, moved up and down with the regularity of an automaton.

He was waist-deep, as though he were digging himself tirelessly into that earth whose born thrall he was; as though he had been severed at the waist, the dead torso laboring on in measured stoop and recover, not knowing that it was dead.

They had completely turned under the entire surface of the garden, and standing in the dark fresh loam, his muscles flinching and jerking with fatigue, Suratt watched Henry; and then he found that Vernon was watching him quietly in turn. Suratt laid his shovel carefully down and went to where Vernon stood. They stood looking at each other while the dawn grayed upon their gaunt faces. When they spoke their voices were quiet.

“You looked close at that money of yours yet?” Suratt said.

Vernon didn’t answer at once. They watched Henry as he rose and fell behind his pick. “I don’t reckon I dared to,” Vernon said. He laid his tool carefully on the earth also, and together he and Suratt turned and went to the house. It was still dark in the house, so they lit the lantern and took the two sacks from the hiding place in a chimney and set the lantern on the floor.

“I reckon we’d ought to thought it wouldn’t no cloth sack—” Suratt said.

“Sho,” Vernon said. “I reckon you can say that and leave off about the sack.”

They squatted, the lantern between them, opening the sacks. “Bet you a dollar I beat you,” Suratt said.

“All right,” Vernon said. They laid two coins aside and examined the others, one by one. Then they looked at each other. “1901,” Vernon said. “What you got?”

“1896,” Suratt said. “I beat you.”

“Yes,” Vernon said. “You beat me.” Suratt took up the wager and they hid the money again and blew the lantern out. It was lighter now, and they could see Henry quite well as he worked in his thigh-deep trench. Soon the sun; already three buzzards soared in it high against the yellow blue.

Henry did not look up at them when they reached him. “Henry,” Suratt said. Henry did not pause. “When was your oldest dollar minted, Henry?” Suratt said. Henry did not falter. Suratt came nearer and touched his shoulder. “Henry,” he said.

Henry whirled, raising the shovel, the blade turned edgewise, glinting a thin line of steel-colored dawn such as an ax would have.

“Git outen my hole,” he said. “Git outen hit.”

The End

Fool About a Horse, William Faulkner

Fool About a Horse

Scribner's, August 1936. Later revised for 'The Hamlet'

I

YES, SIR. It wasn't Pap that bought one horse from Pat Stamper and then sold two back to him. It was Mammy. Her and Pat jest used Pap to trade through. Because we never left home that morning with Mammy's cream separator money to trade horses with nobody.

And I reckon that if Pap had had any notion that he was fated to swap horses with Pat Stamper, they couldn't even have arrested him and taken him to town. We never even knowed it was Pat Stamper that had unloaded that horse on whoever it was Beasley Kemp got it from until we was halfway there.

Because Pap admitted he was a fool about a horse but it wasn't that kind of a fool he meant. And once he was away from our lot and the neighbor men looking through the fence at whatever it was Pap had traded some more of Old Man Anse Holland's bob-wire and busted tools for this time, and Pap lying to them to jest exactly the right amount about how old it was and how much he give for it; — once Pap was away from there I don't reckon he was even the kind of a fool about a horse that Mammy claimed he was when we come up to the house that noon after we had shut the gate on the horse we had jest traded outen Beasley Kemp, and Pap taken his shoes off on the front gallery for dinner and Mammy standing there in the door, shaking the cold skillet at Pap and scolding and railing and Pap saying, "Now Vynie; now Vynie.

I always was a fool about a good horse and it ain't no use you a-scolding and jawing about it. You had better thank the Lord that when He give me a eye for horse-flesh He give me a little jedgment and gumption along with it."

Because it wasn't the horse. It wasn't the trade. It was a good trade, because Pap swapped Beasley a straight stock and fourteen rods of bob-wire and a old wore-out sorghum mill of Old Man Anse's for the horse, and Mammy admitted it was a good swap even for that horse, even for anything that could git up and walk from Beasley Kemp's lot to ourn by itself. Because like she said while she was shaking the skillet at Pap, even Pap couldn't git stung very bad in a horse trade because he never owned nothing that anybody would swap even a sorry horse for and even to him.

And it wasn't because me and Pap had left the plows down in the bottom piece where Mammy couldn't see them from the house, and snuck the wagon out the back way with the straight stock and the wire and the sorghum mill while she thought we were still in the field. It wasn't that.

It was like she knowed without having to be told what me and Pap never found out for a week yet: that Pat Stamper had owned that horse we traded outen Beasley Kemp and that now Pap had done caught the Pat Stamper sickness jest from touching it.

And I reckon she was right. Maybe to hisself Pap did call hisself the Pat Stamper of the Frenchman Bend country, or maybe even of all Beat Four. But I reckon that even when he was believing it the strongest, setting there on the top rail of the lot fence and the neighbor men

coming up to lean on the fence and look at what Pap had brung home this time and Pap not bragging much and maybe not even lying much about it; I reckon that even then there was another part of his mind telling him he was safe to believe he was the Pat Stamper of Beat Four jest as long as he done it setting on that fence where it was about one chance in a million of Pat Stamper actually passing and stopping to put it to a test.

Because he wouldn't no more have set out to tangle with Pat Stamper than he would have set out to swap horses with a water moccasin. Probly if he had knowed that Pat Stamper ever owned that horse we swapped outen Beasley, Pap wouldn't have traded for it at no price. But then, I reckon that a fellow who straggles by acci-dent into where yellow fever or moccasins is, don't aim to ketch fever or snakebite neither.

But he sholy never aimed to tangle with Pat Stamper. When we started for town that morning with Beasley's horse and our mule in the wagon and that separator money that Mammy had been saving on for four years in Pap's pocket, we wasn't even thinking about horse trading, let alone about Pat Stamper, because we didn't know that Pat Stamper was in Jefferson and we didn't even know that he had owned the horse until we got to Varner's store. It was fate.

It was like the Lord Hisself had decided to spend Mammy's separator money for a horse; it would have had to been Him because wouldn't nobody else, leastways nobody that knowed Mammy, have risked doing it. Yes, sir. Pure fate. Though I will have to admit that fate picked a good, quick, willing hand when it picked Pap. Because it wasn't that kind of a fool about a horse that Pap meant he was.

No, sir. Not that kind of a fool. I reckon that while he was setting on the porch that morning when Mammy had done said her say for the time being and went back to the kitchen, and me done fetched the gourd of fresh water from the well, and the side meat plopping and hissing on the stove and Pap waiting to eat it and then go back down to the lot and set on the fence while the neighbor men come up in two's and three's to look at Pap's new horse, I reckon maybe in his own mind Pap not only knowed as much about horse trading as Pat Stamper, but he owned head for head as many of them as Old Man Anse hisself.

I reckon that while he would set there on the fence, jest moving enough to keep outen the sun, with them two empty plows standing in the furrow down in the bottom piece and Mammy watching him outen the back window and saying, "Horse trader! Setting there bragging and lying to a passel of shiftless men, and the weeds and morning glories climbing that thick in the corn and cotton that I am afraid to tote his dinner to him for fear of snakes"; I reckon Pap would look at whatever it was he had traded the mail box or the winter corn or something else that maybe Old Man Anse had done forgot he owned or leastways might not miss, and he would say to hisself: "It's not only mine, but before God it's the prettiest drove of horses a man ever seen."

II

It was pure fate. When we left for town that morning with Mammy's separator money, Pap never even aimed to use Beasley's horse at all because he knowed it probably couldn't make no twelve-mile trip to Jefferson and get back the same day. He aimed to go up to Old Man Anse's and borrow one of his mules to work with ourn; it was Mammy herself that done it, taunted him about the piece of crowbait he had bought for a yard ornament until Pap said that by Godfrey he would show Mammy and all the rest of them that misdoubted he knowed a

horse when he seen it, and so we went to the lot and put the new horse in the wagon with the mule.

We had been feeding it heavy as it would eat for a week now and it looked a heap better than it did the day we got it. But even yet it didn't look so good, though Pap decided it was the mule that showed it up so bad; that when it was the only horse or mule in sight, it didn't look so bad and that it was the standing beside something else on four legs that hurt its looks.

"If we jest had some way to hitch the mule under the wagon where it wouldn't show and jest leave the horse in sight, it would be fine," Pap said. But there wasn't no way to do that, so we jest done the best we could. It was a kind of doormat bay and so, with Pap standing about twenty foot away and squinching first one eye and then the other and saying, "Bear down on it. You got to git the hide hot to make the har shine," I polished it down with croker sacks the best I could.

Pap thought about feeding it a good bait of salt in some corn and then turning it to water and hide some of the ribs, only we knowed that we wouldn't even get to Jefferson in one day, let alone come back, besides having to stop at ever creek and load it up again. So we done the best we could and then we started, with Mammy's separator money (it was twenty-seven dollars and sixty-five cents; it taken her four years to save it outen her egg- and quilt-money) tied up in a rag that she dared Pap to even open to count it before he handed it to Uncle Ike McCaslin at the store and had the separator in the wagon.

Yes, sir. Fate. The same fate that made Mammy taunt Pap into starting out with Beasley's horse; the same fate that made it a hot morning in July for us to start out on. Because when we left home that morning we

wasn’t even thinking about horse trading. We was thinking about horse, all right, because we were wondering if maybe we wasn’t fixing to come back home that night with Beasley’s horse riding in the wagon and me or Pap in the traces with the mule. Yes, sir.

Pap eased that team outen the lot at sunup and on down the road toward Frenchman’s Bend as slow and careful as arra horse and mule ever moved in this world, with me and Pap walking up ever hill that was slanted enough to run water down the ruts, and aiming to do that right on into Jefferson. It was the weather, the hot day, that done it. Because here we was, about a mile from Varner’s store, and Beasley’s horse kind of half walking and half riding on the double tree, and Pap’s face looking a little more and a little more concerned ever time our new horse failed to lift its feet high enough to make the next step, when all of a sudden that horse popped into a sweat.

It flung its head up like it had been teched with a hot poker and stepped up into the collar, teching the collar for the first time since the mule had taken the weight off the breast yoke when Pap’d shaken out the whip inside the lot; and so here we come down the last hill and up to Varner’s store and that horse of Beasley’s with its head up and blowing froth and its eyes white-rimmed like these here colored dinner plates and Pap sawing back on the reins, and I be dog if it not only hadn’t sweated into as pretty a blood bay as you ever see, but even the ribs didn’t seem to show so much.

And Pap, that had been talking about taking a back road so as to miss Varner’s store altogether, setting there on the wagon seat exactly like he would set on the lot fence where he knowed he would be safe from Pat Stamper, telling Jody Varner and them other men that Beasley’s horse come from Kentucky. Jody Varner never even laughed. “Kentucky, hey?” he says. “Sho, now. That explains why it taken it so

long. Herman Short swapped Pat Stamper a buckboard and a set of harness for it five years ago, and Beasley Kemp give Herman eight dollars for it last summer. How much did you give Beasley? Fifty cents?"

That's what done it. From then on, it was automatic. It wasn't the horse, the trade. It was still a good trade, because in a sense you might say that all Pap give Beasley for it was the straight stock, since the bob-wire and the sorghum mill belonged to Old Man Anse. And it wasn't the harness and the buckboard that Herman Short give Pat Stamper: it was that eight dollars that Beasley give Herman. That's what rankled Pap.

Not that he held the eight dollars against Herman, because Herman had done already invested a buckboard and a set of harness. And besides, the eight dollars was still in the county, even if it was out of circulation, belonging to Herman Short, and so it didn't actually matter whether Herman had it or Beasley had it. It was Pat Stamper that rankled Pap.

When a man swaps horse for horse, that's one thing. But when cash money starts changing hands, that's something else; and when a stranger comes into the country and starts actual cash money jumping from hand to hand, it's like when a burglar breaks into your house and flings your clothes and truck from place to place even though he don't take nothing: it makes you mad.

So it was not jest to unload Beasley's horse back onto Pat Stamper. It was to get Beasley's eight dollars back outen Pat some way. And so it was jest pure fate that had Pat Stamper camped right on the road we would take to Jefferson on the very day when me and Pap went to get Mammy's separator.

So I reckon the rest of it don't even hardly need to be told, except as a kind of sidelight on how, when a man starts out to plan to do something, he jest thinks he is planning: that what he is actually doing is giving the highball to misfortune, throwing open the switch and saying, "All right, Bad Luck; come right ahead." So here was Pat Stamper and that nigger magician of hisn camped in Hoke's pasture, right on the road we would have to pass to git to town, and here was Pap on the way to town with two live animals and twenty-seven dollars and sixty-five cents in cash, and feeling that the entire honor and pride of the science and pastime of horse trading in Yoknapatawpha County depended on him to vindicate it.

So the rest of it don't even need to be told. I don't need to tell whether me and Pap walked back home or not, because anybody that knows Pat Stamper knows that he never bought a horse or a mule outright in his life; that he swapped you something for it that could at least walk out of sight. So the only point that might interest you is, what was pulling the wagon when we got back home.

And what Mammy done when she said, "Where is my separator?" and Pap saying, "Now Vynie; now Vynie—" Yes, sir. When it come down to the trade, it wasn't Pat Stamper after all that Pap was swapping horses with. It was the demon rum.

Because he was desperate. After the first swap he was desperate. Before that he was jest mad, like when you dream you are right in the middle of the track and the train a-coming; it's right on you and you can't run or dodge because all of a sudden you realize you are running in sand and so after a while it don't even matter if the train catches you or not because all you can think about is being mad at the sand.

That's how Pap was. For ever mile we made toward Jefferson, the madder Pap got. It wasn't at Beasley's horse, because we nursed it on toward town the same way we nursed it to Varner's store until it begun to sweat. It was them eight cash dollars that that horse represented. I don't even recollect just when and where we found out that Pat Stamper was at Jefferson that day. It might have been at Varner's store.

Or it might have been that we never had to be told; that for Pap to carry out the fate that Mammy started when she taunted him about Beasley's horse, Pat Stamper would jest have to be in Jefferson. Because Pap never even taken time to find out where Pat was camped, so that when we did roll into town we had done already swapped.

Yes, sir. We went up them long hills with Pap and me walking and Beasley's horse laying into the collar the best it could but with the mule doing most of the pulling and Pap walking on his side of the wagon and cussing Pat Stamper and Herman Short and Beasley Kemp and Jody Varner, and we went down the hills with Pap holding the wagon broke with a sapling pole so it wouldn't shove Beasley's horse through the collar and turn it wrong-side-outward like a sock and Pap still a-cussing Pat Stamper and Herman and Beasley and Varner, until we come to the three-mile bridge and Pap turned off the road and druv into the bushes and taken the mule outen the harness and knotted one rein so I could ride it and give me the quarter and told me to git for town and git the dime's worth of saltpeter and the nickel's worth of tar and the number ten fish hook.

So we didn't git to town until that afternoon. We went straight to Pat Stamper's camp in Hoke's pasture where I had done already passed it twice on the mule, with Beasley's horse laying into the collar sho enough now and its eyes looking nigh as wild as Pap's looked a hour later when we come outen McCaslin's back door with the separator,

and foaming a little at the mouth where Pap had rubbed the rest of the saltpeter into its gums and with a couple of as pretty tarred bob-wire cuts on its chest as you could want and another one on its flank where Pap had worked the fish hook under its hide where he could tech it by drooping the rein now and then; yes, sir, turning into Hoke's pasture on two wheels and Pap sawing back on the reins and Pat Stamper's nigger running up and grabbing the bridle to keep Beasley's horse from running right into the tent where Pat slept and Pat hisself coming outen the tent with that 'ere cream-colored Stetson cocked over one eye and them eyes the color of a new plow point and jest about as warm. "That's a pretty lively looking horse you got there," Pat says.

"Hell fire, yes!" Pap says. "It durn nigh killed me and this boy both before I could git it into that ere gate yonder. That's why I got to git shut of it. I expect you to beat me, but I got to trade. So come on and beat me quick and give me something I won't be skeered to walk up to."

And I still believe that Pap was right, that it was the right system. It had been five years since Pat had seen the horse, or anyway since he had unloaded it on Herman Short, so me and Pap figured that the chance of Pat's recognizing it would be about the same as for a burglar to recognize a dollar watch that happened to snag onto his clothes in passing five years ago.

And it was the right system, to rush up and say we jest had to trade instead of jest drifting up and hanging around for Pat to persuade us. And Pap wasn't trying to beat Pat bad. All he wanted was to vindicate that ere eight cash dollars. That was it: the eight cash dollars' worth of the pride of Yoknapatawpha County horse trading, and Pap the self-appointed champion and knight doing it not for profit but for honor.

And I be dog if I still don't believe it worked, that Pap did fool Pat, and that it was because of what Pat aimed to swap to Pap and not because Pat recognized Beasley's horse, that he refused to trade anyway except team for team.

Or I don't know. Maybe Pap was so busy fooling Pat that Pat never had to fool Pap, like a man that has jest got to do something, who no matter how hard he tries he jest half does it, while a man that don't care whether he does it or not, does it twice as good with jest half the work.

So there we was: the nigger holding the two mules that Pat wanted to swap for our team, and Pat chewing his tobacco slow and gentle and steady and watching Pap with them plow point eyes, and Pap standing there with that look on his face that was desperate not because he was skeered yet but because he was having to think fast, realizing now that he had done got in deeper than he aimed to and that he would either have to shet his eyes and bust on through, or back out and quit. Because right here was where Pat Stamper showed how come he was Pat Stamper.

If he had jest started in to show Pap what a bargain he would be getting in them two mules, I reckon Pap would have backed out. But Pat didn't. He fooled Pap exactly like one first-class burglar would purely and simply refuse to tell another first-class burglar where the safe was at.

"But I don't want to swap for a whole team," Pap said. "I already got a good mule. It's the horse I don't want. Trade me a mule for the horse."

“No,” Pat said. “I don’t want no wild horse neither. Not that I won’t trade for anything that can walk, provided I can trade my way. But I ain’t going to trade for that horse alone because I don’t want it no more than you do. What I am trading for is that mule. And besides, this here team of mine is matched. I aim to get about three times for the pair of them what I would get trading either of them single.”

“But you will still have a team to trade with,” Pap says.

“No,” Pat said. “I aim to get more from you for them than if the team was broken. If it’s a single mule you want, you better try somebody else.”

So Pap looked at the mules again. That was it. They looked all right. They looked jest exactly all right. They didn’t look too good and they didn’t look too bad. Neither of them looked quite as good as our mule, but the two of them looked jest a leetle mite better than Beasley’s horse and one mule of anybody’s. That was it.

If they had looked like a bargain, I reckon even I, a twelve-year-old boy, would have had sense enough to tell Pap to come on and let’s git outen there. But Lord, I reckon we was doomed from the very second when Jody Varner told about that eight dollars.

I reckon Pat Stamper knowed we was doomed the very second he looked up and seen the nigger holding Beasley’s horse outen the tent. I reckon he knowed right then that he wouldn’t have to try to trade, that all he would need to do would be jest to say No long enough.

So that’s what he done, leaning against our wagon bed with his thumbs hooked into the top of his pants, chewing his tobacco and watching Pap

going through the motion of examining them mules again. Because even I knowed that Pap had done already traded, that he had done walked out into what he thought was a spring branch and then found it was quicksand, and now he knowed he couldn't even stop long enough to turn back. "All right," he said. "I'll take them."

So the nigger taken Beasley's horse and the mule outen the wagon and put our new team in, and me and Pap went on to town. And before God, them mules still looked all right. I be dog if I didn't think that maybe Pap had walked into that Stamper quicksand and then got out again. Or maybe it was jest getting outen Stamper's reach with the harness left. Because when we got back into the road and outen sight of Stamper's camp, Pap's face begun to look like it would when he would set on the lot fence at home and tell the fellows how he was a fool about a horse but not a durn fool.

It wasn't easy yet; it was jest watchful, setting there and feeling out our new team. We was right at town now and so he wouldn't have much time to feel them out, but we would have a good chance to on the road home. "By Godfrey," Pap said, "if they can walk home a-tall, I have got that ere eight dollars back, durn him."

Because that nigger of Pat Stamper's was a artist. Because I swear to Godfrey them mules looked all right. They jest looked like two ordinary not extry good mules you might see in a hundred wagons on the road.

I noticed how they had a kind of jerky way of starting off, first one jerking into the collar and then jerking back and then the other jerking into the collar and then jerking back, and even after we was in the road and the wagon rolling good, one of them taken a spell of some sort and snatched hisself crossways in the traces like he aimed to go back, but

then Stamper had jest told us that they was a matched team; he never had said they had worked together as a matched team, and they was a well matched team in the sense that neither one of them seemed to have any idea as to jest when the other one aimed to start moving or what direction it was going to take. But Pap got them straightened out and we went on; we was jest starting up that ere big hill into town, when they popped into a sweat jest like Beasley Kemp's horse done back yonder on the other side of Varner's store.

But that was all right; it was hot enough; that was when I first taken notice that that rain was going to come up before dark; I mind how I was jest thinking how it was going to ketch us before we got home when this here sweat taken them mules.

And that was all right; I didn't blame them for sweating; the trouble was, it was a different kind of sweat from the kind Beasley's horse had given us to expect. I mind how I was looking at a big hot-looking bright cloud over to the southwest when all of a sudden I realized that the wagon had done stopped going forward up the hill and was starting down it backward and then I looked in time to see both them mules this time crossways in the traces and kind of glaring at one another across the tongue and Pap trying to straighten them out and his eyes looking a right smart like the mules' eyes, and then all of a sudden they straightened out and I mind how I thought it was a good thing they happened to have their backs toward the wagon when they did, because I reckon they moved at the same time for the first time in their lives, for the first time since Pap owned them at least; and, gentlemen, here we come swurging up that hill and into town like a roach down a rathole, with the wagon on two wheels and Pap sawing back on the lines and hollering, "Hell fire, hell fire," and folks scattering, and Pap jest managed to swing them into the alley behind McCaslin's store and stopped them by locking our nigh front wheel with another wagon's and the other mules (they was hitched) holp to put the brakes on.

So it was a good crowd by then, helping us to git untangled, and Pap led our team on to Uncle Ike's back door and tied them up close to the door handle and me and him went in to get the separator, with the folks still coming up and saying, "It's that team of Stamper's" and Pap kind of breathing hard and looking a right smart less easy in the face than when we had left Stamper's camp even, besides most all-fired watchful, saying, "Come on here. Let's git that durn separator of your mammy's loaded and git outen here." So we give Uncle Ike the rag with Mammy's money in it and me and Pap taken up the separator and started back out to the wagon, to where we had left it.

It was still there. I mind how I could see the bed of it where Pap had drawed it up to the door, and I could see the folks from the waist up standing in the alley, and then I realized that it was about twice as many folks looking at our team as it had been when we left. I reckon Pap never noticed it because he was too busy hurrying that 'ere separator along. So I jest stepped aside a little to have a look at what the folks was looking at and then I realized that I could see the front of our wagon and the place where me and Pap had left the mules, but that I couldn't see no mules.

So I don't recollect whether I dropped my side of the separator or if Pap dropped hisn or if we still carried it when we come to where we could see out the door and see the mules. They were still there. They were just laying down.

Pap had snubbed them right up to the handle of Uncle Ike's back door, with the same rein run through both bits, and now they looked jest exactly like two fellows that had done hung themselves in one of these here suicide packs, with their heads snubbed up together and their

tongues hanging out and their necks stretched about four foot and their legs folded back under them like shot rabbits until Pap jumped down and cut the harness. Yes, sir. A artist. He had give them to the exact inch jest enough of whatever it was, to get them into town and off the square before it played out.

And this here is what I meant when I said it was desperation. I can see Pap now, backed off into that corner behind Uncle Ike's plows and cultivators and such, with his face white and his voice shaking and his hand shaking so he couldn't hardly hand me the six bits. "Go to Doc Peabody's store," he says, "and git me a pint of whiskey and git it quick."

Yes, sir. Desperate. It wasn't even quicksand now. It was a whirlpool, and Pap with jest one jump left. He drunk that pint of whiskey in two drinks and set the empty bottle careful in the corner of Uncle Ike's warehouse, and we went back to the wagon. The mules was still up all right, and we loaded the separator in and Pap eased them away careful, with the folks all watching and telling one another it was a Pat Stamper team and Pap setting there with his face red now instead of white and them clouds were heavy and the sun was even gone now but I don't think Pap ever noticed it.

And we hadn't eaten too, and I don't think Pap noticed that neither. And I be dog if it didn't seem like Pat Stamper hadn't moved too, standing there at the gate to his stock pen, with that Stetson cocked and his thumbs still hooked into the top of his pants, and Pap setting on the wagon trying to keep his hands from shaking and the team stopped now with their heads down and their legs spraddled and breathing like starting up a sawmill on a Monday morning. "I come to trade back for my team," Pap said.

“What’s the matter?” Stamper says. “Don’t tell me these are too lively for you, too. They don’t look it.”

“All right,” Pap said. “All right. I jest want my team back. I’ll give you four dollars to trade back. That’s all I got. And I got to have them. Make your four dollars, and give me my team.”

“I ain’t got your team,” Stamper says. “I didn’t want that horse either. I told you that. So I got shet of it right away.”

Pap set there for a while. It was all clouded over now, and cooler; you could even smell the rain. “All right,” Pap said. “But you still got the mule. All right. I’ll take it.”

“For what?” Stamper says. “You want to swap that team for your mule?” Sho. Pap wasn’t trading.

He was desperate, setting there like he couldn’t even see, with Stamper leaning easy against the gate and looking at him for a minute. “No,” he says. “I don’t want them mules. Yours is the best. I wouldn’t trade that way, even.” He spit, easy and careful, before he looked at Pap again. “Besides, I done included your mule into another team, with another horse. You want to look at it?”

“All right,” Pap said. “How much?”

“Don’t you even want to see it first?” Stamper says.

“All right,” Pap said. So the nigger led out the horse, a little dark brown horse; I remember how even with it clouded up to rain and no sun, how the horse shined; a horse a little bigger than the one we traded

Stamper, and hog fat. Yes, sir. That's jest exactly how it was fat: not like a horse is fat but like a hog: fat right up to its ears and looking tight as a drum; it was so fat it couldn't hardly walk, putting its feet down like they didn't have no weight nor feeling in them. "It's too fat to last," Pap said. "It won't even git me home."

"That's what I think myself," Stamper said. "That's why I am willing to git shet of it."

"All right," Pap said. "But I got to try it."

"Try it?" Stamper said. Pap didn't answer. He jest got down from the wagon careful and went to the horse. It had a hackamore on and Pap taken the rein outen the nigger's hand and started to git on the horse. "Wait," Stamper says. "What you fixing to do?"

"Going to try it," Pap said. "I done traded a horse with you once today." Stamper looked at Pap again for a minute. Then he spit again and kind of stepped back.

"All right," he said. "Help him up, Jim." So the nigger holp Pap onto the horse, only the nigger never had time to jump back because as soon as Pap's weight come onto the horse's back it was like Pap had a live wire in his britches. It throwed Pap hard and Pap got up without no change on his face a-tall and went back to the horse and taken the hackamore again and the nigger holp him up again, with Stamper standing there with his hands hooked into his pants tops, watching.

And the horse slammed Pap off again and Pap got up again with his face jest the same and went back and taken the hackamore from the nigger again when Stamper stopped him. That was exactly how Pap did it, like he wanted the horse to throw him and hard, not to try to hurt

hisself, but like the ability of his bones and meat to feel that 'ere hard ground was all he had left to pay for a horse with life enough in it to git us home. "Here, here," Stamper says. "Are you trying to kill yourself?"

"All right," Pap says. "How much?"

"Come on into the tent and have a drink," Stamper says.

So I waited in the wagon. It was beginning to blow a little now, and we hadn't brought no coats with us. But there was some croker sacks in the wagon that Mammy made us bring to wrap her separator in and so I was wrapping the separator up in them when the nigger led out a horse and buggy and then Pap and Stamper come outen the tent and Pap come to the wagon. He never looked at me.

He jest reached in and taken the separator outen the sacks and put it into the buggy and then him and Stamper got in and druv away. They went back toward town and then they went out of sight and I seen the nigger watching me. "You fixing to git wet fo you git home," he said.

"I reckon so," I said.

"You want to eat a snack of dinner until they git back?" the nigger said.

"I ain't hungry," I said. So he went on into the tent and I waited in the wagon. Yes, sir, it was most sholy going to rain; I mind how I thought that anyway now we could use the croker sacks to try to keep dry in. Then Pap and Stamper come back and Pap never looked at me neither. He went into the tent and I could see him drinking outen a bottle and then putting the bottle back into his shirt. I reckon Stamper give him that bottle.

Pap never said so, but I reckon Stamper did. So then the nigger put our mule and the new horse in the wagon and Pap come outen the tent and got in. Stamper and the nigger both holp him now.

“Don’t you reckon you better let the boy drive?” Stamper says.

“I’ll drive,” Pap said. “By Godfrey, maybe I can’t swap a horse with you, but I can still drive it.”

“Sho now,” Stamper said. “That horse will surprise you.”

III

It did. Yes, sir. It surprised us, jest like Stamper said. It happened jest before dark. The rain, the storm, come up before we had gone a mile and we rode in it for two hours before we found a old barn to shelter under, setting hunched under them croker sacks (I mind how I thought how in a way I almost wished Mammy knew we never had the separator because she had wanted it for so long that maybe she would rather for Uncle Ike to own it and it safe and dry, than for her to own it five miles from home in a wagon in the rain) and watching our new horse that was so fat it even put its feet down like they never had no feeling nor weight, that ever now and then, even in the rain, would take a kind of flinching jerk like when Pap’s weight came down onto its back at Stamper’s camp.

But we didn’t catch on then, because I was driving now, sho enough, because Pap was laying flat in the wagon bed with the rain popping him in the face and him not even knowing it, and me setting on the seat and watching our new horse change from a black horse into a bay.

Because I was jest twelve and me and Pap had always done our horse trading along that country road that run past our lot. So I jest druv into the first shelter I come to and shaken Pap awake. The rain had cooled him off some, but even without that he would have sobered quick. “What?” he says. “What is it?”

“The horse, Pap!” I hollered. “It’s done changed color!”

Yes, sir. It sobered him quick. We was both outen the wagon then and Pap’s eyes popping sho enough now and a bay horse standing there where he had went to sleep looking at a black one.

Because I was jest twelve; it happened too fast for me; I jest mind seeing Pap tech the horse’s back at a spot where ever now and then the backband must have teched it (I tell you, that nigger was a artist) and then the next I knowed that horse was plunging and swurging; I remember dodging jest as it slammed into the wall and then me and Pap heard a sound like when a automobile tire picks up a nail: a sound like Whoosh! and then the rest of that shiny fat black horse we had got from Pat Stamper vanished.

I don’t mean that me and Pap was standing there with jest our mule left. We had a horse too. Only it was the same one we had left home with that morning and that we had swapped Beasley Kemp the sorghum mill and the bob-wire and the straight stock for two weeks ago.

We even got our fish hook back, with the barb still bent where Pap had bent it and the nigger had jest moved it a little. But it wasn’t until we was home the next day at daylight that we found the hand pump valve behind its off fore leg.

And that's about all. Because Mammy was up and seen us pass, and so after a while we had to go to the house, because me and Pap hadn't et since twenty-four hours ago. So we went to the house, with Mammy standing in the door saying, "Where's my separator?" and Pap saying how he always had been a fool about a horse and he couldn't help it and Mammy couldn't neither and that to jest give him time, and Mammy standing there looking at him and then she begun to cry and it was the first time I ever seen her cry.

She cried hard, standing there in her old wrapper, not even hiding her face, saying, "Fool about a horse! Yes, but why the horse? why the horse?"

"Now, Vynie; now, Vynie," Pap said. Then she turned and went back into the house. We didn't go in. We could hear her, but she wasn't in the kitchen, and Pap told me to go around to the kitchen and see if she was fixing breakfast and then come down to the lot and tell him, and I did but she wasn't in the kitchen.

So we set on the lot fence, and then we seen her coming down the hill from the house; she was dressed and had on her shawl and sunbonnet and her gloves, and she went into the stable without looking at us and we could hear her saddling the mule and Pap told me to go and ask her if she wanted him to help her and I did and she didn't answer and I saw her face that time and so I come back and set on the fence with Pap and we saw her ride out of the barn on the mule.

She was leading Beasley Kemp's horse. It was still black in places where the rain had streaked it. "If it hadn't been for that durn rain, we might could have got shet of it," Pap said.

So we went to the house then, and I cooked breakfast and me and Pap et and then Pap taken a nap. He told me to watch for her from the gallery, but me and him neither never much thought to see her soon. We never seen her until next morning. We was cooking breakfast when we heard the wagon and I looked out and it was Odum Tull's wagon and Mammy was getting outen it and I come back to the kitchen jest before Pap left for the stable. "She's got the separator," I told Pap.

"I reckon it didn't happen to be our team in Odum's wagon," Pap said.

"No, sir," I says. So we saw her go into the house with the separator.

"I reckon likely she will wait to put on her old wrapper first," Pap said. "We ought to started breakfast sooner." It did take about that long. And then we could hear it. It made a good strong sound, like it would separate milk good and fast. Then it stopped. "It's too bad she ain't got but the one gallon," Pap said. "You go and look in the kitchen." So I went, and sho enough, she was cooking breakfast. But she wouldn't let us eat it in the kitchen. She handed it out the door to us.

"I am going to be busy in here and I don't aim to have you all in the way," she said. It was all right now. Her face was quiet now; it was jest busy. So me and Pap went out to the well and et, and then we heard the separator again.

"I didn't know it would go through but one time," Pap said.

"Maybe Uncle Ike showed her how to do it," I said.

"I reckon she is capable of running it right," Pap said. "Like she wants it to run, anyhow." Then it stopped, and me and Pap started down to the barn but she called us and made us bring the dishes to the kitchen

door. Then we went down to the lot and set on the fence, only, like Pap said, without no stock to look at, it wasn't no comfort in it. "I reckon she jest rode up to that durn feller's tent and said, 'Here's your team.

Now you git me my separator and git it quick; I got to ketch a ride back home,' " Pap said. And then after a while we heard it again, and that afternoon we walked up to Old Man Anse's to borrow a mule to finish the lower piece with, but he never had none to spare now. So he jest cussed around a while and then we come on back and set on the fence. And sure enough, pretty soon we could hear Mammy starting it up and it running strong and steady, like it would make the milk fly. "She is separating it again," Pap said. "It looks like she is fixing to get a heap of pleasure and comfort outen it."

The End

Race at Morning, William Faulkner

Race at Morning

The Saturday Evening Post, March 1955

I WAS IN the boat when I seen him. It was jest dust-dark; I had jest fed the horses and clumb back down the bank to the boat and shoved off to cross back to camp when I seen him, about half a quarter up the

river, swimming; jest his head above the water, and it no more than a dot in that light. But I could see that rocking chair he toted on it and I knowed it was him, going right back to that canebrake in the fork of the bayou where he lived all year until the day before the season opened, like the game wardens had give him a calendar, when he would clear out and disappear, nobody knowed where, until the day after the season closed.

But here he was, coming back a day ahead of time, like maybe he had got mixed up and was using last year's calendar by mistake. Which was jest too bad for him, because me and Mister Ernest would be setting on the horse right over him when the sun rose tomorrow morning.

So I told Mister Ernest and we et supper and fed the dogs, and then I holp Mister Ernest in the poker game, standing behind his chair until about ten o'clock, when Roth Edmonds said, "Why don't you go to bed, boy?"

"Or if you're going to set up," Willy Legate said, "why don't you take a spelling book to set up over? … He knows every cuss word in the dictionary, every poker hand in the deck and every whisky label in the distillery, but he can't even write his name.… Can you?" he says to me.

"I don't need to write my name down," I said. "I can remember in my mind who I am."

"You're twelve years old," Walter Ewell said. "Man to man now, how many days in your life did you ever spend in school?"

"He ain't got time to go to school," Willy Legate said. "What's the use in going to school from September to middle of November, when he'll

have to quit then to come in here and do Ernest's hearing for him? And what's the use in going back to school in January, when in jest eleven months it will be November fifteenth again and he'll have to start all over telling Ernest which way the dogs went?"

"Well, stop looking into my hand, anyway," Roth Edmonds said.

"What's that? What's that?" Mister Ernest said. He wore his listening button in his ear all the time, but he never brought the battery to camp with him because the cord would bound to get snagged ever time we run through a thicket.

"Willy says for me to go to bed!" I hollered.

"Don't you never call nobody 'mister'?" Willy said.

"I call Mister Ernest 'mister'," I said.

"All right," Mister Ernest said. "Go to bed then. I don't need you."

"That ain't no lie," Willy said. "Deaf or no deaf, he can hear a fifty-dollar raise if you don't even move your lips."

So I went to bed, and after a while Mister Ernest come in and I wanted to tell him again how big them horns looked even half a quarter away in the river. Only I would 'a' had to holler, and the only time Mister Ernest agreed he couldn't hear was when we would be setting on Dan, waiting for me to point which way the dogs was going. So we jest laid down, and it wasn't no time Simon was beating the bottom of the dishpan with the spoon, hollering, "Raise up and get your four-o'clock coffee!" and I crossed the river in the dark this time, with the lantern, and fed Dan and Roth Edmondziz horse. It was going to be a fine day, cold and bright; even in the dark I could see the white frost on the leaves and

bushes — jest exactly the kind of day that big old son of a gun laying up there in that brake would like to run.

Then we et, and set the stand-holder across for Uncle Ike McCaslin to put them on the stands where he thought they ought to be, because he was the oldest one in camp. He had been hunting deer in these woods for about a hundred years, I reckon, and if anybody would know where a buck would pass, it would be him. Maybe with a big old buck like this one, that had been running the woods for what would amount to a hundred years in a deer's life, too, him and Uncle Ike would sholy manage to be at the same place at the same time this morning — provided, of course, he managed to git away from me and Mister Ernest on the jump. Because me and Mister Ernest was going to git him.

Then me and Mister Ernest and Roth Edmonds set the dogs over, with Simon holding Eagle and the other old dogs on leash because the young ones, the puppies, wasn't going nowhere until Eagle let them, nohow.

Then me and Mister Ernest and Roth saddled up, and Mister Ernest got up and I handed him up his pump gun and let Dan's bridle go for him to git rid of the spell of bucking he had to git shut of ever morning until Mister Ernest hit him between the ears with the gun barrel. Then Mister Ernest loaded the gun and give me the stirrup, and I got up behind him and we taken the fire road up toward the bayou, the five big dogs dragging Simon along in front with his single-barrel britchloader slung on a piece of plow line across his back, and the puppies moiling along in ever'body's way.

It was light now and it was going to be jest fine; the east already yellow for the sun and our breaths smoking in the cold still bright air until the sun would come up and warm it, and a little skim of ice in the ruts, and

ever leaf and twig and switch and even the frozen clods frosted over, waiting to sparkle like a rainbow when the sun finally come up and hit them.

Until all my insides felt light and strong as a balloon, full of that light cold strong air, so that it seemed to me like I couldn't even feel the horse's back I was straddle of — jest the hot strong muscles moving under the hot strong skin, setting up there without no weight at all, so that when old Eagle struck and jumped, me and Dan and Mister Ernest would go jest like a bird, not even touching the ground. It was jest fine. When that big old buck got killed today, I knowed that even if he had put it off another ten years, he couldn't 'a' picked a better one.

And sho enough, as soon as we come to the bayou we seen his foot in the mud where he had come up out of the river last night, spread in the soft mud like a cow's foot, big as a cow's, big as a mule's, with Eagle and the other dogs laying into the leash rope now until Mister Ernest told me to jump down and help Simon hold them. Because me and Mister Ernest knowed exactly where he would be — a little canebrake island in the middle of the bayou, where he could lay up until whatever doe or little deer the dogs had happened to jump could go up or down the bayou in either direction and take the dogs on away, so he could steal out and creep back down the bayou to the river and swim it, and leave the country like he always done the day the season opened.

Which is jest what we never aimed for him to do this time. So we left Roth on his horse to cut him off and turn him over Uncle Ike's standers if he tried to slip back down the bayou, and me and Simon, with the leashed dogs, walked on up the bayou until Mister Ernest on the horse said it was fur enough; then turned up into the woods about half a quarter above the brake because the wind was going to be south this morning when it riz, and turned down toward the brake, and Mister

Ernest give the word to cast them, and we slipped the leash and Mister Ernest give me the stirrup again and I got up.

Old Eagle had done already took off because he knowed where that old son of a gun would be laying as good as we did, not making no racket atall yet, but jest boring on through the buck vines with the other dogs trailing along behind him, and even Dan seemed to know about that buck, too, beginning to souple up and jump a little through the vines, so that I taken my holt on Mister Ernest's belt already before the time had come for Mister Ernest to touch him. Because when we got strung out, going fast behind a deer, I wasn't on Dan's back much of the time nohow, but mostly jest strung out from my holt on Mister Ernest's belt, so that Willy Legate said that when we was going through the woods fast, it looked like Mister Ernest had a boy-size pair of empty overhalls blowing out of his hind pocket.

So it wasn't even a strike, it was a jump. Eagle must 'a' walked right up behind him or maybe even stepped on him while he was laying there still thinking it was day after tomorrow. Eagle jest throwed his head back and up and said, "There he goes," and we even heard the buck crashing through the first of the cane. Then all the other dogs was hollering behind him, and Dan give a squat to jump, but it was against the curb this time, not jest the snaffle, and Mister Ernest let him down into the bayou and swung him around the brake and up the other bank.

Only he never had to say, "Which way?" because I was already pointing past his shoulder, freshening my holt on the belt jest as Mister Ernest touched Dan with that big old rusty spur on his nigh heel, because when Dan felt it he would go off jest like a stick of dynamite, straight through whatever he could bust and over or under what he couldn't.

The dogs was already almost out of hearing. Eagle must ‘a’ been looking right up that big son of a gun’s tail until he finally decided he better git on out of there. And now they must ‘a’ been getting pretty close to Uncle Ike’s standers, and Mister Ernest reined Dan back and held him, squatting and bouncing and trembling like a mule having his tail roached, while we listened for the shots.

But never none come, and I hollered to Mister Ernest we better go on while I could still hear the dogs, and he let Dan off, but still there wasn’t no shots, and now we knowed the race had done already passed the standers; and we busted out of a thicket, and sho enough there was Uncle Ike and Willy standing beside his foot in a soft patch.

“He got through us all,” Uncle Ike said. “I don’t know how he done it. I just had a glimpse of him. He looked big as a elephant, with a rack on his head you could cradle a yellin’ calf in. He went right on down the ridge. You better get on, too; that Hog Bayou camp might not miss him.”

So I freshened my holt and Mister Ernest touched Dan again. The ridge run due south; it was clear of vines and bushes so we could go fast, into the wind, too, because it had riz now, and now the sun was up too. So we would hear the dogs again any time now as the wind got up; we could make time now, but still holding Dan back to a canter, because it was either going to be quick, when he got down to the standers from that Hog Bayou camp eight miles below ourn, or a long time, in case he got by them too.

And sho enough, after a while we heard the dogs; we was walking Dan now to let him blow a while, and we heard them, the sound coming faint up the wind, not running now, but trailing because the big son of a

gun had decided a good piece back, probably, to put a end to this foolishness, and picked hisself up and soupled out and put about a mile between hisself and the dogs — until he run up on them other standers from that camp below.

I could almost see him stopped behind a bush, peeping out and saying, “What’s this? What’s this? Is this whole durn country full of folks this morning?” Then looking back over his shoulder at where old Eagle and the others was hollering along after him while he decided how much time he had to decide what to do next.

Except he almost shaved it too fine. We heard the shots; it sounded like a war. Old Eagle must ‘a’ been looking right up his tail again and he had to bust on through the best way he could. “Pow, pow, pow, pow” and then “Pow, pow, pow, pow,” like it must ‘a’ been three or four ganged right up on him before he had time even to swerve, and me hollering, “No! No! No! No!” because he was ourn.

It was our beans and oats he et and our brake he laid in; we had been watching him ever year, and it was like we had raised him, to be killed at last on our jump, in front of our dogs, by some strangers that would probably try to beat the dogs off and drag him away before we could even git a piece of the meat.

“Shut up and listen,” Mister Ernest said. So I done it and we could hear the dogs; not just the others, but Eagle, too, not trailing no scent now and not baying no downed meat, neither, but running hot on sight long after the shooting was over.

I jest had time to freshen my holt. Yes, sir, they was running on sight. Like Willy Legate would say, if Eagle jest had a drink of whisky he would ketch that deer; going on, done already gone when we broke out of the thicket and seen the fellers that had done the shooting, five or six of them, squatting and crawling around, looking at the ground and the bushes, like maybe if they looked hard enough, spots of blood would bloom out on the stalks and leaves like frogstools or hawberries.

“Have any luck, boys?” Mister Ernest said.

“I think I hit him,” one of them said. “I know I did. We’re hunting blood now.”

“Well, when you have found him, blow your horn and I’ll come back and tote him in to camp for you,” Mister Ernest said.

So we went on, going fast now because the race was almost out of hearing again, going fast, too, like not jest the buck, but the dogs, too, had took a new leash on life from all the excitement and shooting.

We was in strange country now because we never had to run this fur before, we had always killed before now; now we had come to Hog Bayou that runs into the river a good fifteen miles below our camp. It had water in it, not to mention a mess of down trees and logs and such, and Mister Ernest checked Dan again, saying, “Which way?” I could just barely hear them, off to the east a little, like the old son of a gun had give up the idea of Vicksburg or New Orleans, like he first seemed to have, and had decided to have a look at Alabama; so I pointed and we turned up the bayou hunting for a crossing, and maybe we could ‘a’ found one, except that I reckon Mister Ernest decided we never had time to wait.

We come to a place where the bayou had narrowed down to about twelve or fifteen feet, and Mister Ernest said, “Look out, I’m going to touch him” and done it.

I didn’t even have time to freshen my holt when we was already in the air, and then I seen the vine — it was a loop of grapevine nigh as big as my wrist, looping down right across the middle of the bayou — and I thought he seen it, too, and was jest waiting to grab it and fling it up over our heads to go under it, and I know Dan seen it because he even ducked his head to jump under it.

But Mister Ernest never seen it atall until it skun back along Dan’s neck and hooked under the head of the saddle horn, us flying on through the air, the loop of the vine gitting tighter and tighter until something somewhere was going to have to give. It was the saddle girth. It broke, and Dan going on and scrabbling up the other bank bare nekkid except for the bridle, and me and Mister Ernest and the saddle, Mister Ernest still setting in the saddle holding the gun, and me still holding onto Mister Ernest’s belt, hanging in the air over the bayou in the tightened loop of that vine like in the drawed-back loop of a big rubber-banded slingshot, until it snapped back and shot us back across the bayou and flang us clear, me still holding onto Mister Ernest’s belt and on the bottom now, so that when we lit I would ‘a’ had Mister Ernest and the saddle both on top of me if I hadn’t clumb fast around the saddle and up Mister Ernest’s side, so that when we landed, it was the saddle first, then Mister Ernest, and me on top, until I jumped up, and Mister Ernest still laying there with jest the white rim of his eyes showing.

“Mister Ernest!” I hollered, and then clumb down to the bayou and scooped my cap full of water and clumb back and throwed it in his face, and he opened his eyes and laid there on the saddle cussing me.

“God dawg it,” he said, “why didn’t you stay behind where you started out?”

“You was the biggest!” I said. “You would ‘a’ mashed me flat!”

“What do you think you done to me?” Mister Ernest said. “Next time, if you can’t stay where you start out, jump clear. Don’t climb up on top of me no more. You hear?”

“Yes, sir,” I said.

So he got up then, still cussing and holding his back, and clumb down to the water and dipped some in his hand onto his face and neck and dipped some more up and drunk it, and I drunk some, too, and clumb back and got the saddle and the gun, and we crossed the bayou on the down logs. If we could jest ketch Dan; not that he would have went them fifteen miles back to camp, because, if anything, he would have went on by hisself to try to help Eagle ketch that buck.

But he was about fifty yards away, eating buck vines, so I brought him back, and we taken Mister Ernest’s galluses and my belt and the whang leather loop off Mister Ernest’s horn and tied the saddle back on Dan. It didn’t look like much, but maybe it would hold.

“Provided you don’t let me jump him through no more grapevines without hollering first,” Mister Ernest said.

“Yes, sir,” I said. “I’ll holler first next time — provided you’ll holler a little quicker when you touch him next time too.” But it was all right; we jest had to be a little easy getting up. “Now which-a-way?” I said. Because we couldn’t hear nothing now, after wasting all this time. And

this was new country, sho enough. It had been cut over and growed up in thickets we couldn't 'a' seen over even standing up on Dan.

But Mister Ernest never even answered. He jest turned Dan along the bank of the bayou where it was a little more open and we could move faster again, soon as Dan and us got used to that homemade cinch strop and got a little confidence in it. Which jest happened to be east, or so I thought then, because I never paid no particular attention to east then because the sun — I don't know where the morning had went, but it was gone, the morning and the frost, too — was up high now.

And then we heard him. No, that's wrong; what we heard was shots. And that was when we realized how fur we had come, because the only camp we knowed about in that direction was the Hollyknowe camp, and Hollyknowe was exactly twenty-eight miles from Van Dorn, where me and Mister Ernest lived — just the shots, no dogs nor nothing. If old Eagle was still behind him and the buck was still alive, he was too wore out now to even say, "Here he comes."

"Don't touch him!" I hollered. But Mister Ernest remembered that cinch strop, too, and he jest let Dan off the snaffle. And Dan heard them shots, too, picking his way through the thickets, hopping the vines and logs when he could and going under them when he couldn't.

And sho enough, it was jest like before — two or three men squatting and creeping among the bushes, looking for blood that Eagle had done already told them wasn't there. But we never stopped this time, jest trotting on by. Then Mister Ernest swung Dan until we was going due north.

"Wait!" I hollered. "Not this way."

But Mister Ernest jest turned his face back over his shoulder. It looked tired, too, and there was a smear of mud on it where that ’ere grapevine had snatched him off the horse.

“Don’t you know where he’s heading?” he said. “He’s done done his part, give everybody a fair open shot at him, and now he’s going home, back to that brake in our bayou. He ought to make it exactly at dark.”

And that’s what he was doing. We went on. It didn’t matter to hurry now. There wasn’t no sound nowhere; it was that time in the early afternoon in November when don’t nothing move or cry, not even birds, the peckerwoods and yellowhammers and jays, and it seemed to me like I could see all three of us — me and Mister Ernest and Dan — and Eagle, and the other dogs, and that big old buck, moving through the quiet woods in the same direction, headed for the same place, not running now but walking, that had all run the fine race the best we knowed how, and all three of us now turned like on a agreement to walk back home, not together in a bunch because we didn’t want to worry or tempt one another, because what we had all three spent this morning doing was no play-acting jest for fun, but was serious, and all three of us was still what we was — that old buck that had to run, not because he was skeered, but because running was what he done the best and was proudest at; and Eagle and the dogs that chased him, not because they hated or feared him, but because that was the thing they done the best and was proudest at; and me and Mister Ernest and Dan, that run him not because we wanted his meat, which would be too tough to eat anyhow, or his head to hang on a wall, but because now we could go back and work hard for eleven months making a crop, so we would have the right to come back here next November — all three of us going back home now, peaceful and separate, until next year, next time.

Then we seen him for the first time. We was out of the cut-over now; we could even ‘a’ cantered, except that all three of us was long past that. So we was walking, too, when we come on the dogs — the puppies and one of the old ones — played out, laying in a little wet swag, panting, jest looking up at us when we passed. Then we come to a long open glade, and we seen the three other old dogs and about a hundred yards ahead of them Eagle, all walking, not making no sound; and then suddenly, at the fur end of the glade, the buck hisself getting up from where he had been resting for the dogs to come up, getting up without no hurry, big, big as a mule, tall as a mule, and turned, and the white underside of his tail for a second or two more before the thicket taken him.

It might ‘a’ been a signal, a good-by, a farewell. Still walking, we passed the other three old dogs in the middle of the glade, laying down, too; and still that hundred yards ahead of them, Eagle, too, not laying down, because he was still on his feet, but his legs was spraddled and his head was down; maybe jest waiting until we was out of sight of his shame, his eyes saying plain as talk when we passed, “I’m sorry, boys, but this here is all.”

Mister Ernest stopped Dan. “Jump down and look at his feet,” he said.

“Nothing wrong with his feet,” I said. “It’s his wind has done give out.”

“Jump down and look at his feet,” Mister Ernest said.

So I done it, and while I was stooping over Eagle I could hear the pump gun go, “Snick-cluck. Snick-cluck. Snick-cluck” three times, except that I never thought nothing then. Maybe he was jest running the shells through to be sho it would work when we seen him again or maybe to make sho they was all buckshot. Then I got up again, and we went on, still walking; a little west of north now, because when we seen his

white flag that second or two before the thicket hid it, it was on a beeline for that notch in the bayou.

And it was evening, too, now. The wind had done dropped and there was a edge to the air and the sun jest touched the tops of the trees. And he was taking the easiest way, too, now, going straight as he could. When we seen his foot in the soft places he was running for a while at first after his rest. But soon he was walking, too, like he knowed, too, where Eagle and the dogs was.

And then we seen him again. It was the last time — a thicket, with the sun coming through a hole onto it like a searchlight. He crashed jest once; then he was standing there broadside to us, not twenty yards away, big as a statue and red as gold in the sun, and the sun sparking on the tips of his horns — they was twelve of them — so that he looked like he had twelve lighted candles branched around his head, standing there looking at us while Mister Ernest raised the gun and aimed at his neck, and the gun went, “Click. Snick-cluck. Click. Snick-cluck. Click.

Snick-cluck” three times, and Mister Ernest still holding the gun aimed while the buck turned and give one long bound, the white underside of his tail like a blaze of fire, too, until the thicket and the shadows put it out; and Mister Ernest laid the gun slow and gentle back across the saddle in front of him, saying quiet and peaceful, and not much louder than jest breathing, “God dawg. God dawg.”

Then he jogged me with his elbow and we got down, easy and careful because of that ere cinch strop, and he reached into his vest and taken out one of the cigars. It was busted where I had fell on it, I reckon, when we hit the ground. He throwed it away and taken out the other one.

It was busted, too, so he bit off a hunk of it to chew and throwed the rest away. And now the sun was gone even from the tops of the trees and there wasn't nothing left but a big red glare in the west.

"Don't worry," I said. "I ain't going to tell them you forgot to load your gun. For that matter, they don't need to know we ever seed him."

"Much oblige," Mister Ernest said. There wasn't going to be no moon tonight neither, so he taken the compass off the whang leather loop in his buttonhole and handed me the gun and set the compass on a stump and stepped back and looked at it. "Jest about the way we're headed now," he said, and taken the gun from me and opened it and put one shell in the britch and taken up the compass, and I taken Dan's reins and we started, with him in front with the compass in his hand.

And after a while it was full dark; Mister Ernest would have to strike a match ever now and then to read the compass, until the stars come out good and we could pick out one to follow, because I said, "How fur do you reckon it is?" and he said, "A little more than one box of matches." So we used a star when we could, only we couldn't see it all the time because the woods was too dense and we would git a little off until he would have to spend another match. And now it was good and late, and he stopped and said, "Get on the horse."

"I ain't tired," I said.

"Get on the horse," he said. "We don't want to spoil him."

Because he had been a good feller ever since I had knowed him, which was even before that day two years ago when maw went off with the

Vicksburg roadhouse feller and the next day pap didn't come home neither, and on the third one Mister Ernest rid Dan up to the door of the cabin on the river he let us live in, so pap could work his piece of land and run his fish line, too, and said, "Put that gun down and come on here and climb up behind."

So I got in the saddle even if I couldn't reach the stirrups, and Mister Ernest taken the reins and I must 'a' went to sleep, because the next thing I knowed a buttonhole of my lumberjack was tied to the saddle horn with that ere whang cord off the compass, and it was good and late now and we wasn't fur, because Dan was already smelling water, the river. Or maybe it was the feed lot itself he smelled, because we struck the fire road not a quarter below it, and soon I could see the river, too, with the white mist laying on it soft and still as cotton.

Then the lot, home; and up yonder in the dark, not no piece akchully, close enough to hear us unsaddling and shucking corn prob'ly, and sholy close enough to hear Mister Ernest blowing his horn at the dark camp for Simon to come in the boat and git us, that old buck in his brake in the bayou; home, too, resting, too, after the hard run, waking hisself now and then, dreaming of dogs behind him or maybe it was the racket we was making would wake him.

Then Mister Ernest stood on the bank blowing until Simon's lantern went bobbing down into the mist; then we clumb down to the landing and Mister Ernest blowed again now and then to guide Simon, until we seen the lantern in the mist, and then Simon and the boat; only it looked like ever time I set down and got still, I went back to sleep, because Mister Ernest was shaking me again to git out and climb the bank into the dark camp, until I felt a bed against my knees and tumbled into it.

Then it was morning, tomorrow; it was all over now until next November, next year, and we could come back. Uncle Ike and Willy and Walter and Roth and the rest of them had come in yestiddy, soon as Eagle taken the buck out of hearing and they knowed that deer was gone, to pack up and be ready to leave this morning for Yoknapatawpha, where they lived, until it would be November again and they could come back again.

So, as soon as we et breakfast, Simon run them back up the river in the big boat to where they left their cars and pickups, and now it wasn't nobody but jest me and Mister Ernest setting on the bench against the kitchen wall in the sun; Mister Ernest smoking a cigar — a whole one this time that Dan hadn't had no chance to jump him through a grapevine and bust. He hadn't washed his face neither where that vine had throwed him into the mud.

But that was all right, too; his face usually did have a smudge of mud or tractor grease or beard stubble on it, because he wasn't jest a planter; he was a farmer, he worked as hard as ara one of his hands and tenants — which is why I knowed from the very first that we would git along, that I wouldn't have no trouble with him and he wouldn't have no trouble with me, from that very first day when I woke up and maw had done gone off with that Vicksburg road-house feller without even waiting to cook breakfast, and the next morning pap was gone, too, and it was almost night the next day when I heard a horse coming up and I taken the gun that I had already throwed a shell into the britch when pap never come home last night, and stood in the door while Mister Ernest rid up and said, "Come on. Your paw ain't coming back neither."

"You mean he give me to you?" I said.

“Who cares?” he said. “Come on. I brought a lock for the door. We’ll send the pickup back tomorrow for whatever you want.”

So I come home with him and it was all right, it was jest fine — his wife had died about three years ago — without no women to worry us or take off in the middle of the night with a durn Vicksburg roadhouse jake without even waiting to cook breakfast. And we would go home this afternoon, too, but not jest yet; we always stayed one more day after the others left because Uncle Ike always left what grub they hadn’t et, and the rest of the homemade corn whisky he drunk and that town whisky of Roth Edmondziz he called Scotch that smelled like it come out of a old bucket of roof paint; setting in the sun for one more day before we went back home to git ready to put in next year’s crop of cotton and oats and beans and hay; and across the river yonder, behind the wall of trees where the big woods started, that old buck laying up today in the sun, too — resting today, too, without nobody to bother him until next November.

So at least one of us was glad it would be eleven months and two weeks before he would have to run that fur that fast again. So he was glad of the very same thing we was sorry of, and so all of a sudden I thought about how maybe planting and working and then harvesting oats and cotton and beans and hay wasn’t jest something me and Mister Ernest done three hundred and fifty-one days to fill in the time until we could come back hunting again, but it was something we had to do, and do honest and good during the three hundred and fifty-one days, to have the right to come back into the big woods and hunt for the other fourteen; and the fourteen days that old buck run in front of dogs wasn’t jest something to fill his time until the three hundred and fifty-one when he didn’t have to, but the running and the risking in front of guns and dogs was something he had to do for fourteen days to have the right not to be bothered for the other three hundred and fifty-

one. And so the hunting and the farming wasn't two different things at all — they was jest the other side of each other.

"Yes," I said. "All we got to do now is put in that next year's crop. Then November won't be no time away."

"You ain't going to put in the crop next year," Mister Ernest said. "You're going to school."

So at first I didn't even believe I had heard him. "What?" I said. "Me? Go to school?"

"Yes," Mister Ernest said. "You must make something out of yourself."

"I am," I said. "I'm doing it now. I'm going to be a hunter and a farmer like you."

"No," Mister Ernest said. "That ain't enough any more. Time was when all a man had to do was just farm eleven and a half months, and hunt the other half. But not now. Now just to belong to the farming business and the hunting business ain't enough. You got to belong to the business of mankind."

"Mankind?" I said.

"Yes," Mister Ernest said. "So you're going to school. Because you got to know why. You can belong to the farming and hunting business and you can learn the difference between what's right and what's wrong, and do right. And that used to be enough — just to do right. But not now. You got to know why it's right and why it's wrong, and be able to tell the folks that never had no chance to learn it; teach them how to do what's right, not just because they know it's right, but because they know now why it's right because you just showed them, told them, taught them why. So you're going to school."

“It’s because you been listening to that durn Will Legate and Walter Ewell!” I said.

“No,” Mister Ernest said.

“Yes!” I said. “No wonder you missed that buck yestiddy, taking ideas from the very fellers that let him git away, after me and you had run Dan and the dogs durn nigh clean to death! Because you never even missed him! You never forgot to load that gun! You had done already unloaded it a purpose! I heard you!”

“All right, all right,” Mister Ernest said. “Which would you rather have? His bloody head and hide on the kitchen floor yonder and half his meat in a pickup truck on the way to Yoknapatawpha County, or him with his head and hide and meat still together over yonder in that brake, waiting for next November for us to run him again?”

“And git him, too,” I said. “We won’t even fool with no Willy Legate and Walter Ewell next time.”

“Maybe,” Mister Ernest said.

“Yes,” I said.

“Maybe,” Mister Ernest said. “The best word in our language, the best of all. That’s what mankind keeps going on: Maybe. The best days of his life ain’t the ones when he said ‘Yes’ beforehand: they’re the ones when all he knew to say was ‘Maybe.’ He can’t say ‘Yes’ until afterward because he not only don’t know it until then, he don’t want to know ‘Yes’ until then.… Step in the kitchen and make me a toddy. Then we’ll see about dinner.”

“All right,” I said. I got up. “You want some of Uncle Ike’s corn or that town whisky of Roth Edmondziz?”

“Can’t you say Mister Roth or Mister Edmonds?” Mister Ernest said.

“Yes, sir,” I said. “Well, which do you want? Uncle Ike’s corn or that ere stuff of Roth Edmondziz?”

The End

Once Aboard the Lugger, William Faulkner

Once Aboard the Lugger

Contempo, February 1932

IN THE MIDDLE of the afternoon we made a landfall. Ever since we left the mouth of the river at dawn and felt the first lift of the sea, Pete’s face had been getting yellower and yellower, until by midday and twenty four hours out of New Orleans, when we spoke to him he’d glare at us with his yellow cat’s eyes, and curse Joe. Joe was his older brother. He was about thirty-five. He had some yellow diamonds big as gravel. Pete was about nineteen, in a silk shirt of gold and lavender stripes, and a stiff straw hat, and all day long he squatted in the bows, holding his hat and saying Jesus Christ to himself.

He wouldn’t even drink any of the whiskey he had hooked from Joe. Joe wouldn’t let us take any with us, and the Captain wouldn’t have let us fetch it aboard, if he had. The Captain was a teetotaller. He had been in the outside trade before Joe hired him, where they took on cargoes of green alcohol in the West Indies and had it all flavored and aged and bottled and labeled and cased before they raised Tortugas. He said he never had been a drinking man, but if he ever had, he’d be cured now. He was a real prohibitionist: he believed that nobody should be allowed to drink. He was a New Englander, with a face like a worn doormat.

So Pete had to hook a couple of bottles from Joe, and we brought them aboard inside our pants leg and the nigger hid them in the galley, and between wheel tricks I’d go forward where Pete was squatting, holding his hat, and have a nip. Now and then the nigger’s disembodied face ducked into the port, without any expression at all, like a mask in carnival, and he passed up a cup of coffee which Pete drank and like as not threw the cup at the nigger’s head just as it ducked away.

“He done busted two of them,” the nigger told me. “We ain’t got but four left, now. I gwine give it to him in a bakingpowder can next time.”

Pete hadn’t eaten any breakfast, and he flung his dinner overside and turned his back while I ate mine, his face getting yellower and yellower, and when we fetched the island — a scar of sand with surf creaming along its windward flank and tufted with gnawed purple pines on a darkling twilit sea — his face and his eyes were the same color.

The Captain held inside. We passed into the island’s lee. The motion ceased and we pounded along in slack water of the clearest green. To starboard the island stretched on, bastioned and sombre, without sign of any life at all. Across the Sound a low smudge of mainland lay like a violet cloud. From beyond the island we could hear the boom and hiss

of surf, but inside here the water was like a mill-pond, with sunlight slanting into it in green corridors. And then Pete got really sick, leaning overside and holding his hat on.

Twilight came swiftly. The clear green of the water, losing the sun, darkened. We beat on across a pulseless surface fading slowly to the hue of violet ink. Against the sky the tall pines stood in shabby and gaunt parade. The smudge of mainland had dissolved. Low on the water where it had been, a beacon was like a cigarette coal. Pete was still being sick.

The engine slowed. “Forrard there,” the Captain said at the wheel. I manned the anchor.

“Come on, Pete,” I said, “Give me a hand with it. You’ll feel better.”

“Hell with it,” Pete said. “Leave the bastard sink.”

So the nigger came topside and we cleared the hawser. The engine stopped and our momentum died into a violet silence floored with whispering water.

“Let go,” the Captain said. We tumbled the anchor over, the hawser rattling and hissing about our feet.

Just before dark came completely down a pale wing of rigid water and a green navigating light stood abruptly in the dusk two miles away and as abruptly faded.

“There her,” the nigger said. “Gwine, too.”

“What is it?”

“Rum chaser. Gwine to Mobile.”

“Hope she stays there,” I said. In the twilight my shirt felt warmer than I, drily so, like a garment of sand.

Pete wouldn’t eat his supper, either. He sat humped in the bows, a filthy quilt about his shoulders, looking like a big disgruntled bird. He sat there while the nigger and I warped the dinghy alongside and until the Captain emerged with three spades and a flashlight. Then he refused unconditionally to get into the dinghy, and he and the Captain cursed each other at point-blank range in the darkness, in ferocious whispers.

But move he would not. So we left him there, humped in his quilt, his hat slanted in savage silhouette above the shapeless blob of the vessel lurking neither wholly hidden nor wholly revealed against the perspective of the Sound and the ghostly and sourceless echo of starlight and the new moon.

The dinghy moved in darkness, in silence save for small gurgling clucks of water as the nigger wielded the oars. At each invisible stroke I could feel the steady and fading surge of the thwart under my thighs. Milky serpentines seethed alongside, mooned with bubbled fire, in the nothingness which bore us and which slapped now and then beneath the keel with whispering, caressing shocks, as of soft and secret palms. Soon a lesser darkness smoldered laterally across the bows, the Captain humped in vague relief against it, and the nigger’s rhythmic blobbing. It thickened still more. The dinghy lifted with a faint grating jar, and stopped. The new moon hung in the crests of the pines overhead.

We hauled the dinghy up. The Captain stood squinting at the skyline. The sand was white, faintly luminous in the starlight. Staring at it, it

seemed to be within a hand's breadth of the face. Then as you stared it seemed to shrink dizzily away until equilibrium itself was lost, fading at last without demarcation into the spangled sky that seemed to take of the sand something of its quality of dizzy and faint incandescence and against which the pines reared their tall and ragged crests, forlorn and gallant and a little austere.

The nigger had lifted the shovels out of the dinghy and the Captain, having oriented himself, took up one of them. The nigger and I took up the other two and followed the dark blob of him across the beach and into the trees. The sand was grown over with a harsh undergrowth of some sort, tough and possessing that pointless perversity of random rusty wire. We struggled through it, the sand shifting beneath us, also with a sort of derisive perversity.

The surge and hiss of surf came steadily out of the darkness upon our faces, with the cool, strong breath of the sea itself, and immediately before us the treacherous darkness burst into mad shapes and a tense, soundless uproar. For a moment it seemed that I could taste my very heart in my mouth and the nigger prodded heavily into me from behind, and in the yellow tunnel of the Captain's flashlight wildeyed and anonymous horned beasts glared at us on braced forelegs, then whirled and rushed soundlessly away with mad overreaching of gaunt flanks and tossing tails. It was like a nightmare through which, pursued by demons, you run forever on a shifting surface that gives no purchase for the feet.

My shirt felt colder than I, now, and damp, and in the dizzy darkness that followed the flash my heart consented to beat again. The nigger handed me my shovel and I found that the Captain had gone on.

"What in God's name was that?" I said.

“Wild cattle,” the nigger said. “Island full of them. They’ll run you in the daytime.”

“Oh,” I said. We slogged on and overtook the Captain halted beside a dune grown harshly over with the wirelike undergrowth. He bade us halt here while he prowled slowly about the dune, prodding at it with his shovel. The nigger and I squatted, our shovels beside us. My shirt was wet, cold to my body. The steady breathing of the sea came across the sand, among the pines.

“What are cattle doing on this island?” I whispered. “I thought it was uninhabited.”

“I don’t know,” the nigger said. “I don’t know what anything want here, walking around night and day in this sand, listening to that wind in them trees.” He squatted beside me, naked to the waist, the starlight glinting faintly upon him, reflected by the sand. “Be wild, too.” he said.

I killed a mosquito on the back of my hand. It left a huge, warm splash, like a raindrop. I wiped my hands on my flanks.

“Skeeter bad here,” the nigger said.

I killed another on my forearm, and two bit me on the ankles at the same time, and one on the neck, and I rolled my sleeves down and buttoned my collar.

“They’ll eat you up, without any shirt on,” I said.

“No, sir,” he said. “Skeeter dont bother me. Cant nothing off the land bother me. I got medicine.”

“You have? On you?”

In the darkness somewhere the cattle moved, in dry crackling surges in the undergrowth. The nigger tugged at his middle and drew something from his waist — a cloth tobacco sack in which I could feel three small, hard objects, slung on a cord about his hips.

“Nothing from the land, eh? How about the water?”

“They aint no water charm,” he said. I sat on my feet, covering my ankles, wishing I had worn socks. The nigger stowed his charm away.

“What do you go to sea for, then?”

“I dont know. Man got to die someday.”

“But do you like going to sea? Cant you make as much ashore?”

The cattle moved now and then in the darkness, among the undergrowth. The breath of the sea came steadily out of the darkness, among the pines.

“Man got to die someday,” the nigger said.

The Captain returned and spoke to us, and we rose and took up our shovels. He showed us where to dig, and he fell to with his own implement and we spaded the dry sand behind us, digging into the dune. As fast as we dug the sand obliterated the shovelmarks, shaling in secret, whispering sighs from above, and my shirt was soon wet and warm again, and where it clung to my shoulders the mosquitoes needled my flesh as though it were naked.

We made progress however, the three rhythmic blobs of us like three figures in a ritualistic and illtimed dance against that background of ghostly incandescence and the deep breath of the sea stirring the unceasing pinetops overhead, for at last the nigger's shovel rang on metal — a single half thump, half clang which the breath of the sea took up and swept on with it among the pines and so away.

We uncovered the metal slowly, a broad, limber sheet of iron roofing, and presently the nigger and I were able to get our hands beneath the edge of it. We bent our backs and straightened our legs and heaved. The sand shifted, hissing drily. We heaved again. "Hah!" the nigger grunted beside me, and the metal sheet buckled and broke free with a single clashing report like that of a pistol fired inside a tin bucket, and it too drifted away on the breath of the sea and sand sifted down across the buckled metal and into the pit beneath it in fading whispers. Shhhhhhhhhhhh. Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

The nigger and I leaned on our shovels, panting a little and sweating a good deal, while the sea went Hush Hush through the pines. The Captain propped the corner of the metal up on his shovel and delved beneath it with his hands. I killed three more mosquitoes on my ankles and wished again that I had worn socks.

The Captain was half into the pit now, and he spoke to us again from the dry whispering of that tomb and we laid our shovels aside and helped him haul the sacks out. They were faintly damp, and sand clung to them, and we dragged them out onto the sand and the nigger and I took up one under each arm and he led the way back to the beach.

The vessel was faintly visible against the starlight on the sound, a shadow among treacherous shades, motionless as an island or a rock. We stowed the sacks carefully in the dinghy and retraced our steps.

Back and forth we went, carrying those endless awkward sacks. They were difficult to hold, at best, would have been heartbreaking labor on good footing, but in shifting sand that bartered each step for the price of four, surrounded always by a soundless and vicious needling which I could not brush even temporarily off, that sense of nightmare returned ten fold — a sense of hopeless enslavement to an obscure compulsion, in which the very necessity for striving was its own derision.

We loaded the dinghy and the nigger pulled off in the darkness toward the vessel. Then I was making the trips alone, and still the sacks came out of the black gullet into which the Captain had wholly disappeared.

I could hear the cattle moving about in the darkness, but they paid me no attention. With every return to the beach I tried to mark the stars, if they had moved any. But even they seemed to be fixed overhead, among the ragged crests of the pines and the constant breath of the sea in their sighing tops.

Pete returned in the dinghy with the nigger, with his hat on. He was sullen and uncommunicative, but he had stopped saying Jesus Christ. The Captain came out of his hole and looked at him, but said nothing, and with another hand the sacks moved faster, and when the nigger made his second trip out to the vessel, I had Pete for company.

He worked well enough, as though his meditation on board after we left had imbued him with the necessity of getting the job done, but he

spoke only once. That was when he and I got a little off the track and blundered into the cattle again.

“What the hell’s that?” he said, and I knew there was a gun in his hand.

“Just some wild cattle,” I said.

“Jesus Christ,” Pete said, and then he paraphrased the nigger unawares: “No wonder they’re wild.”

Back and forth we went between the sibilant and ceaseless cavern and the beach, until at last Pete and the Captain and I stood again together on the beach waiting for the dinghy to return. Though I had not seen him moving, Orion was down beyond the high pines and the moon was gone.

The dinghy came back and we went on board, and in the dark hold stinking of bilge and of fish and of what other nameless avatars through which the vessel had passed, we hauled and shifted cargo until it was stacked and battened down to the Captain’s notion. He flicked the torch upon his watch.

“Three oclock,” he said, the first word he had spoken since he quit cursing Pete yesterday. “We’ll sleep till sunup.”

Pete and I went forward and lay again on the mattress. I heard Pete go to sleep, but for a long while I was too tired to sleep, although I could hear the nigger snoring in the galley, where he had made his bed after that infatuated conviction of his race that fresh air may be slept in only at the gravest peril.

My back and arms and loins ached, and whenever I closed my eyes it seemed immediately that I was struggling through sand that shifted and shifted under me with patient derision, and that I still heard the dark high breath of the sea in the pines.

Out of this sound another sound grew, mounted swiftly, and I raised my head and watched a red navigating light and that pale wing of water that seemed to have a quality of luminousness of its own, stand up and pass and fade, and I thought of Conrad's centaur, the half man, half tugboat, charging up and down river in the same higheared, myopic haste, purposeful but without destination, oblivious to all save what was immediately in its path, and to that a dire and violent menace. Then it was gone, the sound too died away, and I lay back again while my muscles jerked and twitched to the fading echo of the old striving and the Hush Hush of the sea in my ears.

The End

Miss Zilphia Gant, William Faulkner

Miss Zilphia Gant

Book Club of Texas, June 1932

I

Jim Gant was a stock trader. He bought horses and mules in three adjoining counties, and with a hulking halfwitted boy to help him, drove them overland seventy-five miles to the Memphis markets.

They carried a camping outfit with them in a wagon, passing only one night under roof during each trip. That was toward the end of the journey, where at nightfall they would reach … the first mark of man's hand in almost fifteen miles of cypress-and-cane river jungle and worn gullies and second-growth pine … a rambling log house with stout walls and broken roof and no trace whatever of husbandry … plow or plowed land … anywhere near it.

There would be usually from one to a dozen wagons standing before it and in a corral of split rails nearby the mules stamped and munched, with usually sections of harness still unremoved: about the whole place lay an air of transient and sinister dilapidation.

Here Gant would meet and mingle with other caravans similar to his, or at times more equivocal still, of rough, unshaven, over-alled men, and they would eat coarse food and drink pale, virulent corn whiskey and sleep in their muddy clothes and boots on the puncheon floor before the log fire. The place was conducted by a youngish woman with cold eyes and a hard infrequent tongue.

There was in the background a man, oldish, with cunning reddish pig's eyes and matted hair and beard which lent a kind of ferocity to the weak face which they concealed. He was usually befuddled with drink to a state of morose idiocy, though now and then they would hear him

and the woman cursing one another in the back or beyond a closed door, the woman's voice cold and level, the man's alternating between a rumbling bass and the querulous treble of a child.

After Gant sold his stock he would return home to the settlement where his wife and baby lived. It was less than a village, twenty miles from the railroad in a remote section of a remote county. Mrs. Gant and the two-year-old girl lived alone in the small house while Gant was away, which was most of the time.

He would be at home perhaps a week out of each eight. Mrs. Gant would never know just what day or hour he would return. Often it would be between midnight and dawn. One morning about dawn she was awakened by someone standing in front of the house, shouting "Hello, Hello" at measured intervals. She opened the window and looked out. It was the halfwit.

"Yes?" she said. "What is it?"

"Hello," the halfwit bawled.

"Hush your yelling," Mrs. Gant said, "where's Jim?"

"Jim says to tell you he ain't coming home no more," the halfwit bawled. "Him and Mrs. Vinson taken and went off in the waggin. Jim says to tell you not to expect him back." Mrs. Vinson was the woman at the tavern, and the halfwit stood in the making light while Mrs. Gant in a white cotton nightcap leaned in the window and cursed him with the gross violence of a man. Then she banged the window shut.

"Jim owes me a dollar and six bits," the halfwit bawled. "He said you would give it to me." But the window was shut, the house silent again;

no light had ever shown. Yet still the halfwit stood before it, shouting "Hello, Hello" at the blank front until the door opened and Mrs. Gant came out in her nightdress, with a shotgun and cursed him again. Then he retreated to the road and stopped again in the dawn, shouting "Hello, Hello" at the blank house until he tired himself at last and went away.

Just after sunup the next morning Mrs. Gant, with the sleeping child wrapped in a quilt, went to a neighbor's house and asked the woman to keep the child for her. She borrowed a pistol from another neighbor and departed. A passing wagon, bound for Jefferson, took her aboard and she passed slowly from sight that way, sitting erect in a shoddy brown coat, on the creaking seat.

All that day the halfwit told about the dollar and seventy-five cents which Gant had taken from him and told him Mrs. Gant would repay. By noon he had told them all singly, and hoarse, voluble and recapitulant, he would offer to stop them and tell them again as they gathered at the store over the pistol incident. An ancient mariner in faded overalls he pursued them, gesticulant, shock-haired, with a wild eye and drooling a little at the mouth, telling about the dollar and seventy-five cents.

"Jim said for me to git it from her. He said she would give hit to me."

He was still talking about it when Mrs. Gant returned ten days later. She returned the pistol with no more than thanks. She had not even cleaned it nor removed the two exploded cartridges … a hale, not-old woman with a broad, strong face: she had been accosted more than once during her sojourn in those equivocal purlieus of Memphis, where, with a deadly female intuition, an undeviating conviction for sin

(who had never been further away from home than the county seat and who had read no magazines and seen no movies) she sought Gant and the woman with the capability of a man, the pertinacity of a Fate, the serene imperviousness of a vestal out of a violated temple, and then returned to her child, her face cold, satiate and chaste.

The night of her return she was called to the door. It was the halfwit.

“Jim says you would give me that dollar and.…”

She struck him, felled him with a single blow. He lay on the floor, his hands lifted a little, his mouth beginning to open in horror and outrage. Before he could shriek she stooped and struck him again, jerking him up and holding him while she beat him in the face, he bellowing hoarsely. She lifted him bodily and flung him from the porch to the ground and entered the house, where his cries had roused the child. She sat and took it onto her lap, rocking it, her heels clapping hard and rythmic at each thrust, hushing it by singing to it in a voice louder, more powerful, than its own.

Three months later she had sold the house for a good price; and she moved away, taking with her a battered trunk tied with cotton rope and the shotgun and the quilt in which the child slept. They learned later that she had bought a dressmaking shop in Jefferson, the county seat.

II

They told in the town how she and her daughter, Zilphia, lived in a single room twelve feet square for twenty-three years. It was partitioned off from the rear of the shop and it contained a bed, a

table, two chairs and an oil stove. The rear window gave upon a vacant lot where farmers tethered their teams on market days and where sparrows whirled in gusty clouds about the horse and mule droppings and the refuse from the grocery store beneath.

The window was barred and in it for the seven years before the county Health Officer forced Mrs. Gant to let Zilphia go to school, the farmers, hitching or unhitching, would see a wan small face watching them, or, holding to the bars, coughing: a weak hacking sound soon blown away along the air, leaving the still pale face as before with something about it of that quality of Christmas wreaths in a forgotten window.

“Who is that?” one asked.

“Gant’s gal. Jim Gant. Used to live out to the Bend.”

“Oh. Jim Gant. I heard about that.” They looked at the face. “Well, I reckon Mrs. Gant ain’t got a whole lot of use for men-folks no more.” They looked at the face. “But she ain’t no more than a child yet.”

“I reckon Mrs. Gant ain’t taking no risk.”

“Hit ain’t her risk. Hit’s whoever’s risk that would chance her.”

“Hit’s a fact. Sho.”

That was before Mrs. Gant came upon Zilphia and the boy lying inside a worn horse-blanket in the woods one day. It was during the time when, every morning and again at one o’clock they would see the two of them going toward the school, and every noon and afternoon returning to the barred room above the vacant lot. At midmorning recess time Mrs. Gant would close the shop and when the dismissal bell rang, she would

be standing at the corner of the playground, upright, erect in a shapeless dress of dull black and an oil cloth sewing apron and her bosom festooned with threaded needles; still comely in a harsh way.

Zilphia would cross the playground straight to her and the two of them would sit on the stone coping above the street level, side by side and not talking while the other children ran with random shouts back and forth behind them, until the bell rang again and Zilphia returned to her books and Mrs. Gant to the shop and the seam which she had laid aside.

They told how it was a client of Mrs. Gant's that got Zilphia in school. One day in the shop she was talking to Zilphia about school; Zilphia was nine then. "All the boys and girls go. You'll like it." Her back was to the room. She did not hear the machine cease, she only saw Zilphia's eyes go suddenly blank and then fill with terror. Mrs. Gant stood over them.

"Go home," she said. Zilphia … she did not turn and walk away: she seemed to dissolve behind her wan, haunting face and terrified eyes. The client rose. Mrs. Gant was thrusting a wad of cloth into her arms. "Get out of here," she said.

The client fell back, her hands raised, the half-finished dress cascading to the floor. Mrs. Gant picked it up and thrust it at her again, her hands hard in a series of restrained blows. "Get out of my shop," she said. "Don't you never come here again."

Mrs. Gant went back to the room. Zilphia crouched in the corner, watching the door. Mrs. Gant drew her out by one thin arm. She began to beat Zilphia, striking her about the body with her flat hand while

Zilphia's thin arm appeared to elongate like rubber hose as she silently wrenched and strained. "Bitches!" Mrs. Gant said: "bitches!" She ceased as suddenly and sat on the bed and drew Zilphia toward her. Zilphia resisted. She began to cry and vomit, her eyeballs back-rolling until only the whites showed, shrieking and retching. Mrs. Gant got her to bed and sent for the doctor.

At that time Zilphia was pole-thin, with a wan, haunted face and big, not-quite-conquered eyes, going to and from school at her mother's side, behind her small tragic mask of a face. In her third year she refused one day to go back to school. She would not tell Mrs. Gant why: that she was ashamed to never be seen on the street without her mother. Mrs. Gant would not let her stop. In the spring she was ill again, from anemia and nervousness and loneliness and actual despair.

She was sick for a long time. The doctor told Mrs. Gant that Zilphia would have to have companionship, to play with children of her own age and out-of-doors. When Zilphia was convalescent Mrs. Gant came in one day with a miniature cook stove. "Now you can have the girls in and you can cook," she said. "Won't that be nicer than visiting?" Zilphia lay on the pillow, not less white than it. Her eyes looked like holes thumbed into a piece of blotting paper. "You can have a tea party every day," Mrs. Gant said. "I'll make dresses for all the dolls."

Zilphia began to cry. She lay on the pillow, crying, her hands at her sides. Mrs. Gant took the stove away. She took it back to the store and made them return her money.

Zilphia was convalescent for a long time. She still had sudden crying fits. When she was up Mrs. Gant asked her what girls she would like to visit. Zilphia named three or four. That afternoon Mrs. Gant locked the shop.

She was seen in three different parts of town, looking at houses. She stopped passers. “Who lives there?” she said. They told her. “What family have they got?” The passer looked at her. She faced him steadily: a strong, still comely woman. “Have they got any boys?”

The next day she gave Zilphia permission to visit one of them. Zilphia would go home with the girl from school on certain days and they played in the barn or, in bad weather, in the house. At a certain hour Mrs. Gant appeared at the gate in a black shawl and bonnet and she and Zilphia returned to the barred room above the lot. And each afternoon … behind the barn a short pasture sloped to a ditch where scrub cedars grew … in these cedars Mrs. Gant sat on a wooden box from the time school was out until the time for Zilphia to start home, when she would hide the box again and go around by the next street to the gate and be waiting there when Zilphia emerged from the house.

She did not watch the barn or, in the winter time, the house; she just sat there … a woman who for twelve years had been growing into the outward semblance of a man until now at forty there was a faint shadow of moustache at the corner of her mouth … in the timeless patience of her country raising and her cold and implacable paranoia, in the mild weather, or with the shawl drawn close about her against the rain and cold.

In Zilphia’s thirteenth year Mrs. Gant began to examine her body each month. She made Zilphia strip naked and stand cringing before her while the savage light fell through the bars and the gray winter drove above the lot. After one of these examinations … it was in the spring … she told Zilphia what her father had done and what she had done. She sat on the bed while Zilphia cringed swiftly into her clothes, telling her about it in a cold, level voice, in the language of a man while Zilphia’s

thin body shrank and shrank as though in upon itself, as though at the impact of the words.

Then her voice ceased. She was sitting on the bed, upright, motionless, her cold mad eyes gone blank as a statue's; and standing before her, her mouth open a little, Zilphia thought of a rock or a pile from which an abruptly undammed stream has roared away.

They lived now in a kind of armistice. They slept in the same bed and ate of the same food for days in complete silence; sitting at the machine Mrs. Gant would hear Zilphia's feet pass through the room and cease beyond the stairs to the street, without even raising her head. Yet now and then she would close the shop and with the shawl about her shoulders she would repair to the less frequented streets and lanes on the edge of town and after a while she would meet Zilphia walking rapidly and aimlessly. Then together they would return home without a word between them.

One afternoon Zilphia and the boy were lying beneath the blanket. It was in a ditch in the woods on the outskirts of town, within hailing distance of the highroad. They had been doing this for about a month, lying in the mutual, dreamlike mesmeric throes of puberty, rigid, side by side, their eyes closed, not even talking. When Zilphia opened her eyes she was looking up at Mrs. Gant's inverted face and foreshortened body against the sky.

"Get up," Mrs. Gant said. Zilphia lay quietly looking up at her. "Get up, you bitch," Mrs. Gant said.

The next day Zilphia withdrew from school. In an oil cloth sewing apron she sat in a chair beside the window which gave upon the square; beside it Mrs. Gant's machine whirred and whirred. The window was not barred. Through it she watched the children with whom she had gone to school begin to fall into inevitable pairs and pass into and out of her vision, some of them as far as the minister or the church; one year she made the white gown for the girl whom she used to visit; four years later, dresses for her daughter. She sat beside the window for twelve years.

III

In the town they told about Miss Zilphia's beau, with amusement and pity and, here and there, with concern. "He'll take advantage of her," they said. "It ought not to be allowed. A person of her … surely they would not sell her a license, even if...." She was a neat woman, with neat hair. Her skin was the color of celery and she was a little plump in a flabby sort of way. Her glasses lent a baffled, ascetic look to her face, enlarging her opaque irises.

As long as she had a needle in her fingers and was unobserved, her movements were direct, assured; but on the street, in the hat and clothes which her mother made for her, they had that vague, indefinite awkwardness of the nearsighted.

"But surely you don't think that she … of course, her mother is crazy, but Zilphia … poor girl."

"It's a shame. A tramp painter. She should be protected. How her mother can be so blind I cannot...."

He was a young man with black hair and eyes like wood ashes. One day Mrs. Gant found that he had been painting in the window at Zilphia's chair for two days. She moved Zilphia into the back room … it was now a fitting room; for two years now they had been living in a frame bungalow bleak as a calendar picture, on an obscure street … and when he came inside to paint the walls Mrs. Gant closed the shop and she and Zilphia went home. For eight days Zilphia had a holiday, the first in twelve years.

Robbed of her needle, of the slow mechanical manipulation, Zilphia's eyes began to pain her, and she could not sleep well. She would wake from dreams in which the painter performed monstrously with his pot and brush. In the dream his eyes were yellow instead of gray, and he was always chewing, his chin fading away into the blurred drool of the chewing; one night she waked herself by saying aloud, "He's got a beard!" Now and then she dreamed of the pot and brush alone. They would be alive, performing of themselves actions of monstrous and ritualled significance.

After eight days Mrs. Gant fell ill; idleness brought her to bed. One night they had the doctor. The next morning Mrs. Gant rose and dressed and locked Zilphia into the house and went to town. Zilphia watched from the window her mother's black-shawled figure toil slowly down the street, pausing now and then to hold itself erect by the fence. An hour later she returned, in a hired cab, and locked the door and took the key to bed with her.

For three days and nights Zilphia sat beside the bed where the gaunt, manlike woman … the moustaches were heavier now and grizzled faintly … lay rigid, the covers drawn to her chin and her eyes closed. Thus it was that Zilphia could never tell if her mother slept or not. Sometimes she could tell by the breathing, then she would search

carefully and infinitesimally among the bed clothing for the keys. On the third day she found them. She dressed and left the house.

The inside of the shop was half finished, reeking of turpentine. She opened the window and took her old chair beside it. When she heard his feet at last on the stairs she found that she was sewing, without any recollection of what the garment was or when she had taken it up. With the needle in her hand she sat looking up at him, blinking a little behind the glasses until he removed them.

“I knowed, once them glasses was off,” he said. “I kept looking for you and looking for you. And when she come in here and I was working I could hear her on the steps a long time, a step at a time then stop, until she was in the door yonder, holding to the door and sweating like a nigger. Even after she had done fainted she wouldn’t let go and faint.

She just laid there on the floor sweating and sweating and counting the money out of her purse and telling me to be out of town by sundown.” He stood beside the chair, holding the glasses in his hand. She watched the dark rim of paint under his nails, smelling his odor of turpentine. “I’ll get you out of it. That old woman. That terrible old woman. She’ll kill you yet. I know she is crazy now.

I’ve heard. How she’s done you. I’ve talked to folks. When they told me where you lived at I’d walk past the house. I could feel her watching me. Like she was watching me through the window. No hiding; just standing there looking at me and waiting. One night I come into the yard. After midnight it was.

The house was dark and I could feel her standing there, looking at the dark where I was and waiting. Watching me like when she fainted that day and wouldn't faint until I was out of town. She just laid there on the floor sweating, with her eyes shut, telling me to leave the job like it was and be out of town by night.

But I'll get you out of it. Tonight. Now. Not ever again any more." He stood above her. The dusk was thickening; the final swirl of sparrows swept across the square and into the locust trees about the courthouse. "All the time I was watching you I kept thinking about you wearing glasses, because I used to say I wouldn't never want a woman that wore glasses.

Then one day you looked at me and all of a sudden I was seeing you without the glasses. It was like the glasses was gone and I knew then that, soon as I saw you once without them, it wouldn't matter to me if you wore glasses or not...."

They were married by a justice of the peace in the courthouse. Then Zilphia began to hang back.

"No," he said; "don't you see, if you go back now, if you risk her seeing you now...."

"I've got to," Zilphia said.

"What has she ever done for you? What do you owe her? That terrible old woman. Don't you see, if we risk going there.... Come on, Zilphy. You belong to me now. You said to the judge you would do like I say, Zilphy. Now we are away, if we go back now...."

"I've got to. She's my mother. I've got to."

It was full twilight when they entered the gate and went up the walk. She slowed, her hand trembled cold in his. “Don’t leave me!” she said. “Don’t leave me!”

“I won’t ever leave you if you won’t ever leave me. But we ought not to … Come on. It’s time yet. I ain’t scared for me. It’s for you. Zilphy.…” They looked toward the house. Mrs. Gant, dressed, in the black shawl and bonnet, stood in the door with the shotgun.

“Zilphy,” she said.

“Don’t go,” he said. “Zilphy.”

“You, Zilphy,” Mrs. Gant said without raising her voice.

“Zilphy,” he said. “If you go in there … Zilphy.”

Zilphia went on and mounted the steps. She moved stiffly. She seemed to have shrunk into herself, collapsing from inside, to have lost height, become awkward.

“Go in the house,” Mrs. Gant said, without turning her head. Zilphia went on. “Go on,” Mrs. Gant said. “Shut the door.” Zilphia entered and turned, beginning to close the door. She saw four or five people halted along the fence, looking back. “Shut it,” Mrs. Gant said. Zilphia shut the door carefully, fumbling a little at the knob. The house was still; in the cramped hall the shadows of the twilight loomed like a herd of motionless elephants. She could hear her heart faintly, but no other sound, no sound from beyond the door which she had closed upon her husband’s face. She never saw it again.

For the next two days and nights he lay hidden without food in a vacant house across the street. Mrs. Gant locked the door, but instead of going back to bed she seated herself, fully dressed save for the oil cloth apron and the needles, in a chair at the front window, the shotgun leaning at her hand. For three days she sat there, rigid, erect, her eyes closed, sweating slowly. On the third day the painter quitted the vacant house and left town. That night Mrs. Gant died, erect and fully dressed in the chair.

IV

For the first six months she believed that he would hear about it and return for her. She set six months to the day. “He will come before then,” she said. “He will have to come before then, because I am being true to him;” now that she was free she dared not even put into thinking the reasons why she should wait for him. For that reason she left the shop half finished, as he had left it, for a symbol of fidelity. “I have been faithful to you,” she said.

The day came and passed. She saw it accomplish, quietly. “Now,” she said, “that’s finished. Thank God. Thank God.” She realized how terrible the waiting and believing had been, the having to believe. Nothing was worth that. “Nothing,” she said, crying quietly in the dark, feeling tranquil and sad, like a little girl at the spurious funeral of a doll; “nothing.”

She had the painting completed.

At first the odor of turpentine was terrible to her. It seemed to obliterate time as it had the stains of twenty-five years on the walls. Her life seemed to elongate, like rubber: from one time she seemed to see her hands prolonged into another one, fitting and pinning. Then she

could think peacefully, since beyond the safe ritual of her fingers Zilphia Gant and her husband were like dolls, furious and tragic but quite dead.

The shop was doing well. Within a year she had a partner, but she lived alone in the house. She took three or four newspapers, thinking that she might some day see his name in print. After a while she was writing guarded significant letters to agony columns, mentioning incidents which only he could recognize. She began to read all the wedding notices, substituting her name for the bride's and his for that of the groom. Then she would undress and go to bed.

She would have to be careful about getting into sleep. She was much more careful about that than about getting into her clothes. But even then she sometimes slipped. Then she would lie in the dark, the mock orange bush beyond the window filling the silence with its faintest suggestion of turpentine, beginning to toss lightly from side to side like a surf getting up.

She would think about Christ, whispering "Mary did it without a man. She did it;" or, rousing, furious, her hands clenched at her sides, the covers flung back and her opened thighs tossing, she would violate her ineradicable virginity again and again with something evoked out of the darkness immemorial and philoprogenitive: "I will conceive! I'll make myself conceive!"

One evening she opened the paper and began to read of a wedding in a neighboring state. She made the name substitutions as usual and had already turned the page when she realised that she was smelling turpentine. Then she realized that she had not had to make any substitution for the groom's name.

She cut the story out. The next day she went to Memphis for two days. A week later she began to receive weekly letters bearing the return address of a private detective agency. She stopped reading the papers; her subscriptions lapsed. Every night she dreamed of the painter. His back was toward her now; only by his elbows could she read the familiar action of the pot and brush. There was someone beyond him in the dream whom she could not see, hidden by that back which was less of man's than goat's.

She grew plumper, a flabby plumpness in the wrong places. Her eyes behind the shell-rimmed glasses were a muddy olive, faintly protuberant. Her partner said that she was not hygienically over-fastidious. People called her Miss Zilphia; her wedding, that three day sensation, was never mentioned. When on the weekly arrival of the Memphis letters, the postmaster rallied her on her city sweetheart, there was even in this less of insincerity than pity. After another year there was less of both than either.

By means of the letters she knew how they lived. She knew more about each than the other did. She knew when they quarrelled and felt exultation; she knew when they were reconciled and felt raging and impotent despair. Sometimes at night she would become one of the two of them, entering their bodies in turn and crucified anew by her ubiquity, participating in ecstasies the more racking for being vicarious and transcendant of the actual flesh.

One evening she received the letter telling that the wife was pregnant. The next morning she waked a neighbor by running out of the house in her nightdress, screaming. They got the doctor and when she was well again she told that she had mistaken the rat poison for tooth powder. The postmaster told about the letters and the two looked upon her

again with interest and curious pity. “Twice,” they said, even though the letters continued to come; “what a shame. Poor girl.”

When she recovered she looked better. She was thinner and her eyes had cleared up, and she slept peacefully at night for a while. By the letters she knew when the wife’s time would be, and the day she went to the hospital.

Although she had recovered completely she did not dream any more for some time, though the habit she had formed in her twelfth year of waking herself with her own weeping, returned, and almost every night she lay in the darkness and the mock orange scent, weeping quietly and hopelessly between sleep and slumber. How long must this go on? she said to herself, lying flat and still and for a time tear-flushed of even despair in the darkness and the dying rumor of turpentine; how long?

It went on for a long time. She was gone from the town for three years, then she returned. Ten years later she began to dream again. Then she was walking to and from school twice a day with her daughter’s hand in hers, her manner on the street confident and assured, meeting the town with level and tranquil eye.

But at night she still waked herself with her own weeping after the old habit, waking wide-eyed from a sleep in which for some time now she had been dreaming of negro men. “Something is about to happen to me,” she said aloud into the quiet darkness and the scent. Then something did happen to her. One day it had happened, and after that she dreamed hardly at all any more, and then only about food.

V

At last the letter came telling of the birth of a daughter and of the mother's death. Enclosed was a newspaper clipping. The husband had been killed by a motor car while crossing the street to enter the hospital.

The next day Zilphia went away. Her partner said she would be gone a year, perhaps longer, to recover from her sickness. The letters from the city sweetheart ceased.

She was gone three years. She returned in mourning, with a plain gold band and a child. The child, a girl, had eyes like wood ashes and dark hair. Zilphia told quietly of her second marriage and her husband's death, and after a time the interest died away.

She opened the house again, but she also fixed a day nursery in the room behind the shop. The window was barred, so she need not worry about the child. "It's a nice pleasant room," she said. "Why, I grew up there, myself." The shop was doing well. The ladies never tired of fondling little Zilphia.

They still called her Miss Zilphia Gant. "Somehow you just can't conceive of her as a wife. If it were not for the child...." It was no longer out of tolerance or pity now. She looked better; black became her. She was plump again in the wrong places, but to people in our town that and more is permitted a woman who has served her appointed ends.

She was forty-two. "She is as fat as a partridge," the town said. "It becomes her; it really does."

"I should be, from the way I enjoy my food," she said, pausing to chat with them on the way to and from school with little Zilphia's hand in

hers and her open coat, stirring in the wind, revealing her sewing apron of black oil cloth, and the straight thin glints of needles in her black bosom and the gossamer random festooning of the thread.

The End

Thrift, William Faulkner

Thrift

The Saturday Evening Post, September 1930

I

In messes they told of MacWyrglinchbeath how, a first-class air mechanic of a disbanded Nieuport squadron, he went three weeks' A.W.O.L. He had been given a week's leave for England while the squadron was being reequipped with British-made machines, and he was last seen in Boulogne, where the lorry set him and his mates down. That night he disappeared. Three weeks later the hitherto unchallenged presence of an unidentifiable first-class air mechanic was discovered in the personnel of a bombing squadron near Boulogne.

At the ensuing investigation the bomber gunnery sergeant told how the man had appeared among the crew one morning on the beach, where the flight had landed after a raid. Replacements had come up the day

before, and the sergeant said he took the man to be one of the replacements; it appeared that everyone took the man to be one of the new mechanics. He told how the man showed at once a conscientious aptitude, revealing an actual affection for the aeroplane of whose crew he made one, speaking in a slow, infrequent, Scottish voice of the amount of money it represented and of the sinfulness of sending so much money into the air in a single lump.

“He even asked to be put on flying,” the sergeant testified. “He downright courted me till I did it, volunteering for all manner of off-duty jobs for me, until I put him on once or twice. I’d keep him with me, on the toggles, though.”

They did not discover that anything was wrong until pay day. His name was not on the pay officer’s list; the man’s insistence — his was either sublime courage or sublime effrontery — brought his presence to the attention of the squadron commander. But when they looked for him, he was gone.

The next day, in Boulogne, an air mechanic with a void seven-day pass, issued three weeks ago by a now disbanded scout squadron, was arrested while trying to collect three weeks’ pay, which he said was owing to him, from the office of the acting provost marshal himself. His name, he said, was MacWyrglinchbeath.

Thus it was discovered that MacWyrglinchbeath was a simultaneous deserter from two different military units. He repeated his tale — for the fifth time in three days fetched from his cell by a corporal and four men with bayoneted rifles — standing bareheaded to attention before the table where a general now sat, and the operations officer of the bomber squadron and the gunnery sergeant:

“A had gone doon tae thae beach tae sleep, beca’ A kenned they wud want money for-r thae beds in the town. A was ther-re when thae boombers cam’ doon. Sae A went wi’ thae boombers.”

“But why didn’t you go home on your leave?” the general asked.

“A wou’na be spendin’ sic useless money, sir-r.”

The general looked at him. The general had little pig’s eyes, and his face looked as though it had been blown up with a bicycle pump.

“Do you mean to tell me that you spent seven days’ leave and a fortnight more without leave, as the member of the personnel of another squadron?”

“Well, sir-r,” MacWyrglinchbeath said, “naught wud do they but A sud tak’ thae week’s fur-rlough. I didna want it. And wi’ thae big machines A cud get flying pay.”

The general looked at him. Rigid, motionless, he could see the general’s red face swell and swell.

“Get that man out of here!” the general said at last.

“ ‘Bout face,” the corporal said.

“Get me that squadron commander,” the general said. “At once! I’ll cashier him! Gad’s teeth, I’ll put him in jail for the rest of his life!”

“ ‘Bout face!” the corporal said, a little louder. MacWyrglinchbeath had not moved.

“Sir-r,” he said. The general, in mid-voice, looked at him, his mouth still open a little. Behind his mustache he looked like a boar in a covert. “Sir-r,” MacWyrglinchbeath said, “wull A get ma pay for thae thr-r-ree weeks and thae seven hour-rs and for-rty minutes in the air-r?”

It was Ffollansbye, who was to first recommend him for a commission, who knew most about him.

“I give you,” he said, “a face like a ruddy walnut, maybe sixteen, maybe fifty-six; squat, with arms not quite as long as an ape’s, lugging petrol tins across the aerodrome. So long his arms were that he would have to hunch his shoulders and bow his elbows a little so the bottoms of the tins wouldn’t scrape the ground. He walked with a limp — he told me about that. It was just after they came down from Stirling in ‘14. He had enlisted for infantry; they had not told him that there were other ways of going in.

“So he began to make inquiries. Can’t you see him, listening to all the muck they told recruits then, about privates not lasting two days after reaching Dover — they told him, he said, that the enemy killed only the English and Irish and Lowlanders; the Highlands having not yet declared war — and such.

Anyway, he took it all in, and then he would go to bed at night and sift it out. Finally he decided to go for the Flying Corps; decided with pencil and paper that he would last longer there and so have more money saved. You see, neither courage nor cowardice had ever functioned in him at all; I don’t believe he had either. He was just like a man who, lost for a time in a forest, picks up a fagot here and there against the possibility that he might some day emerge.

“He applied for transfer, but they threw it out. He must have been rather earnest about it, for they finally explained that he must have a better reason than personal preference for desiring to transfer, and that a valid reason would be mechanical knowledge or a disability leaving him unfit for infantry service.

“So he thought that out. And the next day he waited until the barracks was empty, prodded the stove to a red heat, removed his boot and putty, and laid the sole of his foot to the stove.

“That was where the limp came from. When his transfer went through and he came out with his third-class air mechanic’s rating, they thought that he had been out before.

“I can see him, stiff at attention in the squadron office, his b. o. on the table, Whiteley and the sergeant trying to pronounce his name.

“ ‘What’s the name, sergeant?’ Whiteley says.

“Sergeant looks at b.o., rubs hands on thighs. ‘Mac—’ he says and bogs down again. Whiteley leans to look-see himself.

“ ‘Mac—’ bogs himself; then: ‘Beath. Call him MacBeath.’

“ ‘A’m ca’d MacWyrglinchbeath,’ newcomer says.

“ ‘Sir,’ sergeant prompts.

“ ‘Sir-r,’ newcomer says.

“ ‘Oh,’ Whiteley says, ‘Magillinbeath. Put it down, sergeant.’ Sergeant takes up pen, writes M-a-c with flourish, then stops, handmaking concentric circles with pen above page while owner tries for a peep at b. o. in Whiteley’s hands. ‘Rating, three ack emma,’ Whiteley says. ‘Put that down, sergeant.’

“ ‘Very good, sir,’ sergeant says. Flourishes grow richer, like sustained cavalry threat; leans yet nearer Whiteley’s shoulder, beginning to sweat.

“Whiteley looks up, says, ‘Eh?’ sharply. ‘What’s matter?’ he says.

“ ‘The nyme, sir,’ sergeant says. ‘I can’t get—’

“Whiteley lays b. o. on table; they look at it. ‘People at Wing never could write,’ Whiteley says in fretted voice.

“ ‘‘Tain’t that, sir,’ sergeant says. “Is people just ‘aven’t learned to spell. Wot’s yer nyme agyne, my man?’

“ ‘A’m ca’d MacWyrglinchbeath,’ newcomer says.

“ ‘Ah, the devil,’ Whiteley says. ‘Put him down MacBeath and give him to C. Carry on.’

“But newcomer holds ground, polite but firm. ‘A’m ca’d MacWyrglinchbeath,’ he says without heat.

“Whiteley stares at him. Sergeant stares at him. Whiteley takes pen from sergeant, draws record sheet to him. ‘Spell it.’ Newcomer does so as Whiteley writes it down. ‘Pronounce it again, will you?’ Whiteley says. Newcomer does so. ‘Magillinbeath,’ Whiteley says. ‘Try it, sergeant.’

“Sergeant stares at written word. Rubs ear. ‘Mac — wigglin-beech,’ he says. Then, in hushed tone: ‘Blimey.’

“Whiteley sits back. ‘Right,’ he says. ‘We’ve it correctly. Carry on.’

“ ‘Ye ha’ it MacWyrglinchbeath, sir-r?’ newcomer says. ‘A’d no ha’ ma pay gang wrong.’

“That was before he soloed. Before he deserted, of course. Lugging his petrol tins back and forth, a little slower than anyone else, but always at it if you could suit your time to his. And sending his money, less what he smoked — I have seen his face as he watched the men drinking beer in the canteen — back home to the neighbor who was keeping his horse and cow for him.

“He told me about that arrangement too.

When he and the neighbor agreed, it was in emergency; they both believed it would be over and he would be home in three months. That was a year ago. ‘ ‘Twull be a sore sum A’ll be owin’ him for foragin’ thae twa beasties,’ he told me. Then he quit shaking his head. He became quite still for a while; you could almost watch his mind ticking over. ‘Aweel,’ he says at last, ‘A doot not thae beasts wull ha’ increased in value, too, wi’ thae har-rd times.’

“In those days, you know, the Hun came over your aerodrome and shot at you while you ran and got into holes they had already dug for that purpose, while the Hun sat overhead and dared you to come out.

“So we could see fighting from the mess windows; we were carting off the refuse ourselves then. One day it crashed not two hundred yards away. When we got there, they were just dragging the pilot clear — all but his legs. He was lying on his back, looking up at the sky with that expression they have, until someone closed his eyes.

“But Mac — they were still calling him MacBeath — was looking at the crash. He was walking around it, clicking his tongue. ‘Tzut, tzut,’ he says. ‘ ’Tis a sinfu’ waste. Sinfu’. Tzut. Tzut. Tzut.’

“That was while he was still a three ack emma. He was a two soon, sending a little more money back to the neighbor. He was keeping books now, with a cheap notebook and a pencil, and a candle stub for nights. The first page was his bank book; the others were like a barograph of this war, tighter than a history.

“Then he was a one A.M. He began then to work over his ledger late into the night. I supposed it was because he had more money to worry him now, drawing, as he probably did, more a month than he ever had in his life, until he came to me for an N.C.O.’s rating sheet. I gave it to him. A week later he had to buy a new candle. I met him.

“ ‘Well, Mac,’ I said, ‘have you decided to go for a sergeant yet?’

“He looked at me, without haste, without surprise. ‘Ay, sir-r,’ he says. He hadn’t heard about flying pay then, you see.”

Ffollansbye told about his solo:

“His new squadron were pups. I suppose as soon as he saw they were single-seaters, he realized that there would be no flying pay here. He applied for transfer to bombers. It was denied. It must have been about this time that he had the letter from his neighbor, telling that the cow had calved. I can see him now, reading the letter through to the last word, keeping all judgment and speculation and concern in abeyance until he had done, then sitting there — his pencil and paper useless in this case — weighing that delicate and unanticipated situation and its

unpredictable ramifications of ownership, then deciding that circumstance would take care of it in good time.

“One day he waked up; the impulse, the need to, may have come like a germ in that letter. Not that he had ever soldiered, but now he began to show interest in the machines and in the operation of the controls, talking with the pilots, asking questions about flight, sifting and cataloguing the answers in his bunk at night. He became so — well, ubiquitous, tireless, made such an up-and-doing appearance when brass hats were about, that they made him a corporal. I suppose if I’d been there then I’d have believed that was his aim all along.

“But this time he had hitched to a star, in more than allegorical sense, it proved. It was in the middle of lunch one day when the alarm goes off. They rush out, officer and man, clutching napkins, in time to see a pup go down the aerodrome, the wings at a forty-five-degree angle, the tip practically dragging. It righted itself by putting the other wing down, and with the crash car wailing behind, it nosed up and shot perpendicularly for perhaps two hundred feet, hung for ten thousand years on the prop, flipped its tail up and vanished from view, still at that forty-five-degree angle.

“ ‘What—’ the major says.

“ ‘It’s mine!’ a subaltern shouts. ‘It’s my machine!’

“ ‘Who—’ the major says. The crash car comes wailing back, and at about a hundred m.p.h. the pup comes into view again, upside down now. The pilot wears neither goggles nor helmet; in the fleeting glimpse they have of him, his face wears an expression of wary and stubborn concern.

He goes on, half rolls into a skid that swaps him end for end. He is now headed straight for the crash car; driver jumps out and flees for nearest hangar, the pup in vicious pursuit. Just as the driver, clutching head in both arms, hurls himself into the hangar, the pup shoots skyward again, hangs again on the prop, then ducks from sight, disappearance followed immediately by dull crash.

“They removed Mac from its intricate remains, intact but unconscious. When he waked he was again under arrest.”

II

“And so,” Ffollansbye said, “for the second time Mac had caused near apoplexy in high places. But this time he was not present. He was in detention camp, where he was calculating the amount of deficit which bade fair to be the first entry on the flying-pay page of his ledger. Meanwhile, at B.H.Q. and in London they considered his case, with its accumulated documents.

At last they decided, as a matter of self-protection and to forestall him before he invented any more crimes for which K.R. & O. had no precedent, to let him have his way.

“They came and told him that he was for England and the school of aeronautics.

“ ‘If A gang, wull they be char-rgin’ thae leetle unfor-rtunate machine against me?’

“ ‘No,’ they said.

“ ‘Verra weel,’ he said. ‘A’m ready noo.’

“He returned to England, setting foot on his native side of the Channel for the first time in more than two years, refusing leave to go home, as usual. Perhaps it was that matter of the calf’s economic legitimacy; perhaps he had figured the most minimated minimum of unavoidable outlay for the trip — knowing, too, that, whatever he discovered, he could not remain long enough to solidify against what he might find when he got there. But perhaps not. Perhaps it was just MacWyrglinchbeath.”

Seven months later, a sergeant pilot, he was trundling an obsolete and unwieldy Reconnaissance Experimental back and forth above the Somme while his officer observer spotted artillery fire from the blunt, bathtubish nose of it. Big, broad-winged, the heavy four-cylinder Beardmore engine thundering sedately behind and above MacWyrglinchbeath’s head, a temptation and potential victim to anything with a gun on it that could move seventy miles an hour. But all the same, flying hours accumulated slowly in MacWyrglinchbeath’s log book.

He and his officer carried on a long, intermittent conversation as they pottered about the ancient thing between flights. The officer was an artilleryman by instinct and a wireless enthusiast by inclination; between him and aviation was an antipathy which never flagged. MacWyrglinchbeath’s passion for accumulating flying time was an enigma to him until, by patient probing, he learned of the neighbor and the mounting hoard of shillings.

“So you came to the war to make money?” he said.

“Aweel,” MacWyrglinchbeath said, “A wou’na be wastin’ ma time.”

The officer repeated MacWyrglinchbeath's history to the mess. A day or two later another pilot — an officer — entered the hangar and found MacWyrglinchbeath head down in the nacelle of his machine.

"I say, sergeant," the officer said to the seat of MacWyrglinchbeath's breeks. MacWyrglinchbeath backed slowly into complete sight and turned over his shoulder a streaked face.

"Ay, sir-r."

"Come down a moment, will you?" MacWyrglinchbeath climbed down, carrying a wrench and a bit of foul waste. "Robinson tells me you're a sort of financier," the officer said.

MacWyrglinchbeath laid the wrench down and wiped his hands on the waste. "Aweel, A wou'na say just that."

"Now, sergeant, don't deny it. Mr. Robinson has told on you.… Have a cigarette?"

"A'll no' mind." MacWyrglinchbeath wiped his hands on his thighs and took the cigarette. "A smawk a pipe masel'." He accepted a light.

"I've a bit of business in your line," the officer said. "This day, each month, you're to give me one pound, and for every day I get back, I give you a shilling. What do you say?"

MacWyrglinchbeath smoked slowly, holding the cigarette as though it were a dynamite cap. "And thae days when ye'll no fly?"

"Just the same. I owe you a shilling."

MacWyrglinchbeath smoked slowly for a while. “Wull ye gang wi’ me as ma obsair-rver-r?”

“Who’ll take up my bus? No, no: if I flew with you, I’d not need underwriting.… What do you say?”

MacWyrglinchbeath mused, the cigarette in his soiled hand. “ ‘Twill tak’ thinkin’,” he said at last. “A’ll tell ye the mor-rn.”

“Right. Take the night and think it out.” The officer returned to the mess.

“I’ve got him! I’ve got him hooked.”

“What’s your idea?” the C.O. said. “Are you spending all this ingenuity for a pound which you can only win by losing?”

“I just want to watch the old Shylock lose flesh. I should give his money back, even if I won it.”

“How?” the C.O. said. The officer looked at him, blinking slowly. “They have an exchange basis between here and Gehenna?” the C.O. said.

“Look here,” Robinson said, “why don’t you let Mac be? You don’t know those people those Highlanders. It takes fortitude just to live as they do, let alone coming away without protest to fight for a king whom they probably still consider a German peasant, and for a cause that, however it ends, he’ll only lose. And the man who can spend three years in this mess and still look forward to a future with any sanity, strength to his arm, say I.”

“Hear, hear!” someone cried.

“Oh, have a drink,” the other said. “I shan’t hurt your Scot.”

The next morning MacWyrglinchbeath paid down the pound, slowly and carefully, but without reluctance. The officer accepted it as soberly.

“We’ll start wi’ today,” MacWyrglinchbeath said.

“Righto,” the officer said. “We’ll start in a half hour.”

Three days later, after a short conversation with Robinson, the C.O. called MacWyrglinchbeath’s client aside.

“Look here. You must call that silly wager off. You’re disrupting my whole squadron. Robinson says that if you’re anywhere in sight, he can’t even keep MacBeath in their sector long enough after the battery fires to see the bursts.”

“It’s not my fault, sir. I wasn’t buying a watchdog. At least, I thought not. I was just pulling Mac’s leg.”

“Well, you look him out tomorrow and ask him to release you. We’ll have Brigade about our ears at this rate.”

The next morning the client talked to MacWyrglinchbeath. That afternoon Robinson talked to MacWyrglinchbeath. That evening, after dinner, the C.O. sent for him. But MacWyrglinchbeath was firm, polite and without heat, and like granite.

The C.O. drummed on the table for a while. “Very well, sergeant,” he said at last. “But I order you to keep to your tour of duty. If you are reported off your patrol once more, I’ll ground you. Carry on.”

MacWyrglinchbeath saluted. “Verra gude, sir-r.”

After that he kept to his tour. Back and forth, back and forth above the puny shell puffs, the gouts of slow smoke. From time to time he scanned the sky above and behind him, but always his eyes returned northward, where the other R. E. was a monotonous speck in the distance.

This was day after day, while Mr. Robinson, with his binocular, hung over the leading edge of the nacelle like a man in a bath who has dropped the soap overside. But every day the client returned, daily the shillings grew, until that day came when the shilling was profit, followed by another and another. Then the month was complete, and MacWyrglinchbeath paid down another pound. The profit was gone now, and his gaze was a little more soberly intent as he stared northward at brief intervals.

Mr. Robinson was leaning, down-peering, over the nacelle when the heavy engine behind him burst into thunderous crescendo and the earth pivoted one hundred and eighty degrees in a single swoop. He jerked himself up and looked behind, swinging his gun about.

The sky was clear, yet they were moving at the R.E.'s sedate top speed. MacWyrglinchbeath was staring straight ahead and Robinson turned and saw, indicated by A-A bursts, the other R.E. plunging and darting like an ancient stiffkneed horse. Shrapnel unfolded and bloomed above it, and at last he made out the Fokker clinging to the R.E.'s blind spot. He swung his gun forward and cleared the mechanism with a short burst.

The two R.E.'s approached at a quartering angle, the first zigzagging just above the clinging German, all three losing altitude. The first and last intimation the German had of the presence of the second R.E. was a

burst from Robinson's gun. The German shot straight up, stalled, and burst into flames. Then MacWryglinchbeath, yawing violently to dodge the zooming German, saw Robinson fall forward over the edge of the nacelle, and at the same time a rake of tracer smoke along the fuselage beside him.

He swerved; without pausing, the second German shot past and plumped full upon the tail of the first R.E., and again bullets ripped about MacWyrglinchbeath, coming from beneath now, where British infantry were firing at the German.

The three of them were not a hundred feet high when they flashed above the secondary lines and the tilted pink faces of the A-A battery. The German utterly disregarded MacWryglinchbeath. He hung upon the tail of the first R.E., which was still zigzagging in wild and sluggish yaws, and putting his nose down a little more and unfastening his belt, MacWryglinchbeath brought his machine directly above the German and a little behind him.

Still the German seemed utterly unaware of his presence, and MacWyrglinchbeath put one leg over the nacelle and got from directly beneath the engine and pushed the stick forward. The German disappeared completely beneath the end of the nacelle and Robinson's dead body sprawled there; immediately afterward, MacWyrglinchbeath felt the prolonged shock. He cut the switch and climbed free of the nacelle, onto the bottom wing, where the engine wouldn't fall on him. "Sax shillin'," he said as the sudden earth swooped and tilted.

III

He climbed stiffly down from his Bristol and limped across the tarmac, toward his hut. His limp was pronounced now, a terrific crablike gait, for in the wet, chill October days his broken hips stiffened, even after fourteen months.

The flight was all in, the windows of the officers' mess glowed cheerily across the dusk; he limped on, thinking of tea, a drink, a cozy evening in his hut behind the locked door. That was against the young devils from the mess. Children they took now. The old pilots, mature men, were all dead or promoted to remote Wing offices, their places filled by infants not done with public school, without responsibility or any gift for silence. He went on and opened the door to his hut.

He stopped, the open door in his hand, then he closed it and entered the cubbyhole of a room. His batman had built the fire up in the miniature stove; the room was quite warm. He laid his helmet and goggles aside and slowly unfastened and removed his flying boots. Only then did he approach the cot and stand there, looking quietly at the object which had caught his eye when he entered. It was his walking-out tunic. It had been pressed, but that was not all.

The Royal Flying Corps tabs and the chevrons had been ripped from shoulder and sleeve, and on each shoulder strap a subaltern's pip was fixed, and upon the breast, above the D.S.M. ribbon, were wings. Beside it his scarred belt lay, polished, with a new and shining shoulder strap buckled on. He was still looking soberly at them when the door burst open upon a thunderous inrush.

"Now, old glum-face!" a young voice cried. "He'll have to buy a drink now. Hey, fellows?"

They watched him from the mess windows as he crossed the aerodrome in the dusk.

“Wait, now,” they told one another. “Wait till he’s had time to dress.”

Another voice rose: “Gad, wouldn’t you like to see the old blighter’s face when he opens the door?”

“Old blighter?” a flight commander sitting with a newspaper beneath the lamp said. “He’s not old. I doubt if he’s thirty.”

“Good gad! Thirty! Gad, I’ll not live to see thirty by ten years.”

“Who cares? Who wants to live forever?”

“Stow it. Stow it.”

“Ave, Cæsar! Morituri—”

“Stow it, stow it! Don’t be a mawkish fool!”

“Gad, yes! What ghastly taste!”

“Thirty! Good gad!”

“He looks about a hundred, with that jolly walnut face of his.”

“Let him. He’s a decent sort. Shame it wasn’t done sooner for him.”

“Yes. Been a D.S.O. and an M.C. twice over by now.”

“Got quite a decent clink record too. Deserted once, you know.”

“Go on!”

“ ‘Struth. And first time he was ever off the ground he nipped off alone on a pup. No instruction; ack emma then. Sort of private solo.”

“I say, do you know that yarn they tell about him about hoarding his pay against peace? Sends it all home. Done it for years.”

“Well, why not?” the flight commander said. “If some of you young puppies would just—” They shouted him down. “Clear off, the lot of you!” the flight commander said above the din. “Why don’t you go and fetch him up here?”

They charged from the room; the noise faded in the outer dusk. The three flight commanders sat down again, talking quietly among themselves.

“I’m glad too. Trouble is, they should have done it years ago. Ffollansbye recommended him once. Dare say some ass hipped on precedent quashed it.”

“Too bad Ffollansbye couldn’t have lived to see it done.”

“What a putrid shame.”

“Yes. But you’d not know it from Mac. Ffollansbye told him when he put him up. Old Mac never said anything at all; just went on about his business. And then, when Ffollansbye had to tell him it was no go, he just sort of grunted and thanked him, and carried on as though it had never come up.”

“What a ruddy shame.”

“Yes. Sort of makes you glad you belong to the same squadron with a chap like that. Does his bit and be damned to you.” They sat in the cozy warmth, talking quietly of MacWyrglinchbeath. Feet rushed again

beyond the door; it opened and two of the deputation stood in it with their young, baffled faces.

“Well?” someone said. “Where’s the victim?”

But they were beckoning the senior flight commander, in whose flight MacWyrglinchbeath was.

“Come here, skipper,” they said. The senior looked at them. He did not rise.

“What’s row?”

But they were merely urgent and mysterious; not until the three of them were outside did they explain. “The old fool won’t take it,” they said in hushed tones. “Can you believe it? Can you?”

“We’ll see,” the flight commander said. Beyond MacWyrglinchbeath’s door the sound of voices indistinguishable and expostulant came.

The flight commander entered and thrust among them as they stood about the cot. The tunic and belt lay untouched upon it; beside it MacWyrglinchbeath sat in the lone chair.

“Clear off, now,” the flight commander said, herding them toward the door. “Off with you, the whole lot.” He pushed the last one out and shut the door and returned and straddled his legs before the stove.

“What’s all the hurrah, Mac?”

“Weel, skipper,” MacWyrglinchbeath said slowly, “thae bairns mean weel, A doot not—” He looked up. “Ye ha’ disfee-gur-red ma walkin-oot tunic, and thae bairns think A sud just dress up in a’ thae leather-r and

brass, and gang wi' they tae thae awf-ficer-rs' mess." He mused again upon the tunic.

"Right," the flight commander said. "Shame it wasn't done a year ago. Hop into it now, and come along. Dinner's about about."

But MacWyrglinchbeath did not stir. He put his hand out slowly and musingly, and touched the gallant sweep of the embroidered wings above the silken candy stripe.

"Thae bairns mean weel, A mak' nae doot," he said.

"Silly young pups. But we're all damned glad. You should have seen the major when it came through this morning. Like a child on Christmas Eve. The lads could hardly wait until they could sneak your tunic out."

"Ay," MacWyrglinchbeath said. "They mean well, A mak' nae doot. But 'twill tak' thinkin'." He sat, slowly and gently touching the wings with a blunt hand, pitted and grained with four years of grease. The flight commander watched quietly and with what he thought was comprehension. He moved.

"Right you are. Take the night and think it out. Better show up at breakfast, though, or those devils will be after you again."

"Ay," MacWyrglinchbeath said. " 'Twill tak' thinkin'."

Dark was fully come. The flight commander strode savagely back to the mess, swearing. He opened the door, and, still cursing, he entered. The others faced him quickly.

"Is he coming?"

The flight commander cursed steadily — Wing, Brigade, Staff, the war, Parliament.

“Do you think he will? Would any of you yourselves, after they’d let you rot for four ruddy years, and then gave you a second lieutenancy as though it were a Garter? The man has pride, and he’s damned well right.”

After his dinner MacWyrglinchbeath went to the sergeant of the officers’ mess and talked with him. Then he went to the squadron commander’s orderly and talked with him. Then he returned and sat on his cot — he had yet the stub of candle, for light was furnished him now; but he was well into his second pencil — and calculated. He roughly computed the cost of a new uniform and accessories, with an allowance for laundry.

Then he calculated a month’s average battel bill, added the amounts and subtracted the total from a subaltern’s pay. he compared the result with his present monthly net, sitting above the dead yet irrevocable assertion of the figures for a long time. Then he tied the ledger up in its bit of greasy cord and went to bed.

The next morning he sought the flight commander. “Thae bairns mean well, A mak’ nae doot,” he said, with just a trace of apology. “And the major-r. A’m gritfu’ tae ye a’. But ‘twina do, skipper. Ye ken that.”

“Yes,” the flight commander said. “I see. Yes.” Again and aloud he cursed the whole fabric of the war. “Stupid fools, with their ruddy tabs and brass. No wonder they can’t win a war in four years. You’re right,

Mac; ‘course it’s no go at this late day. And I’m sorry, old fellow.” He wrung MacWyrglinchbeath’s limp, calloused hand hard.

“A’m gritfu’,” MacWyrglinchbeath said. “A’m obleeged.”

That was in October, 1918.

By two o’clock there was not a mechanic on the place. On the tarmac the squadron commander’s machine stood, the engine idling; in the cockpit the major sat. He was snoring. Up and down the aerodrome the senior flight commander and a wing commander and an artillery officer raced in the squadron’s car, while a fourth man in an S.E. 5 played tag with them.

He appeared to be trying to set his landing gear down in the tonneau of the car; at each failure the occupants of the car howled, the artillery officer waving a bottle; each time the flight commander foiled him by maneuvering, they howled again and passed the bottle from mouth to mouth.

The mess was littered with overturned chairs and with bottles and other objects small enough to throw. Beneath the table lay two men to whom three hours of peace had been harder than that many years of fighting; above and upon and across them the unabated tumult raged. At last one climbed upon the table and stood swaying and shouting until he made himself heard:

“Look here! Where’s old Mac?”

“Mac!” they howled. “Where’s old Mac? Can’t have a binge without old Mac!”

They rushed from the room. In his cockpit the major snored; the squadron car performed another last-minute skid as the S. E.'s propeller flicked the cap from the artillery officer's head. They rushed on to MacWyrglinchbeath's hut and crashed the door open. MacWyrglinchbeath was sitting on his cot, his ledger upon his knees and his pencil poised above it. He was taking stock.

With the hammer which he had concealed beneath the well coping four years ago he carefully drew the nails in the door and window frames and put them into his pocket and opened his house again. He put the hammer and the nails away in their box, and from another box he took his kilts and shook them out. The ancient folds were stiff, reluctant, and moths had been among them, and he clicked his tongue soberly.

Then he removed his tunic and breeks and putties, and donned the kilts. With the fagots he had stored there four years ago he kindled a meager fire on the hearth and cooked and ate his supper. Then he smoked his pipe, put the dottle carefully away, smothered the fire and went to bed.

The next morning he walked three miles down the glen to the neighbor's. The neighbor, from his tilted doorway, greeted him with sparse unsurprise:

"Weel, Wully. A thocht ye'd be comin' hame. A heer-rd thae war-r was done wi'."

"Ay," MacWyrglinchbeath said, and together they stood beside the angling fence of brush and rocks and looked at the shaggy, small horse

and the two cows balanced, seemingly without effort, on the forty-five-degree slope of the barn lot.

“Ye’ll be takin’ away thae twa beasties,” the neighbor said.

“Thae three beasties, ye mean,” MacWyrglinchbeath said. They did not look at each other. They looked at the animals in the lot.

“Ye’ll mind ye left but twa wi’ me.”

They looked at the three animals. “Ay,” MacWyrglinchbeath said. Presently they turned away. They entered the cottage. The neighbor lifted a hearthstone and counted down MacWyrglinchbeath’s remittances to the last ha’penny. The total agreed exactly with the ledger.

“A’m gritfu’,” MacWyrglinchbeath said.

“Ye’ll ha’ ither spoil frae thae war-r, A doot not?” the neighbor said.

“Naw. ’Twas no that kind o’ a war-r,” MacWyrglinchbeath said.

“Ay,” the neighbor said. “No Hieland Scots ha’ ever won aught in English war-rs.”

MacWyrglinchbeath returned home. The next day he walked to the market town, twelve miles away. Here he learned the current value of two-year-old cattle; he consulted a lawyer also. He was closeted with the lawyer for an hour. Then he returned home, and with pencil and paper and the inch-long butt of the candle he calculated slowly, proved his figures, and sat musing above the result. Then he snuffed the candle and went to bed.

The next morning he walked down the glen. The neighbor, in his tilted doorway, greeted him with sparse unsurprise:

“Weel, Wully. Ye ha’ cam’ for thae twa beasties?”

“Ay,” MacWyrglinchbeath said.

The End

Idyll in the Desert, William Faulkner

Idyll in the Desert

Random House, December 1931

I

“It would take me four days to make my route. I would leave Blizzard on a Monday and get to Painter’s about sundown and spend the night. The next night I would make Ten Sleep and then turn and go back across the mesa. The third night I would camp, and on Thursday night I would be home again.”

“Didn’t you ever get lonesome?” I said.

“Well, a fellow hauling government mail, government property. You hear tell of these old desert rats getting cracked in the head. But did you ever hear of a soldier getting that way? Even a West Pointer, a fellow out of the cities, that never was out of hollering distance of a hundred people before in his life, let him be out on a scout by himself for six months, even.

Because that West Pointer, he’s like me; he ain’t riding alone. He’s got Uncle Sam right there to talk to whenever he feels like talking: Washington and the big cities full of folks, and all that that means to a man, like what Saint Peter and the Holy Church of Rome used to mean to them old priests, when them Spanish Bishops would come riding across the mesa on a mule, surrounded by the ghostly hosts of Heaven with harder hitting guns than them old Sharpses even, because the pore aboriginee that got shot with them heavenly bolts, they never even saw the shooting, let alone the gun. And then I carry a rifle, and there’s always the chance of an antelope and once I killed a mountain sheep without even getting out of the buckboard.”

“Was it a big one?” I said.

“Sure. I was coming around a shoulder of the canyon just about sunset. The sun was just above the rim, shining right in my face. So I saw these two sheep just under the rim. I could see their horns and tails against the sky, but I couldn’t see the sheep for the sunset. I could see a set of horns, I could make out a pair of hindquarters, but because of the sun I couldn’t make out if them sheep were on this side of the rim or just beyond it. And I didn’t have time to get closer. I just pulled the team up and throwed up my rifle and put a bullet about two foot back of them

horns and another bullet about three foot ahead of them hindquarters and jumped out of the blackboard running."

"Did you get both of them?" I said.

"No. I just got one. But he had two bullets in him; one back of the fore leg and the other right under the hind leg."

"Oh," I said.

"Yes. Them bullets was five foot apart."

"That's a good story," I said.

"It was a good sheep. But what was I talking about? I talk so little that, when I mislay a subject, I have to stop and hunt for it. I was talking about being lonesome, wasn't I? There wouldn't hardly a winter pass without I would have at least one passenger on the up or down trip, even if it wasn't anybody but one of Painter's hands, done rode his horse down to Blizzard with forty dollars in his pocket, to leave his horse at Blizzard and go down to Juarez and bust the bank with that forty dollars by Christmas day and come back and maybe set up with Painter for his range boss, provided if Painter was honest and industrious and worked hard. They'd always ride back up to Painter's with me along about New Year's."

"What about their horses?" I said.

"What horses?"

"The ones they rode down to Blizzard and left there."

“Oh. Them horses would belong to Matt Lewis by that time. Matt runs the livery stable.”

“Oh,” I said.

“Yes. Matt says he don’t know what to do. He said he kept on hoping that maybe this polo would take the country like Mah-Jong done a while back. But now he says he reckons he’ll have to start him a glue factory. But what was I talking about?”

“You talk so seldom,” I said. “Was it about getting lonesome?”

“Oh yes. And then I’d have these lungers. That would be a passenger a week for two weeks.”

“Would they come in pairs?”

“No. It would be the same one. I’d take him up one week and leave him, and the next week I’d bring him back down to make the east bound train. I reckon the air up at Sivgut was a little too stiff for eastern lungs.”

“Sivgut?” I said.

“Sure. Siv. One of them things they strain the meal through back east at Santone and Washinton. Siv.”

“Oh. Siv. Yes. Sivgut. What is that?”

“It’s a house we built. A good house. They kept on coming here, getting off at Blizzard, passing Phoenix where there is what you might call back east at Santone and Washinton a dude lung-ranch. They’d pass that and come on to Blizzard: a peaked-looking fellow in his Sunday clothes, with

his eyes closed and his skin the color of sandpaper, and a fat wife from one of them eastern corn counties, telling how they wanted too much at Phoenix so they come on to Blizzard because they don't think a set of eastern wore-out lungs is worth what the folks in Phoenix wanted.

Or maybe it would be vice versa, with the wife with a sand-colored face with a couple of red spots on it like the children had been spending a wet Sunday with some scraps of red paper and a pot of glue while she was asleep, and her still asleep but not too much asleep to put in her opinion about how much folks in Phoenix thought Ioway lungs was worth on the hoof. So we built Sivgut for them. The Blizzard Chamber of Commerce did it, with two bunks and a week's grub, because it takes me a week to get up there again and bring them back down to make the Phoenix train. It's a good camp. We named it Sivgut because of the view.

On a clear day you can see clean down into Mexico. Did I tell you about the day when that last revolution broke out in Mexico? Well, one day — it was a Tuesday, about ten o'clock in the morning — I got there and the lunger was out in front, staring off to the south with his hand shading his eyes. 'It's a cloud of dust,' he says. 'Look at it.' I looked. 'That's curious,' I said. 'It can't be a rodeo or I'd heard about it. And it can't be a sandstorm,' I said, 'because it's too big and staying in one place.' I went on and got back to Blizzard on Thursday. Then I learned about this new revolution down in Mexico. Broke out Tuesday just before sundown, they told me."

"I thought you said you saw that dust at ten o'clock," I said.

"Sure. But things happen so fast down there in Mexico that that dust started rising the night before to get out of the way of—"

"Don't tell about that," I said. "Tell about Sivgut."

“All right. I’d get up to Sivgut on Tuesday morning. At first she’d be in the door, or maybe out in front of the cabin, looking down the trail for me. But after that sometimes I would drive right up to the door and stop the team and say ‘Hello’ and the house still as vacant as the day it was built.”

“A woman,” I said.

“Yes. She stayed on, after he got well and left. She stayed on.”

“She must have liked the country.”

“I guess not. I don’t guess any of them liked the country. Would you like a country you were just using to get well from a sickness you were ashamed for your friends to know you had?”

“I see.” I said. “He got well first. Why didn’t he wait until his wife got well too?”

“I guess he never had time to wait. I guess he figgered there was a right smart lot for him to do yet back yonder, being a young fellow, and like he had just got out of jail after a long time.”

“That’s less reason than ever for him to leave his wife sick.”

“He didn’t know she was sick. That she had it too.”

“Didn’t know?” I said.

“You take a sick fellow, a young fellow at that, without no ties to speak of, having to come and live for two years in a place where there ain’t a traffic light in four hundred miles; where there ain’t nothing but quiet

and sunlight and them durn stars staring him in the face all night long. You couldn't expect him to pay much mind to somebody that never done nothing but cook his food and chop his firewood and haul his water in a tin bucket from a spring three quarters of a mile away to wash him in like he was a baby. So when he got well, I don't reckon he could be blamed for not noticing that she had one more burden herself, especially if that burden wasn't nothing but a few little old bugs."

"I don't know what you call ties, then," I said, "If marriage isn't a tie."

"Now you're getting at it. Marriage is a tie; only, it depends some on who you are married to. You know what my private opinion is, after having watched them for about ten years, once a week on a Tuesday, as well as carrying a letter or a telegram back and forth between them and the railroad?"

"What is your private opinion?"

"It's my private opinion, based on evidence though not hidebound; I was never a opinionated man; that they wasn't married to one another a-tall."

"What do you consider evidence?"

"Well, a letter to me from a fellow back east that did claim to be her husband might be considered as evidence. What do you think?"

"Did you kill this sheep with one shot or with two," I said.

"Sho, now," the mail rider said.

II

“This fellow got off the west bound train one morning about ten years ago. He didn’t look like a lunger, maybe because he didn’t have but one grip. Usually it’s too late already when they come here. Usually the doctor has told them they haven’t got but a month more, or maybe six months. Yet they’ll get off that west bound train sometimes with everything but the cook stove. I’ve noticed that taking trouble just to get through the world is about the hardest habit of all to break. Owning things.

I know folks right now that would hold up a train bound for heaven while they telephoned back home for the cook to run and bring them something which, not having ever had any use for it at home, they had done forgot. They could live in a house on earth with it for years without even knowing where it was, but just try to get them to start to heaven without taking it along.

“He didn’t look like a lunger. He didn’t look concerned enough. You take them, even while they are sitting on the baggage truck with their eyes shut while the wife is arguing with anybody in sight that her husband’s lungs ain’t worth as much as western folks seem to think, and they look concerned. They are right there, where it is going on. They don’t care who knows that they are the most interested parties present. Like a man on horseback that’s swallowed a dynamite cap and a sharp rock at the same time.

“But him. His name was Darrel, Darrel Howes. Maybe House. She called him Dorry. He just got off the train with his one grip and stood on our platform and sneered at it, the mountains, the space, at the Lord God Himself that watches a man here like a man might watch a bug, a ant.

“ ‘Our station ain’t much,’ I says. ‘You’ll have to give us a little time. We only been working on this country about two hundred years and we ain’t got it finished yet.’

“He looked at me, a tall fellow in clothes that hadn’t never seen as far west as Santone even, before he brought them. What the pitchure magazines would call a dook, maybe. ‘That’s all right with me,’ he says. ‘I don’t intend to look at any of it longer than I can help.’

“ ‘Help yourself,’ I said. ‘They’ll tell you in Washinton it belongs to you too.’

“ ‘They can have my part of it back soon then,’ he says. He looked at me. ‘You’ve got a house here. A camp.’

“I understood what he meant then, what he had come for; I hadn’t never suspected it. I guess I thought he was a drummer, maybe. A perfume drummer, maybe. ‘Oh,’ I says. ‘You mean Sivgut. Sure. You want to use it?’

“That was what he wanted, standing there in his eastern clothes like a Hollywood dook, sneering. And then I knew that he was just about scared to death. After them three or four days on the train with nobody to talk to except his own inhabitants, he had just about got himself scared to death. ‘Sure,’ I said. ‘It’s a good camp. You’ll like it up there. I’m going up there today. You can go with me, if you want to look at it.

I will get you back here by Thursday night.’ He didn’t say anything. He didn’t seem to be paying any attention at all. ‘You’ll have a lot of time to listen to them little things before you die, my friend,’ I says to myself. ‘And without anybody to help you listen, neither.’ I thought that that was what it was. That he was just young (there was something about him that let you know, plain as if he had told you, that he was an only child and that his ma had been a widow since before he begun to

remember; anyway, you could see that he had probably spent all his life being took care of by women, women to whom he looked like quite a figger, and here when he really needed to be took care of, he was ashamed to tell them the reason of it, and scared of himself.

I didn't think he knew what he wanted to do or what he would do next; I thought that all he wanted was for somebody to tell him they would do this or that next, before the time come to need to do something else even. I thought he was running from himself, trying to lose himself in some crowd or in some strange surroundings where he would get lost and couldn't keep up. I never thought different even when he asked about food. 'We'll find some at camp,' I said. 'Enough for a week.'

" 'You pass there every week do you?' he said.

" 'Sure. Every Tuesday. I get there Tuesday morning. And Thursday night this team will be champing corn in Blizzard again.'

"The team was. I was in Blizzard too, but he was up there at Sivgut. He wasn't standing in the door, watching me drive away, neither. He was down in the canyon behind the camp, chopping wood, and not making much of an out with the axe, neither. He gave me ten dollars, to buy him a week's grub. 'You can't eat no ten dollars in a week,' I said. 'Five will be all you'll want. I'll bring it to you and you can pay me then.' But that wouldn't do him. When I left there, I had his five dollars.

"I didn't buy the grub. I borrowed a buffalo robe from Matt Lewis, because the weather had changed that week and I knew it would be a cold ride for him, them two days back to town in the buckboard. He was glad to see the robe. He said the nights was getting pretty chilly, and that he would be glad to have it. So I left the mail with him and I went back to Painter's and talked Painter out of enough grub to last

him until next Tuesday. And I left him there again. He gave me another five dollars. 'I'm making out a little better with the axe,' he told me. 'Don't forget my grub, this time.'

"And I didn't forget it. I carried it to him every Tuesday for two years, until he left. I'd see him every Tuesday, especially during that first winter that near about killed him, I'd find him laying on the cot, coughing blood, and I'd cook him up a pot of beans and cut him enough firewood to last until next Tuesday, and finally I took the telegram down to the railroad and sent it for him. It was to a Mrs. So-and-so in New York; I thought that maybe his ma had married again, and it didn't make sense. It just said 'I've two weeks more the less long than farewell' and there wasn't any name to it. So I signed my name to it, Lucas Crump, Mail Rider, and sent it on. I paid for it, too. She got there in five days. It took her five days to get there, and ten years to leave."

"You said two years a minute ago," I said.

"That was him. He just stayed two years. I guess that first winter maybe killed his bugs, same as boll weevils back east in Texas. Anyway, he begun to set up and to chop the wood himself, so that when I'd get there about ten o'clock she'd tell me he had done been gone since sunup. And then one day, in the spring after she come there the spring before, I saw him in Blizzard. He had walked in, forty miles, and he had gained about thirty pounds and he looked hard as a range pony. I didn't see him but for a minute, because he was in a hurry. I didn't know how much of a hurry until I saw him getting onto the east bound train when it pulled out. I thought then that he was still running from himself."

"And when you found that the woman was still up there at Sivgut, what did you think then?"

“I knew that he was running from himself then,” the Mail Rider said.

III

“And the woman, you said she stayed ten years.”

“Sure. She just left yesterday.”

“You mean that she stayed on eight years after he left?”

“She was waiting for him to come back. He never told her he wasn’t coming back. And besides, she had the bugs herself then. Maybe it was the same ones, up and moved onto a new pasture.”

“And he didn’t know it? Living right there in the same house with her, he didn’t know she was infected?”

“How know it? You reckon a fellow that’s got a dynamite cap inside him has got time to worry about whether his neighbor swallowed one too or not? And besides, she had done left a husband and two children when she got the telegram. So I reckon she felt for him to come back. I used to talk to her, that first winter when we thought he was going to die.

She was a durn sight handier with that axe than he was, and sometimes there wouldn’t be a thing for me to do when I got there.

So we would talk. She was about ten years older than him, and she told me about her husband, that was about ten years older than her, and their children. Her husband was one of these architects and she told me

about how Dorry came back from this Bow and Art school in Paris and how he went to work in her husband's office.

And I guess he was a pretty stiff lick to a woman of thirty-five and maybe better, that had a husband and a house that all run themselves too well for her to meddle with, and Dorry just twenty-five and fresh from Pareesian bowleyvards and looking like a Hollywood dook to boot.

So I guess it couldn't have been long before they had one another all steamed up to where they believed they couldn't live until they had told her husband and his boss that love was im-perious or im-peerious or whatever it is, and had went off to live just down the canyon from a stage settin with the extra hands all playing mouth-organs and accordions in the background.

"That would have been all right. They could have bore unreality. It was the reality they never had the courage to deny. He tried, though. She told me that she didn't know he was sick nor where he had went to until she got our telegram. She says he just sent her a note that he was gone and to not expect him back. Then she got the telegram. 'And there wasn't nothing else I could do,' she says, in a man's flannel shirt and corduroy coat. She had fell off and she didn't look thirty-five by five years. But I don't reckon he noticed that. 'There was nothing else I could do,' she says. 'Because his mother had just died the year before.' 'Sho,' I said. 'I hadn't thought of that. And since she couldn't come, you had to since he never had no grandmother nor wife nor sister nor daughter nor maid servant.' But she wasn't listening.

"She never listened to anything except to him in the bed or to the pot on the stove. 'You've learned to cook fine,' I told her. 'Cook?' she said. 'Why not?' I don't guess she knew what she was eating, if she et at all,

which I never saw her do. Only now and then I would make her think that she had found herself some way to get the grub done without burning it or having it taste like throwed-away cinch-leathers. I reckon though women just ain't got time to worry much about what food tastes like. But now and then during that bad winter I'd just up and run her out of the kitchen and cook him something he needed.

"Then that next spring I saw him at the station that day, getting on the train. After that, neither of us ever mentioned him a-tall. I went up to see her next day. But we didn't mention him; I never told her I saw him get on the train. I set out the week's grub and I says, 'I may come back this way tomorrow,' not looking at her. 'I ain't got anything that goes beyond Ten Sleep. So I may come back past here tomorrow on my way to Blizzard.' 'I think I have enough to last me until next Tuesday,' she says. 'Alright,' I says. 'I'll see you then.'"

"So she stayed," I said.

"Sure. She had them herself, then. She didn't tell me for some time. Sometimes it would be two months and I would not see her. Sometimes I would hear her down in the canyon with the axe, and sometimes she would speak to me out of the house, without coming to the door, and I would set the grub on the bench and wait a while. But she would not come out, and I would go on. When I saw her again, she never looked no thirty-five by twenty years. And when she left yesterday, she didn't look it by thirty-five years."

"She gave him up and left, did she?"

“I telegraphed to her husband. That was about six months after Dorry left. The husband he got here in five days, same as she did. He was a fine fellow, kind of old. But not after making no trouble. ‘I’m obliged to you,’ he says first thing. ‘What for?’ I says. ‘I’m obliged to you,’ he says. ‘What do you think I had better do first?’

“We talked it over. We figgered he had better wait in town until I got back. I went up there. I didn’t tell her he was there. I never got that far; that was the first time I ever come out and talked like there was any such thing as tomorrow. I never got far enough to tell her he was there. I came back and told him. ‘Maybe next year,’ I told him. ‘You try then.’ She still thought Dorry was coming back. Like he would be on the next train.

So the husband he went back home and I fixed the money up in an envelope and I got Manny Hughes in the postoffice to help compound a crime or whatever you do to the government, with the cancelling machine so it would look natural, and I carried it to her. ‘It’s registered,’ I said. ‘Must be a gold mine in it.’

And she took it, fake number and fake postmark and all, and opened it, looking for the letter from Dorry. Dorry, she called him; did I tell you? The only thing she seemed to mistrust about it was the only thing that was authentic. ‘There’s no letter,’ she says. ‘Maybe he was in a hurry,’ I says. ‘He must be pretty busy to have earned all that money in six months.’

“After that, two or three times a year I would take her one of these faked letters. Once a week I would write her husband how she was getting along, and I would take the money two or three times a year, when she would about be running out, and take the letter to her, and

her opening the envelope and kind of throwing the money aside to look for the letter, and then looking at me like she believed that me or Manny had opened the envelope and taken the letter out. Maybe she believed that we did.

“I couldn’t get her to eat right. Finally, about a year ago, she had to go to bed too, in the same cot, the same blankets. I telegraphed her husband and he sent a special train with one of them eastern specialists that won’t look at you without you got pedigree stud papers, and we told her he was the County Health officer on his yearly rounds and that his fee was one dollar and she paid him, letting him give her change for a five dollar bill, and him looking at me.

‘Go on and tell her,’ I said. ‘You can live a year,’ he said. ‘A year?’ she says. ‘Sure,’ I says. ‘That’ll be plenty long. You can get here from anywhere in five days.’ ‘That’s so,’ she says. ‘Do you think I ought to try to write to him? I might put it in the papers,’ she said. ‘I wouldn’t do that,’ I said. ‘He’s busy. If he wasn’t pretty busy, he couldn’t make the money he’s making. Could he?’ ‘That’s so,’ she said.

“So the doctor went back to New York on his special train, and he gave the husband an earfull. I had a wire from him right off; he wanted to send the specialist back, this eastern stud doctor. But he figgered by telegraph that that wouldn’t do any good, so I told my substitute he could make a good job; he could make one and a half of my pay for a year. It never done no harm to let him think he was working for one of these big eastern syndicates too, as well as the government.

And I took a bed roll and I camped out in the canyon below the cabin. We got a Injun woman to wait on her. The Injun woman couldn’t talk enough of any language to tell her better than a rich man sent her to

wait there. And there she waited, with me camped out in the canyon, telling her I was on my vacation, hunting sheep. That vacation lasted eight months. It took her a right smart while.

“Then I went back to town and telegraphed her husband. He telegraphed back to put her on the Los Angeles train on Wednesday, that he would go on to Los Angeles by airplane and meet the train, so we brought her down Wednesday. She was laying on a stretcher when the train come in and stopped and the engine uncoupled and went on down to the water tank. She was laying on the stretcher, waiting for them to lift her into the baggage car; me and the Injun woman had told her that the rich man had sent for her, when they come up.”

“They?” I said.

“Dorry and his new wife. I forgot to tell that. News passes Blizzard about four times before it ever lights. News happens in Pittsburg, say. All right. It gets radioed, passing right over us to Los Angeles or Frisco. All right.

They put the Los Angeles and Frisco papers into the airplane and they pass right over us, going east now to Phoenix. Then they put the papers onto the fast train and the news passes us again, going west at sixty miles an hour at two A. M. And then the papers come back east on the local, and we get a chance to read them. Matt Lewis showed me the paper, about the wedding, on Tuesday. ‘You reckon this is the same Darrel House?’ he says. ‘Is the gal rich?’ I says. ‘She’s from Pittsburg,’ Matt says. ‘Then that’s the one,’ I says.

“So they were all out of the cars, stretching their legs like they do. You know these pullman trains. Folks that have lived together for four days.

All know one another like a family: the millionaire, the movie queen, the bride and groom with rice still in their hair like as not.

He still never looked a day more than thirty, with this new wife holding to him with her face lowered, and the heads of them other passengers turning when they passed, the heads of the old folks remembering their honeymoons too, and of the bachelors too, thinking maybe a few of the finest thoughts they ever think about this world and the bride thinking a little too, maybe, shrinking against her husband and holding him and thinking enough to imagine herself walking along there nekkid and probably she wouldn't take eleven dollars or even fifteen for the privilege.

They come on too, with the other passengers that would come up and pass the stretcher and glance at it and then kind of pause like a house-owner that finds a dead dog or maybe a queer-shaped piece of wood at the corner, and go on."

"Did they go on, too?"

"That's right. They come up and looked at her, with the gal kind of shrinking off against her husband and holding him, with her eyes wide, and Dorry looking down at her and going on, and she — she couldn't move anything except her eyes then — turning her eyes to follow them, because she seen the rice in their hair too by then. I guess she had maybe thought all the time until then that he would get off the train and come to her. She thought he would look like he had when she saw him last, and she thought that she would look like she had when he saw her first. And so when she saw him and saw the gal and smelt the rice, all she could do was move her eyes. Or maybe she didn't know him at all. I don't know."

“But he,” I said. “What did he say?”

“Nothing. I don’t reckon he recognized me. There was a lot of folks there, and I didn’t happen to be up in front. I don’t guess he saw me a-tall.”

“I mean, when he saw her.”

“He didn’t know her. Because he didn’t expect to see her there. You take your own brother and see him somewhere you don’t expect to, where it never occurred to your wildest dream he would be, and you wouldn’t know him. Let alone if he has went and aged forty years on you in ten winters. You got to be suspicious of folks to recognize them at a glance wherever you see them. And he wasn’t suspicious of her. That was her trouble. But it didn’t last long.”

“What didn’t last long?”

“Her trouble. When they took her off the train at Los Angeles she was dead. Then it was her husband’s trouble. Ours, too. She stayed in the morgue two days, because when he went and looked at her, he didn’t believe it was her. We had to telegraph back and forth four times before he would believe it was her. Me and Matt Lewis paid for the telegrams, too. He was busy and forgot to pay for them, I guess.”

“You must still have had some of the money the husband sent you to fool her with,” I said.

The Mail Rider chewed. “She was alive when he was sending that money,” he said. “That was different.” He spat carefully. He wiped his sleeve across his mouth.

“Have you got any Indian blood?” I said.

“Indian blood?”

“You talk so little. So seldom.”

“Oh, sure. I have some Indian blood. My name used to be Sitting Bull.”

“Used to be?”

“Sure. I got killed one day a while back. Didn’t you read it in the paper?”

The End

Two Dollar Wife, William Faulkner

Two Dollar Wife

College Life, Volume XVIII, 1936

“AIN’T SHE NEVER going to be ready!” Maxwell Johns stared at himself in the mirror. He watched himself light a cigarette and snap the match backward over his shoulder. It struck the hearth and bounced, still burning, toward the rug.

“What the hell do I care if it burns the damn dump down!” he snarled, striding up and down the garish parlor of the Houston home. He stared

at his reflection again — slim young body in evening clothes, smooth dark hair, smooth white face. He could hear, in the room overhead, Doris Houston and her mother shrieking at each other.

“Listen at ’em squall!” he grunted. “You’d think it was a knock-down-and-drag-out going on instead of a flounce getting into her duds. Oh, hell! Their brains are fuzzy as the cotton we grow!”

A colored maid entered the room and puttered about a moment, her vast backside billowing like a high wave under oil. She glanced at Maxwell and sniffed her way out of the room.

The screams above reached a crescendo. Then he heard rushing feet, eager and swift — a bright eager clatter, young and evanescent.

A final screech from above seemed to shoot Doris Houston into the room like a pip squeezed from an orange. She was thin as a dragonfly, honey-haired, with long coltish legs. Her small face was alternate patches of dead white and savage red.

She carried a fur coat over her arm and held onto one shoulder of her dress with the other hand. The other shoulder, with a dangling strap, had slipped far down.

Doris shrugged the gown back into place and mumbled between her red lips. A needle glinted between her white teeth, the gossamer thread floating out as she flung the coat down and whirled her back to Maxwell. “Here, Unconscious, sew me up!” he interpreted her mumbled words.

“Good God, I just sewed you into it night before last!” Maxwell growled. “And I sewed you into it Christmas Eve, and I sewed—”

“Aw, dry up!” said Doris. “You did your share of tearing it off of me! Sew it good this time, and let it stay sewed!”

He sewed it, muttering to himself, with long, savage stitches like a boy sewing the ripped cover of a baseball. He snapped the thread, juggled the needle from one hand to the other for a moment and then thrust it carelessly into the seat cover of a chair.

Doris shrugged the strap into place with a wriggle and reached for her coat. Outside a motor horn brayed, “Here they are!” she snapped. “Come on!”

Again feet sounded on the stairs — like lumps of half-baked dough slopping off a table. Mrs. Houston thrust her frizzled hair and her diamonds into the room.

“Doris!” she shrieked. “Where are you going tonight? Maxwell, don’t you dare let Doris stay out till all hours again like she did Christmas Eve! I don’t care if it is New Year’s! Do you hear? Doris, you come home—”

“All right! All right!” squawked Doris without looking back. “Come on, Unconscious!”

“Get in!” barked Walter Mitchell, driver of the car. “Get in back, Doris, damn it! Lucille, get your legs outa my lap! How the hell you expect me to drive?”

As the car ripped through the outer fringe of the town, a second car, also containing two couples, turned in from a side road. The drivers blatted horns at each other in salute. Side by side they swerved into the straight road that led past the Country Club. They raced, roaring, rocking — sixty — seventy — seventy-five, hub brushing hub, outer

wheels on the rims of the road. Behind the steering wheels glowered two almost identical faces — barbered, young, grim.

Far ahead gleamed the white gates of the Country Club. “You better slow down!” shrieked Doris.

“Slow down, hell!” growled Mitchell, foot and accelerator both flat on the floorboards.

The other car drew ahead, horn blatting derisively, voices squalling meaningless gibberish. Mitchell swore under his breath.

Scre-e-e-e-each!

The lead car took the turn on two wheels, leaped, bucked, careened wildly and shot up the drive. Mitchell slammed his throttle shut and drifted on down the dark road. A mile from the Country Club he ground the car to a stop, switched off engine and lights and pulled a flask from his pocket.

“Let’s have a drink!” he grunted, proffering the flask.

“I don’t want to stop here,” Doris said. “I want to go to the Club.”

“Don’t you want a drink?” asked Mitchell.

“No. I don’t want a drink, either. I want to go to the Club.”

“Don’t pay any attention to her,” said Maxwell. “If anybody comes along I’ll show ’em the license.”

A month before, just after Maxwell had been suspended from Sewanee, Mitchell had dared Doris and him to get married. Maxwell had borrowed two dollars from the Negro janitor at the Cotton Exchange, where Max “worked” in his father’s office, and they had driven a hundred miles and bought a license. Then Doris changed her mind. Maxwell still carried the license in his pocket, now a little smeary from moisture and friction.

Lucille shrieked with laughter.

“Max, you behave yourself!” squawked Doris. “Take your hands away!”

“Here, give me the license,” said Walter, “I’ll tie it on the radiator. Then they won’t even have to get out of the car to look at it.”

“No you won’t!” Doris cried.

“What you got to say about it?” demanded Walter. “Max was the one that paid two dollars for it — not you.”

“I don’t care! It’s got my name on it!”

“Gimme my two dollars back and you can have it,” said Maxwell.

“I haven’t got two dollars. You take me back to the Club, Walter Mitchell!”

“I’ll give you two bucks for it, Max,” said Walter.

“Okay,” agreed Maxwell, putting his hand to his coat. Doris flung herself at him.

“No you don’t!” she cried. “I’m going to tell daddy on you!”

“What do you care?” protested Walter. “I’m going to scratch out yours and Max’s names and put mine and Lucille’s in. We’re liable to need it!”

“I don’t care! Mine will still be on it and it will be bigamy.”

“You mean incest, honey,” Lucille said.

“I don’t care what I mean. I’m going back to the Club!”

“Are you?” Walter said. “Tell them we’ll be there after while.” He handed Maxwell the flask.

Doris banged the door open and jumped out.

“Hey, wait!” Walter cried. “I didn’t—”

Already they could hear Doris’ spike heels hitting the road hard. Walter turned the car.

“You better get out and walk behind her,” he told Maxwell. “You left home with her. Get her to the Club, anyway. It ain’t far — not even a mile, hardly.”

“Watch where you’re going!” yelped Maxwell. “Here comes a car behind us!”

Walter drew aside and flashed his spot on the other car as it passed.

“It’s Hap White!” shrieked Lucille, craning her neck. “He’s got that Princeton man, Jornstadt, with him — the handsome one all the girls are crazy about. He’s from Minnesota and is visiting his aunt in town.”

The other car ground to a halt beside Doris. The door opened. She got in.

“The little snake!” shrilled Lucille. “I bet she knew Jornstadt was in that car. I bet she made a date with Hap White to pick her up.”

Walter Mitchell chuckled maliciously. “ ‘There goes my girl—’ “ he hummed.

Maxwell swore savagely under his breath.

There were already five in the other car. Doris sat on Jornstadt’s lap. He could feel the warmth and the rounded softness of her legs. He held her steady drawing her back against him. Doris wriggled slightly and his arm tightened.

Jornstadt drew a deep breath freighted with the perfume of the honey-colored hair. His arm tightened still more.

A moment later Mitchell’s car roared past.

Lurking between two parked cars, Walter and Maxwell watched the six from Hap White’s car enter the club house. The group [passed] the girls in a bee-like clot around the tall Princeton man, whose beautifully ridged head towered over them. The blaring music seemed to be a triumphant carpet spread for him, derisive and salutant.

Walter handed his almost empty flask to Maxwell. Max tilted it up.

“I know a good place for that Princeton guy,” he said, wiping his lips.

“Huh?”

“The morgue,” said Max.

“Gonna dance?” asked Walter.

“Hell, no! Let’s go to the cloak room. Oughta be a crap game in there.”

There was. Above the kneeling ring of tense heads and shoulders, they saw the Princeton man, Jornstadt, and Hap White, a fat youth with a cherubic face and a fawning manner. They were drinking, turn about, from a thick tumbler in which a darky poured corn from a Coca-Cola bottle. Hap waved a greeting. “Hi-yi, boy,” he addressed Max. “Little family trouble?”

“Nope,” said Maxwell evenly. “Gimme a drink.”

Max and Walter watched the crap game. Hap and Jornstadt strolled out, the music squalling briefly through the opening and closing door. Around the kneeling ring droned monotonous voices.

“E-eleven! Shoot four bits.”

“You’re faded! Snake eyes! Let the eight bits ride?”

“C’mon, Little Joe!”

“Ninety days in the calaboose! Let it ride!”

The bottle went around. The door began banging open and shut. The cloak room became crowded, murky with cigarette smoke. The music had stopped.

Suddenly pandemonium broke loose: the rising wail of a fire siren, the shrieks of whistles from the cotton gins scattered about the countryside, the crack of pistols and rifles and the duller boom of shotguns. On the veranda girls shrieked and giggled.

“Happy New Year!” said Walter viciously. Max glared at him, shucked off his coat and ripped his collar open.

“Lemme in that game!” he snarled.

A tall man with beautifully ridged hair had just sauntered past the open door. On his arm hung a lithe girl with honey-colored hair.

By three o'clock, Maxwell had won a hundred and forty dollars and broken the game. One by one the gamblers arose, stiffly, like people who have been asleep. The music was still droning along but the cloak room was full of flapping overcoat sleeves. Youths adjusted their ties, smoothed their already patent-leather-smooth hair.

"Is it over?" asked Maxwell.

"Damn near it!" grunted Walter.

Fat Hap White sidled in through the door. Behind him was Jornstadt, his face flushed, hesitant.

"That Princeton guy sure can put away the likker," grunted a voice behind Max. "He's still got a quart flask of prime stuff, too."

Hap White eased up beside Maxwell, speaking in a low voice.

"That license you got, Max," he hesitated.

Maxwell gave him a cold look. "What license?'

Hap dabbed at his forehead with a handkerchief. "You know, that marriage license for you and Doris. We — we want to buy it, since you won't be needing it yourself."

"I ain't selling, and it wouldn't do you any good if you did have it. It's got the names already written in it."

“We can fix that,” wheedled Hap. “It’s easy, Max. Johns — Jornstadt. See? They look alike on paper and there wouldn’t anybody expect a county clerk to be able to write so you could read it. See?”

“Yes, I see,” said Maxwell quietly, very quietly.

“It’s all right with Doris,” urged Hap. “Look, here’s a note she sent.”

Max read the unsigned scrawl in Doris’ childish hand: “You leave me be, you old bigamist!” He scowled blackly.

“What say, Max?” persisted Hap.

Maxwell’s lean jaw set grimly.

“No, I won’t sell it; but I’ll shoot Jornstadt for it — the license against his flask.”

“Aw, come on, Max,” protested Hap, “Jornstadt ain’t no crap shooter. He’s a Northerner. He don’t even know how to handle the dice.”

“Best two out of three, high dice,” said Max. “Take it or leave it.”

Hap pattered over to Jornstadt, muttered a few words. The Princeton man protested, then agreed.

“All right,” said Hap. “Here’s the flask. Put the license beside it on the floor.”

“Where’s the dice?” asked Maxwell. “Who’s got some dice? Peter, gimme that set of yours.”

The darky rolled the whites of his eyes. “My dice — they ain’t — they— ”

“Shut up and give them here!” blazed Maxwell. “We won’t hurt ’em. C’mon!”

Peter fished them from his pocket.

“Here, lemme show you, Jornstadt,” exclaimed Hap White.

Jornstadt handled the dice awkwardly. He fumbled them onto the floor. A five and a four showed.

“Nine!” chortled Hap. “That’s a good roll!”

It was plenty good. The best Max could get was three and four — seven. The first round went to Jornstadt.

Max won the next one, however, nine against five. He clicked the dice together.

“Shall I go on shootin’?” he asked Jornstadt.

The Princeton man looked inquiringly at Hap White.

“Sure, it’s all right,” said Hap. “Let him shoot first.”

Clickety-click! The dice tumbled from Maxwell’s hand, rolled over and over and stopped.

“Whoopeee!” cheered Walter Mitchell under his breath. “Two fives! That’s a winner!”

“Any use for me to shoot?” asked Jornstadt.

“Sure, take your roll,” said Hap gloomily, “but you ain’t got no more chance than a female in a frat house.”

Jornstadt fumbled the dice awkwardly from hand to hand. He tossed them out. A five showed. The other cube spun dizzily on a corner for a spine-crawling moment and settled. Maxwell stared at the six black dots winking at him like spotty-eyed devils.

“Osky-wow-wow!” shrilled Hap White. “A natural!”

Jornstadt picked up the dice and glanced inquiringly about.

“Do I win?” he asked.

“Yes, you win,” replied Maxwell evenly. He began putting on his collar. Jornstadt handed the dice to the pop-eyed Peter. “Thank you,” he said. He sauntered from the room with the gleeful Hap White, stuffing flask and license into his pocket.

The room was very still as Maxwell walked to the mirror and began adjusting his tie. One by one the youths slipped out. Maxwell was left alone. He glared into the mirror.

He heard somebody muttering to himself in the little wash room back of the partition. He recognized Peter’s voice.

“Lawdy! Lawdy!” sounded the darky’s querulous tones. “He jest nacherly couldn’ta made no ‘leben wiff dem bones, kase dey ain’t no sixes on ’em! Dem’s special bones. He jest couldn’t! But he did! I wish I knowed how to shoot crap like he don’t know!”

Maxwell stared into the mirror, his lips slowly whitening. He reached to his hip pocket. The dull blue-black of an automatic pistol winked back at him from the mirror. He hesitated, returned the gun to his pocket.

“I don’t want to get myself hung!” he muttered.

For long minutes he stood staring, the smoothness of his forehead wrinkled with the unaccustomed labor of intense thought. Peter still puttered around in the washroom.

Maxwell strode around the partition. He gripped the darky by the arm.

“Pete, I want you to get me something, and get it darned quick,” he snarled. “Listen—”

“But, Mistuh Max, that stuff’s blue lightnin’!” protested the darky. “That ain’t no drinkin’s for white gemmuns! All right, I’s a-gwin’! I’s a-gwin’!”

He was back in five minutes, with a fruit jar full of something that looked like water. Maxwell took it and shoved it into his coat pocket. A minute later Walter Mitchell came in with Jornstadt and Hap White. They had the flask.

Maxwell pulled out his fruit jar, unscrewed the cap and tilted it up.

“This is a man’s drink,” he said. “It ain’t colored water like that stuff!”

Jornstadt sneered. “I never saw anything I couldn’t drink,” he declared. “Gimme a swig!”

“Better leave it alone,” cautioned Maxwell. “I tell you it’s for men.”

Jornstadt flushed darkly. “Gimme that jar!”

Max handed it to him. Hap White caught a whiff and his mouth gaped open.

“That’s cawn likker!” he squeaked.

“Jornstadt, don’t you—”

Maxwell’s elbow caught him viciously in the throat. Jornstadt, the jar already tilted, did not notice. Hap gagged, gulped and subsided, shivering slightly under Maxwell’s baleful glare. Jornstadt gasped.

“Thought so,” nodded Max. “Can’t take it!”

“Who the hell says I can’t!” snarled Jornstadt, and the jar tilted again.

The orchestra was playing “Goodnight, Sweetheart,” when they left the coat room. Jornstadt’s eyes were slightly glazed and he held onto Hap White’s arm. Maxwell walked behind them, a thin smile on his lips. The smile was still there when he saw Jornstadt wobble to Hap White’s car, his arm around Doris.

“We’re headin’ for Marley,” he heard Hap White say. Lucille, already in the car, giggled.

“Follow them!” Maxwell snarled at Walter Mitchell. Marley was twenty-two miles away. There was a justice of the peace at Marley.

Jornstadt was sagging limply, his head on his breast. His once immaculate shirt bosom had burst open. His collar was up around his ears. Doris and Lucille supported him in the careening car. Doris was whimpering:

“I don’t want to marry anybody. I want to go home. Old drunken bigamist!”

“You’ve got to go through with it now,” said Lucille. “Both your names are on it now. If you don’t it’ll be forgery!”

“It says Maxwell Jornstadt!” wailed Doris. “I’ll be married to both of them! It’ll be bigamy!”

“Bigamy isn’t as bad as forgery. We’ll all be in trouble!”

“I don’t wanna!”

The car slammed to a stop in front of a boxcar that had apparently got lost from its railroad. There were windows cut in it, and a door over which was a sign reading, “Justice of the Peace.”

“I don’t wanna be married in a boxcar!” whimpered Doris.

“It’s just like a church,” urged Lucille, “only there ain’t no organ. A J. P. isn’t a D. D., so he can’t marry you in a church.”

The boxcar door opened and a paunchy, oldish man carrying a flash light looked out. His nightshirt was thrust into his trousers. His braces were dangling.

“Come in! Come in!” he grumbled.

Walter Mitchell’s car slid up. Maxwell got out and strolled to Hap’s car.

Hap was pawing at Jornstadt; trying to rouse him.

“Let him be,” grunted Maxwell. “Get the license and give it to me. I’ll stand up for him.”

“I don’t wanna!” whimpered Doris.

They went into the boxcar. The J. P. stood with a large book in his hand. The light of an oil lamp yellowed their wan faces. The J. P. looked at Doris.

“How old are you, sister?” he asked.

Doris stared woodenly. Lucille spoke up quickly:

“She’s just eighteen.”

“She looks about fourteen and like she ought to be home in bed,” grunted the J. P.

“She’s been sitting up with a sick friend,” said Lucille.

The J. P. looked at the license. Lucille gulped in her throat.

“These names—” he began. Lucille found her voice.

“Doris Houston and Maxwell Johnstadt,” she said.

“Good God, don’t they even know their own names!” exclaimed the J. P. “This one looks like—”

Something suddenly nuzzled into the palm of his hand. Maxwell was standing beside him, very close. The thing that nuzzled the J. P.’s hand was the hundred and forty dollars Max had won in the crap game. The J. P.’s hands closed over the roll of bills like a tomcat’s claw over a mouse. He opened the big book.

“Come on,” Max told Doris three minutes later. “From now on you’re taking orders from me — Mrs. Johns!”

Lucille wailed. Hap White yammered. Jornstadt snored loudly in the tonneau of Hap’s car.

“Oh!” said Doris.

The cold light of a January morning was breaking as they reached the big, garish Houston house. There was already a car standing in front of it.

“That’s Doc Carberry’s Chrysler!” exclaimed Maxwell. “Do you reckon somebody—”

Doris was out and running before the car stopped. “If it is it’s your fault!” she wailed thinly over her shoulder: “Go away from me, you old bigamist.”

Maxwell followed her into the house. He heard Dr. Carberry say:

“He’ll be all right now, Mrs. Houston. I got it out; but it was a narrow escape.”

Doris was screaming at her mother:

“Mamma! I’m married, Mamma! Mamma! I’m married!”

“Married!” shrieked Mrs. Houston. “My God, ain’t we had enough trouble here tonight! Married! Who—”

She caught sight of Maxwell. “You!” she screeched, rushing at him, waving her pudgy hands. The diamonds on her fingers sent dazzling glints of light into his eyes. “You get out of here! Get out, I say! Get out!”

“We’re mar—” began Max. “I tell you—”

Mrs. Houston rushed him into the hall, screeched a final, “Get out!” and dived back into the parlor. The billowing form of the Negro maid suddenly appeared before Max. He gave back a step.

“De front door’s open,” said the Negress pointedly.

“What you talking about?” demanded Max. “I tell you we’re married, all right. We—”

“Ain’t you kicked up enough bobbery ‘round heah for one night?” demanded the Negress. “You get out now. Mebbe you telefoam t’morrow.”

“Telephone!” sputtered Max. “I tell you she’s my—”

“You to blame for it all!” glowered the Negress. “Leavin’ the needle stickin’ in de chair wheah anybody’d knowed de baby would get hold of it!”

She billowed forward. Max suddenly found himself on the front porch.

“Needle — baby—” he gurgled dazedly. “What — what—”

“You no ‘count good-fo’ nothin’! De baby he swallered it!”

The door closed in his face.

He started the car. It moved slowly away. “Telephone, hell,” he said suddenly. “She’s my—”

But he did not say it. An approaching car swung wide of him. He did not see it. He was fumbling in his pocket. At last he drew out a crumpled cigarette. Another car swerved wildly and barely missed Maxwell’s car.

The cruising driver saw only a big car moving with erratic slowness on the wrong side of the street driven by a young man in evening clothes at nine o’clock in the morning.

The End

Afternoon of a Cow, William Faulkner

Afternoon of a Cow

Furioso, 1947

MR. FAULKNER AND I were sitting under the mulberry with the afternoon's first julep while he informed me what to write on the morrow, when Oliver appeared suddenly around the corner of the smokehouse, running and with his eyes looking quite large and white. "Mr. Bill!" he cried. "Day done sot fire to de pasture!"

" — —" cried Mr. Faulkner, with that promptitude which quite often marks his actions, " —— those boys to —— !" springing up and referring to his own son, Malcolm, and to his brother's son, James, and to the cook's son, Rover or Grover. Grover his name is, though both Malcolm and James (they and Grover are of an age and have, indeed, grown up not only contemporaneously but almost inextricably) have insisted upon calling him Rover since they could speak, so that now all the household, including the child's own mother and naturally the child itself, call him Rover too, with the exception of myself, whose practice and belief it has never been to call any creature, man, woman, child or beast, out of its rightful name — just as I permit no one to call me out of mine, though I am aware that behind my back both Malcolm and James (and doubtless Rover or Grover) refer to me as Ernest be Toogood — a crass and low form of so-called wit or humor to which children, these two in particular — are only too prone.

I have attempted on more than one occasion (this was years ago; I have long since ceased) to explain to them that my position in the household is in no sense menial, since I have been writing Mr. Faulkner's novels and short stories for years. But I long ago became convinced (and even

reconciled) that neither of them either knew or cared about the meaning of the term.

I do not think that I anticipate myself in saying that we did not know where the three boys would now be. We would not be expected to know, beyond a general feeling or conviction that they would by now be concealed in the loft of the barn or stable — this from previous experience, though experience had never before included or comprised arson. Nor do I feel that I further violate the formal rules of order, unity and emphasis by saying that we would never for one moment have conceived them to be where later evidence indicated that they now were.

But more on this subject anon: we were not thinking of the boys now; as Mr. Faulkner himself might have observed, someone should have been thinking about them ten or fifteen minutes ago; that now it was too late. No, our concern was to reach the pasture, though not with any hope of saving the hay which had been Mr. Faulkner's pride and even hope — a fine, though small, plantation of this grain or forage fenced lightly away from the pasture proper and the certain inroads of the three stocks whose pleasance the pasture was, which had been intended as an alternative or balancing factor in the winter's victualing of the three beasts.

We had no hope of saving this, since the month was September following a dry summer, and we knew that this as well as the remainder of the pasture would burn with almost the instantaneous celerity of gunpowder or celluloid. That is, I had no hope of it and doubtless Oliver had no hope of it. I do not know what Mr. Faulkner's emotion was, since it appears (or so I have read and heard) a fundamental human trait to decline to recognize misfortune with regard to some object

which man either desires or already possesses and holds dear, until it has run him down and then over like a Juggernaut itself.

I do not know if this emotion would function in the presence of a field of hay, since I have neither owned nor desired to own one. No, it was not the hay which we were concerned about. It was the three animals, the two horses and the cow, in particular the cow, who, less gifted or equipped for speed than the horses, might be overtaken by the flames and perhaps asphyxiated, or at least so badly scorched as to be rendered temporarily unfit for her natural function; and that the two horses might bolt in terror, and to their detriment, into the further fence of barbed wire or might even turn and rush back into the actual flames, as is one of the more intelligent characteristics of this so-called servant and friend of man.

So, led by Mr. Faulkner and not even waiting to go around to the arched passage, we burst through the hedge itself and, led by Mr. Faulkner who moved at a really astonishing pace for a man of what might be called almost violently sedentary habit by nature, we ran across the yard and through Mrs. Faulkner's flower beds and then through her rose garden, although I will say that both Oliver and myself made some effort to avoid the plants; and on across the adjacent vegetable garden, where even Mr. Faulkner could accomplish no harm since at this season of the year it was innocent of edible matter; and on to the panel pasture fence over which Mr. Faulkner hurled himself with that same agility and speed and palpable disregard of limb which was actually amazing — not only because of his natural lethargic humor, which I have already indicated, but because of that shape and figure which ordinarily accompanies it (or at least does so in Mr. Faulkner's case) — and were enveloped immediately in smoke.

But it was at once evident by its odor that this came, not from the hay which must have stood intact even if not green and then vanished in holocaust doubtless during the few seconds while Oliver was crying his news, but, from the cedar grove at the pasture's foot. Nevertheless, odor or not, its pall covered the entire visible scene, although ahead of us we could see the creeping line of conflagration beyond which the three unfortunate beasts now huddled or rushed in terror of their lives.

Or so we thought until, still led by Mr. Faulkner and hastening now across a stygian and desolate floor which almost at once became quite unpleasant to the soles of the feet and promised to become more so, something monstrous and wild of shape rushed out of the smoke. It was the larger horse, Stonewall — a congenitally vicious brute which no one durst approach save Mr. Faulkner and Oliver, and not even Oliver durst mount (though why either Oliver or Mr. Faulkner should want to is forever beyond me) which rushed down upon us with the evident intent of taking advantage of this opportunity to destroy its owner and attendant both, with myself included for lagniappe or perhaps for pure hatred of the entire human race.

It evidently altered its mind, however, swerving and vanishing again into smoke. Mr. Faulkner and Oliver had paused and given it but a glance. "I reckin dey all right," Oliver said. "But where you reckin Beulah at?"

"On the other side of that —— fire, backing up in front of it and bellowing," replied Mr. Faulkner. He was correct, because almost at once we began to hear the poor creature's lugubrious lamenting. I have often remarked now how both Mr. Faulkner and Oliver apparently possess some curious rapport with horned and hooved beasts and even dogs, which I cheerfully admit that I do not possess myself and do not even understand. That is, I cannot understand it in Mr. Faulkner.

With Oliver, of course, cattle of all kinds might be said to be his avocation, and his dallying (that is the exact word; I have watched him more than once, motionless and apparently pensive and really almost pilgrim-like, with the handle of the mower or hoe or rake for support) with lawn mower and gardening tools his sideline or hobby. But Mr. Faulkner, a member in good standing of the ancient and gentle profession of letters! But then neither can I understand why he should wish to ride a horse, and the notion has occurred to me that Mr. Faulkner acquired his rapport gradually and perhaps over a long period of time from contact of his posterior with the animal he bestrode.

We hastened on toward the sound of the doomed creature's bellowing. I thought that it came from the flames perhaps and was the final plaint of her agony — a dumb brute's indictment of heaven itself — but Oliver said not, that it came from beyond the fire. Now there occurred in it a most peculiar alteration. It was not an increase in terror, which scarcely could have been possible. I can describe it best by saying that she now sounded as if she had descended abruptly into the earth.

This we found to be true. I believe however that this time order requires, and the element of suspense and surprise which the Greeks themselves have authorized will permit, that the story progress in the sequence of events as they occurred to the narrator, even though the accomplishment of the actual event recalled to the narrator the fact or circumstance with which he was already familiar and of which the reader should have been previously made acquainted. So I shall proceed.

Imagine us, then, hastening (even if the abysmal terror in the voice of the hapless beast had not been inventive enough, we had another: on

the morrow, when I raised one of the shoes which I had worn on this momentous afternoon, the entire sole crumbled into a substance resembling nothing so much as that which might have been scraped from the ink-wells of childhood's school days at the beginning of the fall term) across that stygian plain, our eyes and lungs smarting with that smoke along whose further edge the border of fire crept. Again a wild and monstrous shape materialized in violent motion before us, again apparently with the avowed and frantic aim of running us down.

For a horrid moment I believed it to be the horse, Stonewall, returned because after passing us for some distance (persons do this; possibly it might likewise occur in an animal, its finer native senses dulled with smoke and terror), remembering having seen myself or recognized me, and had now returned to destroy me alone. I had never liked the horse. It was an emotion even stronger than mere fear; it was that horrified disgust which I imagine one must feel toward a python and doubtless even the horse's subhuman sensibilities had felt and had come to reciprocate. I was mistaken, however.

It was the other horse, the smaller one which Malcolm and James rode, apparently with enjoyment, as though in miniature of the besotted perversion of their father and uncle — an indiscriminate, round-bodied creature, as gentle as the larger one was vicious, with a drooping sad upper lip and an inarticulate and bemused (though to me still sly and untrustworthy) gaze; it, too, swerved past us and also vanished just before we reached the line of flame which was neither as large nor as fearful as it had looked, though the smoke was thicker, and seemed to be filled with the now loud terrified voice of the cow.

In fact, the poor creature's voice seemed now to be everywhere: in the air above us and in the earth beneath. With Mr. Faulkner still in the lead we sprang over it, whereupon Mr. Faulkner immediately vanished.

Still in the act of running, he simply vanished out of the smoke before the eyes of Oliver and myself as though he too had dropped into the earth.

This is what he had also done. With the voice of Mr. Faulkner and the loud terror of the cow coming out of the earth at our feet and the creeping line of the conflagration just behind us, I now realized what had happened and so solved Mr. Faulkner's disappearance as well as the previous alteration in the voice of the cow. I now realized that, confused by the smoke and the incandescent sensation about the soles of the feet, I had become disoriented and had failed to be aware that all the while we had been approaching a gully or ravine of whose presence I was quite aware, having looked down into it more than once while strolling in the afternoons while Mr. Faulkner would be riding the large horse, and upon whose brink or verge Oliver and I now stood and into which Mr. Faulkner and the cow had, in turn and in the reverse order, fallen.

"Are you hurt, Mr. Faulkner?" I cried. I shall not attempt to reproduce Mr. Faulkner's reply, other than to indicate that it was couched in that pure ancient classic Saxon which the best of our literature sanctions and authorizes and which, due to the exigencies of Mr. Faulkner's style and subject matter, I often employ but which I myself never use although Mr. Faulkner even in his private life is quite addicted to it and which, when he employs it, indicates what might be called a state of the most robust, even though not at all calm, wellbeing. So I knew that he was not hurt. "What shall we now do?" I inquired of Oliver.

"We better git down in dat hole too," Oliver replied. "Ain't you feel dat fire right behime us?" I had forgot about the fire in my concern over Mr. Faulkner, but upon glancing behind me I felt instinctively that Oliver was right. So we scrambled or fell down the steep sandy

declivity, to the bottom of the ravine where Mr. Faulkner, still speaking, stood and where the cow was now safely ensconced though still in a state of complete hysteria, from which point or sanctuary we watched the conflagration pass over, the flames crumbling and flickering and dying away along the brink of the ravine. Then Mr. Faulkner spoke:

“Go catch Dan, and bring the big rope from the storehouse.”

“Do you mean me?” said I. Mr. Faulkner did not reply, so he and I stood beside the cow who did not yet seem to realize that the danger was past or perhaps whose more occult brute intellect knew that the actual suffering and outrage and despair had yet to occur — and watched Oliver climb or scramble back up the declivity. He was gone for some time, although after a while he returned, leading the smaller and tractable horse who was adorned with a section of harness, and carrying the rope; whereupon commenced the arduous business of extricating the cow. One end of the rope was attached to her horns, she still objecting violently; the other end was attached to the horse.
“What shall I do?” I inquired.

“Push,” said Mr. Faulkner.

“Where shall I push?” I asked.

“I don’t give a —— ,” said Mr. Faulkner. “Just push.”

But it appeared that it could not be done. The creature resisted, perhaps to the pull of the rope or perhaps to Oliver’s encouraging shouts and cries from the brink overhead or possibly to the motive power supplied by Mr. Faulkner (he was directly behind, almost beneath her, his shoulder against her buttocks or loins and swearing steadily now) and myself. She made a gallant effort, scrambled quite half way up the declivity, lost her footing and slid back. Once more we tried and failed, and then again. And then a most regrettable accident

occurred. This third time the rope either slipped or parted, and Mr. Faulkner and the cow were hurled violently to the foot of the precipice with Mr. Faulkner underneath.

Later — that evening, to be exact — I recalled how, at the moment while we watched Oliver scramble out of the ravine, I seem to have received, as though by telepathy, from the poor creature (a female mind; the lone female among three men) not only her terror but the subject of it: that she knew by woman's sacred instinct that the future held for her that which is to a female far worse than any fear of bodily injury or suffering: one of those invasions of female privacy where, helpless victim of her own physical body, she seems to see herself as object of some malignant power for irony and outrage; and this none the less bitter for the fact that those who are to witness it, gentlemen though they be, will never be able to forget it but will walk the earth with the remembrance of it so long as she lives; — yes, even the more bitter for the fact that they who are to witness it are gentlemen, people of her own class.

Remember how the poor spent terrified creature had for an entire afternoon been the anguished and blind victim of a circumstance which it could not comprehend, had been sported with by an element which it instinctively feared, and had now been hurled recently and violently down a precipice whose crest it doubtless now believed it would never see again. — I have been told by soldiers (I served in France, in the Y.M.C.A.) how, upon entering battle, there often sets up within them, prematurely as it were, a certain impulse or desire which brings on a result quite logical and quite natural, the fulfillment of which is incontestible and of course irrevocable. — In a word, Mr. Faulkner underneath received the full discharge of the poor creature's afternoon of anguish and despair.

It has been my fortune or misfortune to lead what is — or might be — called a quiet, even though not retired, life; and I have even preferred to acquire my experience from reading what had happened to others or what other men believe or think might have logically happened to creatures of their invention or even in inventing what Mr. Faulkner conceives might have happened to certain and sundry creatures who compose his novels and stories.

Nevertheless, I would imagine that a man is never too old nor too secure to suffer what might be called experiences of initial and bizarre originality, though of course not always outrage, following which his reaction would be quite almost invariably out of character. Or rather, following which his reaction would reveal that actual character which for years he may have successfully concealed from the public, his intimates, and his wife and family; perhaps even from himself. I would take it to be one of these which Mr. Faulkner had just suffered.

Anyway, his actions during the subsequent few minutes were most peculiar for him. The cow — poor female alone among three men — struggled up almost at once and stood, hysterically still though no longer violent, trembling rather with a kind of aghast abasement not yet become despair. But for a time Mr. Faulkner, prone on the earth, did not stir at all. Then he rose. He said, “Wait,” which naturally we should do until he gave further orders or instructions.

Then — the poor cow and myself, and Oliver looking down from the crest beside the horse — we watched Mr. Faulkner walk quietly a few paces down the ravine and sit down, his elbows on his knees and his chin supported between his hands. It was not the sitting down which was peculiar. Mr. Faulkner did this often — steadily perhaps is a better word — if not in the house, then (in summer) well down in a large chair on the veranda just outside the library window where I would be

working, his feet on the railing, reading a detective magazine; in winter in the kitchen, his stocking feet inside the oven to the stove. It was the attitude in which he now sat. As I have indicated, there was a quality almost violent about Mr. Faulkner's sedentation; it would be immobile without at all being lethargic, if I may put it so.

He now sat in the attitude of M. Rodin's Penseur increased to his tenth geometric power say, since le penseur's principal bewilderment appears to be at what has bemused him, while Mr. Faulkner can have had no doubt. We watched him quietly — myself, and the poor cow who now stood with her head lowered and not even trembling in utter and now hopeless female shame; Oliver and the horse on the brink above. I remarked then that Oliver no longer had smoke for his background. The immediate conflagration was now over, though the cedar grove would doubtless smoulder until the equinox.

Then Mr. Faulkner rose. He returned quietly and he spoke as quietly (or even more so) to Oliver as I have ever heard him: "Drop the rope, Jack." Oliver removed his end of the rope from the horse and dropped it, and Mr. Faulkner took it up and turned and led the cow down the ravine. For a moment I watched him with an amazement of which Oliver doubtless partook; in the next moment doubtless Oliver and I would have looked at one another in that same astonishment.

But we did not; we moved; doubtless we moved at the same moment. Oliver did not even bother to descend into the ravine. He just went around it while I hastened on and overtook Mr. Faulkner and the cow; indeed, the three of us were actually soldiers recovered from the amnesia of battle, the battle with the flames for the life of the cow. It has been often remarked and even insisted upon in literature (novels have been built upon it, though none of them are Mr. Faulkner's) how, when faced with catastrophe, man does everything but the simple one.

But from the fund of my own experience, though it does consist almost entirely of that afternoon, it is my belief that it is in the face of danger and disaster that he does the simple thing. It is merely simply wrong.

We moved down the ravine to where it turned at right angles and entered the woods which descended to its level. With Mr. Faulkner and the cow in the lead we turned up through the woods and came presently to the black desolation of the pasture in the fence to which Oliver, waiting, had already contrived a gap or orifice through which we passed. Then with Mr. Faulkner again in the lead and with Oliver, leading the horse and the cow, and myself side by side, we retraced across that desolate plain the course of our recent desperate race to offer succor, though bearing somewhat to the left in order to approach the stable — or barnlot.

We had almost reached the late hay plantation when, without warning, we found ourselves faced by three apparitions. They were not ten paces away when we saw them and I believe that neither Mr. Faulkner nor Oliver recognized them at all, though I did. In fact, I had an instantaneous and curious sense, not that I had anticipated this moment so much as that I had been waiting for it over a period which might be computed in years.

Imagine yourself, if you will, set suddenly down in a world in complete ocular or chromatic reversal. Imagine yourself faced with three small ghosts, not of white but of purest and unrelieved black. The mind, the intelligence, simply refuses to believe that they should have taken refuge from their recent crime or misdemeanor in the hay plantation before it took fire, and lived.

Yet there they were. Apparently they had neither brows, lashes nor hair; and clothing epidermis and all, they were of one identical sable, and the only way in which Rover or Grover could be distinguished from the other two was by Malcolm's and James' blue eyes. They stood looking at us in complete immobility until Mr. Faulkner said, again with that chastened gentleness and quietude which, granted my theory that the soul, plunged without warning into some unforeseen and outrageous catastrophe, comes out in its true colors, has been Mr. Faulkner's true and hidden character all these years: "Go to the house."

They turned and vanished immediately, since it had been only by the eyeballs that we had distinguished them from the stygian surface of the earth at all. They may have preceded us or we may have passed them. I do not know. At least, we did not see them again, because presently we quitted the sable plain which had witnessed our Gethsemane, and presently entered the barnlot where Mr. Faulkner turned and took the halter of the horse while Oliver led the cow into its private and detached domicile, from which there came presently the sound of chewing as, freed now of anguish and shame she ruminated, maiden meditant and — I hope — once more fancy free.

Mr. Faulkner stood in the door of the stable (within which, by and by, I could hear the larger and vicious horse, Stonewall, already at his food, stamp now and then or strike the board wall with his hoof as though even in the act of eating it could not forbear making sounds of threat and derision toward the very man whose food nourished it) and removed his clothing. Then, in full sight of the house and of whoever might care or not care to see, he lathered himself with saddle soap and then stood at the watering trough while Oliver doused or flushed him down with pail after pail of water. "Never mind the clothes just now," he said to Oliver. "Get me a drink."

“Make it two,” said I; I felt that the occasion justified, even though it may not have warranted, that temporary aberration into the vernacular of the fleeting moment. So presently, Mr. Faulkner now wearing a light summer horse blanket belonging to Stonewall, we sat again beneath the mulberry with the second julep of the afternoon.

“Well, Mr. Faulkner,” said I after a time, “shall we continue?”

“Continue what?” said Mr. Faulkner.

“Your suggestions for tomorrow,” said I. Mr. Faulkner said nothing at all. He just drank, with that static violence which was his familiar character, and so I knew that he was himself once more and that the real Mr. Faulkner which had appeared momentarily to Oliver and myself in the pasture had already retreated to that inaccessible bourne from which only the cow, Beulah, had ever evoked it, and that doubtless we would never see it again. So after a time I said, “Then, with your permission, tomorrow I shall venture into fact and employ the material which we ourselves have this afternoon created.”

“Do so,” Mr. Faulkner said — shortly, I thought.

“Only,” I continued, “I shall insist upon my prerogative and right to tell this one in my own diction and style, and not yours.”

“By —— !” said Mr. Faulkner. “You better had.”

The End

Sepulture South Gaslight, William Faulkner

Sepulture South: Gaslight

Harper's Bazaar, December 1954

WHEN GRANDFATHER DIED, Father spoke what was probably his first reaction because what he said was involuntary because if he had taken time to think, he would not have said it: "Damn it, now we'll lose Liddy."

Liddy was the cook. She was one of the best cooks we had ever had and she had been with us ever since Grandmother died seven years ago when the cook before her had left; and now with another death in the family, she would move too, regretfully, because she liked us also. But that was the way Negroes did: left after a death in the family they worked for, as though obeying not a superstition but a rite: the rite of their freedom: not freedom from having to work, that would not occur to anyone for several years yet, not until W.P.A., but the freedom to move from one job to another, using a death in the family as the moment, the instigation, to move, since only death was important enough to exercise a right as important as freedom.

But she would not go yet; hers and Arthur's (her husband's) departure would be done with a dignity commensurate with the dignity of Grandfather's age and position in our family and our town, and the commensurate dignity of his sepulture. Not to mention the fact that Arthur himself was now serving his apogee as a member of our household, as if the seven years he had worked for us had merely been the waiting for this moment, this hour, this day: sitting (not standing

now: sitting) freshly shaved and with his hair trimmed this morning, in a clean white shirt and a necktie of Father's and wearing his coat, in a chair in the back room of the jewelry store while Mr. Wedlow the jeweler inscribed on the sheet of parchment in his beautiful flowing Spencerian hand the formal notice of Grandfather's death and the hour of his funeral, which, attached to the silver salver with knots of black ribbon and sprays of imitation immortelles, Arthur would bear from door to door (not back or kitchen doors but the front ones) through our town, to ring the bell and pass the salver in to whoever answered it, not as a servant bringing a formal notification now but as a member of our family performing a formal rite, since by this time the whole town knew that Grandfather was dead. So this was a rite, Arthur himself dominating the moment, dominating the entire morning in fact, because now he was not only no servant of ours, he was not even an envoy from us but rather a messenger from Death itself, saying to our town: "Pause, mortal; remember Me."

Then Arthur would be busy for the rest of the day, too, now in the coachman's coat and beaver hat which he had inherited from the husband of Liddy's precessor who had inherited it in his turn from the husband of her precessor's precessor, meeting with the surrey the trains on which our kin and connections would begin to arrive. And now the town would commence the brief, ritual formal calls, almost wordless and those in murmurs, whispers.

Because ritual said that Mother and Father must bear this first shock of bereavement in privacy, supporting and comforting one another. So the next of kin must receive the callers: Mother's sister and her husband from Memphis because Aunt Alice, Father's brother Charles's wife, would have to be comforting and supporting Uncle Charley — as long as they could keep her upstairs, that is. And all this time the neighbor ladies would be coming to the kitchen door (not the front one now: the kitchen and back ones) without knocking, with their cooks or yardboys

carrying the dishes and trays of food they had prepared to feed us and our influx of kin, and for a midnight supper for the men, Father's friends that he hunted and played poker with, who would sit up all night with Grandfather's coffin when the undertaker brought it and put him into it.

And all tomorrow too, while the wreaths and flowers arrived; and now all who wanted to could go into the parlor and look at Grandfather framed in white satin in his gray uniform with the three stars on the collar, freshly shaven too and with just a touch of rouge on his cheeks. And tomorrow too, until after our dinner, when Liddy said to Maggie and the other children: "Now you chillen go down to the pasture and play until I calls you. And you mind Maggie now." Because it was not to me.

I was not only the oldest but a boy, the third generation of oldest son from Grandfather's father; when Father's turn came it would be me to say before I would have time to think: Damn it, now we'll lose Julia or Florence or whatever her name would be by that time. I must be there too, in my Sunday clothes, with a band of crape on my arm, all of us except Mother and Father and Uncle Charley (Aunt Alice was though, because people excused her because she was always a good one to run things when she got a chance: and Uncle Rodney too although he was Father's youngest brother too) in the back room which Grandfather called his office, to which the whisky decanter had been moved from the dining-room sideboard in deference to the funeral; yes, Uncle Rodney too, who had no wife — the dashing bachelor who wore silk shirts and used scented shaving lotion, who had been Grandmother's favorite and that of a lot of other women too — the traveling salesman for the St. Louis wholesale house who brought into our town on his brief visits a breath, an odor, a glare almost of the metropolitan outland which was not for us: the teeming cities of hotel bellhops and girl shows and oyster-bars, my first recollection of whom was standing at

the sideboard with the whisky decanter in his hand and who had it in his hand now except that Aunt Alice's hand was on it too and we could all hear her furious whisper:

"You cannot, you shall not let them smell you like this!"

Then Uncle Rodney's: "All right, all right. Get me a handful of cloves from the kitchen." So that too, the odor of cloves inextricable from that of whisky and shaving lotion and cut flowers, was a part of Grandfather's passing for the last time from his house, we waiting still in the office while the ladies entered the parlor where the casket was, the men stopping outside on the lawn, decorous and quiet, still wearing their hats until the music started, when they would remove them and stand again, their bare heads bowed a little in the bright early afternoon sunshine.

Then Mother was in the hall, in black and heavily veiled, and Father and Uncle Charley in black; and now we crossed into the dining room where chairs had been arranged for us, the folding doors open into the parlor, so that we, the family, were at the funeral but not yet of it, as though Grandfather in his casket now had to be two: one for his blood descendants and connections, one for those who were merely his friends and fellow townsmen.

Then that song, that hymn which meant nothing to me now: no lugubrious dirge to death, no reminder that Grandfather was gone and I would never see him again. Because never again could it match what it had once meant to me — terror, not of death but of the un-dead.

I was just four then; Maggie, next to me, could barely walk, the two of us in a clump of older children half concealed in the shrubbery in the corner of the yard. I at least did not know why, until it passed — the

first I had ever watched — the black plumed hearse, the black closed hacks and surreys, at the slow significant pace up the street which was suddenly completely deserted, as it seemed to me that I knew suddenly the entire town would be.

"What?" I said. "A deader? What's a deader?" And they told me. I had seen dead things before — birds, toads, the puppies the one before Simon (his wife was Sarah) had drowned in a crokersack in the water-trough because he said that Father's fine setter had got mixed up with the wrong dog, and I had watched him and Sarah both beat to bloody shapeless strings the snakes which I now know were harmless. But that this, this ignominy, should happen to people too, it seemed to me that God Himself would not permit, condone.

So they in the hearse could not be dead: it must be something like sleep: a trick played on people by those same inimical forces and powers for evil which made Sarah and her husband have to beat the harmless snakes to bloody and shapeless pulp or drown the puppies — tricked into that helpless coma for some dreadful and inscrutable joke until the dirt was packed down, to strain and thrash and cry in the airless dark, to no escape forever. So that night I had something very like hysterics, clinging to Sarah's legs and panting: "I won't die! I won't! Never!"

But that was past now. I was fourteen now and that song was woman's work, as was the preacher's peroration which followed it, until the men entered — the eight pallbearers who were Father's hunting and poker and business friends, and the three honorary ones who were too old now to bear a burden: the three old men in gray too, but of privates (two of them had been in the old regiment that day when, a part of Bee, it had fallen back before McDowell until it rallied on Jackson in front of the Henry House).

So they bore Grandfather out, the ladies pressing back a little to make room for us, not looking at us, the men outside in the sunny yard not looking at the passing casket or us either, bareheaded, bowed a little or even turned slightly away as though musing, inattentive; there came one muffled startling half-hollow sound as the bearers, amateurs too, finally got the casket into the hearse, then rapidly with a kind of decorous celerity, passed back and forth between the hearse and the parlor until all the flowers were in too: then moving briskly indeed now, almost hurrying, as though already disassociated, not only from the funeral but even from death too, around the corner where the carryall waited to take them by back streets to the cemetery so they would be there waiting when we arrived: so that any Southern stranger in our town, seeing that vehicle filled with black-clad, freshly shaved men going at a rapid trot up a back street at three o'clock on Wednesday afternoon, would not need to ask what had happened.

Yes, processional: the hearse, then our surrey with Mother and Father and me, then the brothers and sisters and their wives and husbands, then the cousins in one and two and three degrees, diminishing in nearness to the hearse as their connection with Grandfather diminished, up the deserted street, across the Square as empty now as Sunday, so that my insides swelled with snobbery and pride to think that Grandfather had been this important in the town. Then along the empty street which led to the cemetery, in almost every yard of which the children stood along the fence watching with that same terror and excitement which I remembered, remembering the terror and regret with which I had once wished that we lived on Cemetery Street too so that I could watch them all pass.

And now we could already see them, gigantic and white, taller on their marble pedestals than the rose-and-honeysuckle-choked fence,

looming into the very trees themselves, the magnolias and cedars and elms, gazing forever eastward with their empty marble eyes — not symbols: not angels of mercy or winged seraphim or lambs or shepherds, but effigies of the actual people themselves as they had been in life, in marble now, durable, impervious, heroic in size, towering above their dust in the implacable tradition of our strong, uncompromising, grimly ebullient Baptist-Methodist Protestantism, carved in Italian stone by expensive Italian craftsmen and shipped the long costly way by sea back to become one more among the invincible sentinels guarding the temple of our Southern mores, extending from banker and merchant and planter down to the last tenant farmer who owned neither the plow he guided nor the mule which drew it, which decreed, demanded that, no matter how Spartan the life, in death the significance of dollars and cents was abolished: that Grandmother might have split stovewood right up to the day she died, yet she must enter the earth in satin and mahogany and silver handles even though the first two were synthetic and the third was german — a ceremony not at all to death nor even to the moment of death, but to decorum: the victim of accident or even murder represented in effigy not at the instant of his passing but at the peak of his sublimation, as though in death at last he denied forever the griefs and follies of human affairs.

Grandmother too; the hearse stopped at last beside the raw yawn of the waiting pit, the preacher and the three old men in gray (with the dangling meaningless bronze medals which didn't signify valor but only reunions, since in that war all the men on both sides had been brave and so the only accolades for individual distinction were the lead ones out of the muskets of firing squads) waiting beside it, now carrying shotguns, while the pallbearers removed the flowers and then the casket from the hearse; Grandmother too in her bustle and puffed sleeves and the face which we remembered save for the empty eyes, musing at nothing while the casket sank and the preacher found a place to stop at last and the first clod made that profound quiet half-hollow

sound on the invisible wood and the three old men fired their ragged volley and raised their quavering and ragged yell.

Grandmother too. I could remember that day six years ago, the family gathered, Father and Mother and Maggie and I in the surrey because Grandfather rode his horse — the cemetery, our lot.

Grandmother's effigy pristine and dazzling now out of its packing case, tall on the dazzling pedestal above the grave itself, the undertaker, hat in hand, and the Negro workmen who had sweated it erect, withdrawn to one side for us, the family, to look at it and approve.

And in another year, after the tedious carving in Italy and the long Atlantic ship, Grandfather too on his pedestal beside her, not as the soldier which he had been and as I wanted him, but — in the old hard unalterable tradition of apotheosis' apogee — the lawyer, parliamentarian, the orator which he was not: in frock coat, the bare head thrown back, the carven tome carved open in one carven hand and the other extended in the immemorial gesture of declamation, this time Mother and Maggie and I in the surrey because Father was now on the horse, come for the formal private inspection and approval.

And three or four times a year I would come back, I would not know why, alone to look at them, not just at Grandfather and Grandmother but at all of them looming among the lush green of summer and the regal blaze of fall and the rain and ruin of winter before spring would bloom again, stained now, a little darkened by time and weather and endurance but still serene, impervious, remote, gazing at nothing, not like sentinels, not defending the living from the dead by means of their vast ton-measured weight and mass, but rather the dead from the living; shielding instead the vacant and dissolving bones, the harmless

and defenseless dust, from the anguish and grief and inhumanity of mankind.

The End

Mr. Acarius, William Faulkner

Mr. Acarius

The Saturday Evening Post, October 1965

MR. ACARIUS WAITED until toward the end of the afternoon, though he and his doctor had been classmates and fraternity brothers and still saw each other several times a week in the homes of the same friends and in the bars and lounges and grills of the same clubs, and he knew that he would have been sent straight in, no matter when he called. He was, almost immediately, to stand in his excellent sober Madison Avenue suit above the desk behind which his friend sat buried to the elbows in the paper end of the day, a reflector cocked rakishly above one ear and the other implements of his calling serpentined about the white regalia of his priesthood.

“I want to get drunk,” Mr. Acarius said.

“All right,” the doctor said, scribbling busily now at the foot of what was obviously a patient’s chart. “Give me ten minutes. Or why don’t you go on to the club and I’ll join you there.”

But Mr. Acarius didn’t move. He said, “Ab. Look at me,” in such a tone that the doctor thrust his whole body up and away from the desk in order to look up at Mr. Acarius standing over him.

“Say that again,” the doctor said. Mr. Acarius did so. “I mean in English,” the doctor said.

“I was fifty years old yesterday,” Mr. Acarius said. “I have just exactly what money I shall need to supply my wants and pleasures until the bomb falls. Except that when that occurs — I mean the bomb, of course — nothing will have happened to me in all my life. If there is any rubble left, it will be only the carcass of my Capehart and the frames of my Picassos.

Because there will never have been anything of me to have left any smudge or stain. Until now, that has contented me. Or rather, I have been resigned to accept it. But not any more. Before I have quitted this scene, vanished from the recollection of a few headwaiters and the membership lists of a few clubs—”

“Along with the headwaiters and the clubs,” the doctor said. “Predicating the bomb, of course.”

“Be quiet and listen,” Mr. Acarius said. “Before that shall have happened, I want to experience man, the human race.”

“Find yourself a mistress,” the doctor said.

“I tried that. Maybe what I want is debasement too.”

“Then in God’s name get married,” the doctor said. “What better way than that to run the whole gamut from garret to cellar and back again, not just once, but over again every day — or so they tell me.”

“Yes,” Mr. Acarius said. “So they tell you. I notice how the bachelor always says Try marriage, as he might advise you to try hashish. It’s the husband who always says Get married; videlicet: We need you.”

“Then get drunk,” the doctor said. “And may your shadow never grow less. And now I hope we have come at last to the nut. Just what do you want of me?”

“I want—” Mr. Acarius said. “I don’t just want—”

“You don’t just want to get tight, like back in school: Wake up tomorrow with nothing but a hangover, take two aspirins and a glass of tomato juice and drink all the black coffee you can hold, then at five P.M. a hair of the dog and now the whole business is over and forgotten until next time. You want to lie in a gutter in skid row without having to go down to skid row to do it.

You no more intend going down to skid row than you intend having skid row coming up the elevator to the twenty-second floor of the Barkman Tower. You would join skid row in its debasement, only you prefer to do yours on good Scotch whiskey. So there’s not just an esprit de sty; there’s a snobbery de sty too.”

“All right,” said Mr. Acarius.

“All right?”

“Yes then,” Mr. Acarius said.

“Then this is where we came in,” the doctor said. “Just what do you want of me?”

“I’m trying to tell you,” Mr. Acarius said. “I’m not just no better than the people on skid row. I’m not even as good, for the reason that I’m richer. Because I’m richer, I not only don’t have anything to escape from, driving me to try to escape from it, but as another cypher in the abacus of mankind, I am not even high enough in value to alter any equation by being subtracted from it. But at least I can go along for the ride, like the flyspeck on the handle of the computer, even if it can’t change the addition. At least I can experience, participate in, the physical degradation of escaping—”

“A sty in a penthouse,” the doctor said.

“ — the surrender, the relinquishment to and into the opium of escaping, knowing in advance the inevitable tomorrow’s inevitable physical agony; to have lost nothing of anguish but instead only to have gained it; to have merely compounded yesterday’s spirit’s and soul’s laceration with tomorrow’s hangover—”

“ — with a butler to pour your drink when you reach that stage and to pour you into the bed when you reach that stage, and to bring you the aspirin and the bromide after the three days or the four or whenever it will be that you will allow yourself to hold them absolved who set you in the world,” the doctor said.

“I didn’t think you understood,” Mr. Acarius said, “even if you were right about the good Scotch where his on skid row is canned heat. The butler and the penthouse will only do to start with, to do the getting

drunk in. But after that, no more. Even if Scotch is the only debasement of which my soul is capable, the anguish of my recovery from it will be at least a Scotch approximation of his who had nothing but canned heat with which to face the intolerable burden of his soul."

"What in the world are you talking about?" the doctor said. "Do you mean that you intend to drink yourself into Bellevue?"

"Not Bellevue," Mr. Acarius said. "Didn't we both agree that I am incapable of skid row? No, no: One of those private places, such as the man from skid row will never and can never see, whose at best is a grating or a vacant doorway, and at worst a police van and the — what do they call it? — bullpen. A Scotch bullpen of course, since that's all I am capable of. But it will have mankind in it, and I shall have entered mankind."

"Say that again," the doctor said. "Try that in English too."

"That's all," Mr. Acarius said. "Mankind. People. Man. I shall be one with man, victim of his own base appetites and now struggling to extricate himself from that debasement. Maybe it's even my fault that I'm incapable of anything but Scotch, and so our bullpen will be a Scotch one where for a little expense we can have peace, quiet for the lacerated and screaming nerves, sympathy, understanding—"

"What?" the doctor said.

" — and maybe what my fellow inmates are trying to escape from — the too many mistresses or wives or the too much money or responsibility or whatever else it is that drives into escape the sort of people who can afford to pay fifty dollars a day for the privilege of

escaping — will not bear mention in the same breath with that which drives one who can afford no better, even to canned heat.

But at least we will be together in having failed to escape and in knowing that in the last analysis there is no escape, that you can never escape and, whether you will or not, you must reenter the world and bear yourself in it and its lacerations and all its anguish of breathing, to support and comfort one another in that knowledge and that attempt."

"What?" the doctor said. "What's that?"

"I beg pardon?" said Mr. Acarius.

"Do you really believe that that's what you are going to find in this place?"

"Why not?"

"Then I beg yours," the doctor said. "Go on."

"That's all," Mr. Acarius said. "That's what I want of you. You must know any number of these places. The best—"

"The best," the doctor said. "Of course." He reached for the telephone. "Yes, I know it."

"Shouldn't I see it first?"

"What for? They're all alike. You'll have seen plenty of this one before you're out again."

"I thought you said that this one would be the best," Mr. Acarius said.

"Right," the doctor said, removing his hand from the telephone. It did not take them long: an address in an expensive section facing the Park,

itself outwardly resembling just another expensive apartment house not too different from that one in (or on) which Mr. Acarius himself lived, the difference only beginning inside and even there not too great: A switchboard in a small foyer enclosed by the glass-panel walls of what were obviously offices.

Apparently the doctor read Mr. Acarius's expression. "Oh, the drunks," the doctor said. "They're all upstairs. Unless they can walk, they bring them in the back way. And even when they can walk in, they don't see this very long nor but twice. Well?" Then the doctor read that one too. "All right. We'll see Hill too. After all, if you're going to surrender your amateur's virginity in debauchery, you are certainly entitled to examine at least the physiognomy of the supervisor of the rite."

Doctor Hill was no older than Mr. Acarius's own doctor; apparently there was between them the aura or memory of more than one Atlantic City and Palm Beach and Beverly Hills convention. "Look here, Ab," Doctor Hill said. "Haven't you boys come to the wrong place?"

"Does Doctor Hill think I shouldn't take up room better used or at least needed by someone else?" Mr. Acarius said.

"No, no," Doctor Hill said. "There's always room for one more in dipsomania."

"Like in adultery," Mr. Acarius's doctor said.

"We don't cure that here," Doctor Hill said.

"Do they anywhere?" Mr. Acarius's doctor said.

"Can't say," Doctor Hill said. "When do you want to start?"

“What about now?” said Mr. Acarius.

“You just get sober here, not drunk too,” Doctor Hill said. “You’ll have to do that much of it outside, otherwise the antitrust or the free-trade laws might get us.”

“Give us four days,” Mr. Acarius’s doctor said. “We can certainly come in under the wire in that time.”

So four days were set; Mr. Acarius let himself go into alcohol completely again for the first time since his college days. That is, he tried to, because at first it seemed to him that he was making no progress at all and in the end would let down not only his own doctor but Doctor Hill too.

But by the end of the third day, reason told him he had better not try to leave his penthouse; and by the afternoon of the fourth one, when his doctor called for him, his legs themselves assured him that he could not without assistance, so that his doctor looked at him with a sort of admiration almost. “By gravy, you’re even up to an ambulance. What do you say? Go in toes-up like you had come in a patrol wagon right out from under Brooklyn Bridge?”

“No,” Mr. Acarius said. “Just hurry.”

“What?” the doctor said. “It can’t be that your mind is changing.”

“No,” Mr. Acarius said. “This is what I wanted.”

“The brotherhood of suffering,” the doctor said. “All of you together there, to support and comfort one another in the knowledge of the world’s anguish, and that you must be a man and not run from it? How did it go? Peace and quiet for the lacerated and screaming nerves, sympathy, understanding—”

“All right,” Mr. Acarius said. “Just hurry. I’m going to be sick.”

So they did: between his own houseman and an elevator man who remembered him well and tenderly from many Christmases, down the elevator and across the foyer and into the doctor’s car; then into the other small foyer again, where Mr. Acarius knew that at any moment now he was going to be sick, looking out of a sort of tilting chasm of foul bile-tasting misery at what was holding them up: some commotion or excitement at the elevator which a flashy, slightly brassy woman in an expensive fur coat, like a fading show girl, was being forcibly restrained from entering. If somebody doesn’t do something pretty quick, Mr. Acarius thought, it won’t matter anymore. Which apparently someone did, his own doctor perhaps, though Mr. Acarius was too miserable to tell, only that he was in the elevator at last, the door sliding to across the heavily rouged shape of the woman’s scream. “Peace and quiet,” his doctor said.

“All right,” Mr. Acarius said again. “Just hurry.”

But they made it: in the privacy of his room at last and the nurse (he did not remark when or where she came from either) even got the basin in position in time. Then he lay exhausted on his bed while the deft hands which he had anticipated divested him of his clothing and slipped his pajamas over his legs and arms, not his doctor’s hands, nor — opening his eyes — even the nurse’s.

It was a man, with a worn almost handsome actor’s face, in pajamas and dressing gown, whom Mr. Acarius knew at once, with a sort of peaceful vindication, to be another patient. He had been right, it was not even as he had merely hoped but as he had expected, lying there, empty and exhausted and even at peace at last while he watched the

stranger take up his coat and trousers and move rapidly into the bathroom with them and reappear empty-handed, stooping now over Mr. Acarius's suitcase when the nurse entered with a small glass of something and a tumbler of water on a tray.

"What is it?" Mr. Acarius said.

"For your nerves," the nurse said.

"I don't want it now," Mr. Acarius said. "I want to suffer a little more yet."

"You want to what?" the nurse said.

"The man's suffering," the stranger said. "Go on, Goldie. Bring him a drink. You've got to have something to put down on his chart."

"Says you," the nurse said.

"You've got to watch Goldie," the stranger said to Mr. Acarius. "She's from Alabama."

"What time everybody's not watching you," the nurse said to the stranger. She glanced rapidly, apparently at Mr. Acarius's discarded clothing, because she said sharply, "Where's his suit?"

"I've already put it in," the stranger said, tossing Mr. Acarius's shoes and underwear and shirt into the suitcase and closing it rapidly. Then he crossed to a narrow locker in the corner and stowed the suitcase in it and closed the door, which now revealed itself to be armed with a small padlock. "You want to lock it yourself, or will you trust me?" the stranger said to the nurse.

"Hold it," the nurse said grimly. She set the tray on the table and entered the bathroom and then reappeared. "All right," she said. "Lock

it.” The stranger did so. The nurse approached and tested the lock and then took up the tray again. “When you want this, ring,” she told Mr. Acarius. At the door she paused again, speaking this time to the stranger. “Get out of here now,” she said. “Let him rest.”

“Right,” the stranger said. The nurse went out. The stranger watched the door for perhaps half a minute. Then he came back to the bed. “It’s behind the tub,” he said.

“What?” Mr. Acarius said.

“That’s right,” the stranger said. “You’ve got to watch even the good ones like Goldie. Just wait till you see the one that’s coming at midnight. Boy. But we’ll be all right now.” He looked down at Mr. Acarius, speaking rapidly now. “My name’s Miller. You’re a patient of Doctor Cochrane’s, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” Mr. Acarius said.

“That’ll do it; Cochrane’s got such a good reputation around here that any patient of his gets the benefit of the doubt. Judy’s down stairs — Watkins’s girl friend. She’s already tried once to get up here. But Watkins himself hasn’t a chance; Goldie’s got him sewed up in his room and is watching him like a hawk. But you can do it.”

“Do what?” Mr. Acarius said.

“Call down and say Judy is your guest, and to send her up,” Miller said, handing Mr. Acarius the telephone. “Her name’s Lester.”

“What?” Mr. Acarius said. “What?”

“OK. I’ll do it for you. What’s your name? I didn’t catch it.”

“Acarius,” Mr. Acarius said.

“Acarius,” Miller said. He said into the telephone: “Hello. This is Mr. Acarius in twenty-seven. Send Miss Lester up, will you? Thanks.” He put the receiver back and picked up Mr. Acarius’s dressing gown. “Now put this on and be ready to meet her. We’ll take care of the rest of it. We’ll have to work fast because Goldie’s going to catch on as soon as she hears the elevator.”

It did go fast. Mr. Acarius in his dressing gown was barely on his feet and Miller was scarcely out of the room, when he heard the elevator stop, followed by a hard rapid clatter of female heels in the corridor. Then the next moment his room seemed to be full of people: the brassy, slightly buxom slightly faded girl whom he had left screaming in the foyer, running in and flinging herself upon him shrieking, “Darling! Darling!” with Miller and another man in pajamas and robe on her heels — an older man of at least sixty, with no actor’s face this time because Shriner’s conventions and nightclubs and the first-night lobbies of musical comedies were full of it — and last of all, the nurse and the elevator attendant, Mr. Acarius watching in horror the brassy girl now hissing viciously: “Hurry, you bastards, hurry!” holding the fur coat open while Miller and the other man tore savagely at the front of her dress until it fell open and revealed a half-pint bottle tucked into each lobe of her brassiere.

Then the room was empty again, as suddenly and violently as it had filled, though not for long; indeed, to Mr. Acarius it seemed almost simultaneous, superposed: The uproar still fading up the corridor, the older patient’s voice still raised in adjuration at the nurse or whoever it was who had finally got the two bottles, when the heels clattered again, the brassy girl entering this time at a dead run, snatching the front of her dress and slip into a wad at her middle and revealing a third

bottle, a full pint this time, taped high between her running legs, running to Mr. Acarius and crying down at him: “Grab it! Grab it!” then, while Mr. Acarius, incapable of moving, merely stared, ripping the bottle free herself and thrusting it into the chair behind him and turning already smoothing her skirt over her hips as the nurse entered, saying to the nurse haughtily, in a voice of a princess or a queen: “Have the goodness not to touch me again.”

And he still crouched there, weak and trembling, while the uproar really did die away; he was still there perhaps ten minutes later when Miller, followed by the older man, entered. “Good work,” Miller said. “Where is it?” Mr. Acarius made a weak gesture. Miller reached behind him and extracted a pint of whiskey.

“Did you ever see a dream … walking,” the older man said.

“Oh yes,” Miller said. “This is Watkins.”

“Did you ever hear a dream … talking,” Watkins said. “The best place to hide it is here.”

“Right.” Miller said. “The geranium too.”

“Go and get it,” Watkins said. Miller went out. Watkins carried the pint bottle to Mr. Acarius’s bed and thrust it beneath the covers at the foot. “And the dream that is walking and talking,” Watkins said. “This your first visit here?”

“Yes,” Mr. Acarius whispered.

“You’ll get used to it,” Watkins said, “… is you,” he said. Miller returned, carrying a potted geranium under his dressing gown, and a folded

newspaper which he spread on the floor and then dumped the plant and its nurturing earth from the pot onto the paper, revealing another pint bottle.

“That puts us in pretty good shape,” Miller said. “We may not have to use your suit, after all.”

“My suit?” Mr. Acarius whispered.

“The fire escape goes down just outside my window,” Miller said, folding the refuse of the geranium into the paper. “Last week Watkins got hold of the key long enough to unlock the window. I’ve still got my shoes and shirt, but we didn’t have any pants. But we’re fixed now. In an emergency, one of us can climb down the fire escape and go down to the corner and get a bottle. But we won’t need to now. We won’t even need to risk changing the charts tonight,” he said to Watkins.

“Maybe not,” Watkins said, brushing the earth from the bottle, “Get a glass from the bathroom.”

“Maybe we ought to put this back into the pot,” Miller said, raising the folded paper.

“Put it all in the wastebasket,” Watkins said. Miller dumped the paper containing the ruined geranium into Mr. Acarius’s wastebasket and dropped the empty pot on top of it and went into the bathroom and returned with an empty tumbler. Watkins had already opened the bottle. He poured a drink into the tumbler and drank it. “Give him one too,” he said. “He deserves it.”

“No,” Mr. Acarius whispered.

“Better have one,” Miller said. “You don’t look too good.”

“No,” Mr. Acarius whispered.

“You want me to send Goldie back with that bromide she tried to give you?”

“No,” Mr. Acarius whispered.

“Let the man alone,” Watkins said. “This is still America, even in here. He don’t have to drink if he don’t want to. Hide this one good too.”

“Right,” Miller said.

“Did you ever see a dream … walking,” Watkins said.

And still Mr. Acarius crouched. After a while an orderly brought him a tray of supper; he sat looking at the food quietly, as though it contained poison. The nurse entered, again with the tray. This time it bore, in addition to the water, a small glass of whiskey.

“You’ve got to eat,” she said. “Maybe this will give you an appetite.”

“No,” Mr. Acarius whispered.

“Come on now,” the nurse said. “You must try to cooperate.”

“I can’t,” Mr. Acarius whispered.

“OK,” the nurse said. “But you must eat some of it, or I’ll have to tell Doctor Hill on you.”

So he tried, chewing down a little of the food anyway; presently the orderly came and removed the tray; immediately after that Miller

entered rapidly and removed one of the bottles, the one Watkins had opened, from Mr. Acarius's bed. "We appreciate this," Miller said. "Sure you won't have one?"

"No," Mr. Acarius whispered. Then he could crouch again, hearing the slow accumulation of the cloistral evening. He could see the corridor beyond his door. Occasionally other men in pajamas and dressing gowns passed; they seemed to be congregating toward another lighted door up the corridor; even as he knotted the cord of his robe he could hear the unmistakable voice: "Did you ever see a dream … walking," then, creeping nearer, he could see inside the office or dispensary or whatever it was — a cabinet, open, the keys dangling on a ring from the lock, the nurse measuring whiskey from a brown unlabeled bottle in turn into the small glasses in the hands of the assembled devotees. "Did you ever hear a dream … talking," Watkins said.

"That's right," Miller said to him in a friendly voice. "Better take it while you can. It's going to be a long dry spell after Goldie goes off at midnight."

But that was not what Mr. Acarius wanted; alone with the nurse at last, he said so. "It's a little early to go to bed yet, isn't it?" the nurse said.

"I've got to sleep," Mr. Acarius said. "I've got to."

"All right," the nurse said. "Go get in bed and I'll bring it to you."

He did so, swallowed the capsule and then lay, the hidden bottle cold against his feet, though it would warm in time or perhaps in time, soon even, he would not care, though he didn't see how, how ever to sleep again; he didn't know how late it was, though that would not matter either: to call his doctor now, have the nurse call him, to come and get

him, take him away into safety, sanity, falling suddenly from no peace into something without peace either, into a loud crash from somewhere up the corridor. It was late, he could feel it.

The overhead light was off now, though a single shaded one burned beside the bed, and now there were feet in the corridor, running; Watkins and Miller entered. Watkins wore a woman's jade-colored raincoat, from the front of which protruded or dangled a single broken-stemmed tuberose; his head was bound in a crimson silk scarf like a nun's wimple.

Miller was carrying the same brown unlabeled bottle which Mr. Acarius had seen the nurse lock back inside the cabinet two or three hours or whatever it was ago, which he was trying to thrust into Mr. Acarius's bed when there entered a nurse whom Mr. Acarius knew at once must be the new and dreaded one: an older woman in awry pince-nez, crying: "Give it back to me! Give it back to me!" She cried to Mr. Acarius: "I had the cabinet unlocked and was reaching down the bottle when one of them knocked my cap off and when I caught at it, one of them reached over my head and grabbed the bottle!"

"Then give me back that bottle of mine you stole out of my flush tank," Miller said.

"I poured it out," the nurse cried in triumph.

"But you had no right to," Miller said. "That was mine. I bought it myself, brought it in here with me. It didn't belong to the hospital at all and you had no right to put your hand on it."

"We'll let Doctor Hill decide that," the nurse said. She snatched up the brown unlabeled bottle and went out.

“You bet we will,” Miller said, following.

“Did you ever hear a dream … talking,” Watkins said. “Move your feet,” he said, reaching into Mr. Acarius’s bed and extracting the unopened bottle. Mr. Acarius did not move, he could not, while Watkins opened the bottle and drank from it. From up the corridor there still came the sound of Miller’s moral indignation; presently Miller entered.

“She wouldn’t let me use the telephone,” he said. “She’s sitting on it. We’ll have to go upstairs and wake him up.”

“She has no sense of humor,” Watkins said. “Better kill this before she finds it too.” They drank rapidly in turn from the bottle. “We’ll have to have more liquor now. We’ll have to get the keys away from her.”

“How?” Miller said.

“Trip her up. Grab them.”

“That’s risky.”

“Not unless she hits her head on something. Get her out into the corridor first, where there’s plenty of room.”

“Let’s go upstairs and wake up Hill first,” Miller said. “I’m damned if I’m going to let them get away with anything as highhanded as this.”

“Right,” Watkins said, emptying the bottle and dropping it into Mr. Acarius’s wastebasket. Then Mr. Acarius was alone again — if he had ever been else, since there was no time to telephone anyone now, no one to telephone to: who was as isolate from help and aid here as if he had waked on an inaccessible and forgotten plateau of dinosaurs, where only beast might be rallied to protect beast from beast; he

remembered in the group armed with the small ritual glasses at the dispensary one who looked like a truck driver or perhaps even a prize fighter; he might do to help, provided he was awake, though it was incredible to Mr. Acarius that anyone on the floor could still be asleep; certainly not now because at this moment there came through the ceiling overhead the sound of Doctor Hill's voice roaring with rage, Mr. Acarius lying in a kind of suffering which was almost peaceful, thinking, Yes, yes, we will save her life and then I will get out of here, I don't care how, I don't care where; still lying so while Doctor Hill's voice reached its final crescendo, followed by a curious faint sound which Mr. Acarius could define only as a suspended one: then one last thundering crash.

He was off the bed now; the nurse and an orderly running, had already shown the way: A door in the corridor which, open now, revealed a flight of concrete stairs, at the foot of which lay Watkins. He looked indeed like a corpse now. In fact, he looked more than just dead: he looked at peace, his eyes closed, one arm flung across his breast so that the lax hand seemed to clasp lightly the broken stem of the tuberose. "That's right!" Mr. Acarius cried, "tremble! You only hope he is!"

Miller had said he put the suit behind the tub; it was there, wadded. Mr. Acarius had no shirt save his pajama jacket nor shoes save his carpet slippers. Nor did he have any idea where Miller's room with its unlocked window on the fire escape was either. But he did not hesitate. I've done what I can, he thought. Let the Lord provide awhile.

Something did, anyway. He had to wait while the orderly and two patients bore Watkins into his room and cleared the corridor. Then he found Miller's room with no more effort than just selecting a door rapidly and opening it. He had had a fear of height all his life, though he was already on the dark fire escape before he even remembered it,

thinking with a kind of amazement of a time, a world in which anyone had time to be afraid of anything consisting merely of vertical space.

He knew in theory that fire escapes did not reach the ground and that you had to drop the remaining distance too; it was dark here and he did not know into what but again he did not hesitate, letting go into nothing, onto cinders; there was a fence too and then an alley and now he could see the sweet and empty sweep of the Park: that and nothing more between him and the sanctuary of his home.

Then he was in the Park, running, stumbling, panting, gasping, when a car drew abreast of him. Slowing, and a voice said, “Hey, you!” and still trying to run even after the blue coats and the shields surrounded him: then he was fighting, swinging wildly and violently until they caught and held him while one of them sniffed his breath. “Don’t strike a match near him,” a voice said. “Call the wagon.”

“It’s all right, officer,” his doctor said and, panting, helpless, even crying now, Mr. Acarius saw for the first time the other car drawn up behind the police one. “I’m his doctor. They telephoned me from the hospital that he had escaped. I’ll take charge of him. Just help me get him into my car.”

They did so: the firm hard hands. Then the car was moving. “It was that old man,” he said crying. “That terrible, terrible old man, who should have been at home telling bedtime stories to his grandchildren.”

“Didn’t you know there were police in that car?” the doctor said.

“No,” Mr. Acarius cried. “I just knew that there were people in it.”

Then he was at home, kneeling before the cellarette, dragging rapidly out not only what remained of the whiskey but all the rest of it too — the brandy, vermouth, gin, liqueurs — all of it, gathering the bottles in his arms and running into the bathroom where first one then a second and then a third crashed and splintered into the tub, the doctor leaning in the door, watching him.

“So you entered mankind, and found the place already occupied,” the doctor said.

“Yes,” Mr. Acarius said, crying, “You can’t beat him. You cannot. You never will. Never.”

The End