

WILLIAM FAULKNER

*Knights*

*Gambit*

RANDOM HOUSE



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# Knight's Gambit, William Faulkner

## Knight's Gambit

ONE OF THEM knocked. But the door opened in the middle of it, swinging right out from under the rapping knuckles, so that the two callers were already in the room when he and his uncle looked up from the chessboard. Then his uncle recognised them too.

Their name was Harriss. They were brother and sister. At first glance they might have been twins, not just to strangers but to most of Jefferson too. Because there were probably not half a dozen people in Yoknapatawpha County who actually knew which one was the oldest.

They lived six miles from town on what twenty years ago had been just another plantation raising cotton for the market and com and hay to feed the mules which made the cotton. But now it was a county (or for that matter, a north Mississippi) landmark: a mile square of white panel and rail paddock-and pasture-fences and electric-lit stables and a once-simple country house transmogrified now into something a little smaller than a Before-the-War Hollywood set.

They came in and stood, rosy, young, delicate and expensive-looking, flushed from the December night. His uncle rose. 'Miss Harriss, Mr. Harriss,' he said. 'But you are already in, so I cant—'

But the boy didn't wait for that either. Then he saw that the boy held his sister, not by the arm or elbow, but by the forearm above the wrist like in the old lithographs of the policeman with his cringing captive or

the victory-flushed soldier with his shrinking Sabine prey. And that was when he saw the girl's face.

'You're Stevens,' the boy said. He didn't even demand it. He stated it.

'That's partly correct,' his uncle said. 'But let it pass. What can I'

Nor did the boy wait for that. He turned to the girl. 'That's Stevens,' he said. 'Tell him.'

But she didn't speak. She just stood there, in the evening dress and a fur coat which had cost a good deal more than any other girl (or woman either) in Jefferson or Yoknapatawpha County had to spend for such, staring at his uncle with that frozen sickness of dread or terror or whatever it was on her face, while the knuckles of the boy's hand grew whiter and whiter on her wrist. Tell him,' the boy said.

Then she spoke. You could hardly hear her. 'Captain Gualdres. At our house—'

His uncle had taken a few steps toward them. Now he stopped too, standing in the middle of the floor, looking at her. 'Yes,' his uncle said. Tell me.'

But it seemed as if that one expiring rush was all of it. She just stood there, trying to tell his uncle something, whatever it was, with her eyes; trying to tell both of them for that matter, since he was there too. But they found out quickly enough what it was, or at least what it was the boy wanted her to say, had dragged her in to town by the arm to say. Or at least what he thought it was she wanted to say. Because he

should have known then that his uncle probably knew already more than the boy or the girl either intended to say yet; perhaps, even then, all of it. But it would be a little while yet before he would realise that last. And the reason he was so slow about it was his uncle himself.

‘Yes,’ the boy said, in exactly the same tone and voice which had declined to address the older man by any title of courtesy or deference to age; he — Charles — watched the boy staring at his uncle too — the same delicate face which the sister had, but with nothing delicate about the eyes. They — the eyes — stared at his uncle without even bothering to be hard: they just waited. ‘Captain Gualdres, our so-called house-guest. We want him out of our house and out of Jefferson too.’

‘I see,’ his uncle said. He said, ‘I’m on the draft board here. I don’t remember your name in the registration.’

But the boy’s stare didn’t change at all. It was not even contemptuous. It just waited.

Then his uncle was looking at the sister; his voice was quite different now. ‘Is that what it is?’ his uncle said.

But she didn’t answer. She just stared at his uncle with that urgent desperation, her arm hanging at her side and her brother’s knuckles white around her wrist. Now his uncle was speaking to the boy too though he still watched the girl and his voice was even still gentle too or at least quiet:

‘Why did you come to me? What makes you think I can help you? That I should?’

‘You’re the Law here, aren’t you?’ the boy said.

His uncle still watched the sister. 'I'm the County Attorney.' He was still talking to her too. 'But even if I could help you, why should I?'

But again it was the boy: 'Because I don't intend that a fortune-hunting Spick shall marry my mother.'

Now it seemed to him that his uncle really looked at the boy for the first time. 'I see,' his uncle said. Now his uncle's voice was different. It was no louder, there was just no more gentleness in it, as though for the first time his uncle could (or anyway had) stop speaking to the sister: That's your affair and your right.

I ask you again: why should I do anything about it, even if I could?' And now the two of them — his uncle and the boy — spoke crisply and rapidly; it was almost as though they stood toe to toe, slapping each other: 'He was engaged to marry my sister. When he found out that the money would still be our mother's as long as she lived, he ratted.'

'I see. You wish to employ the deportation laws of the Federal government to avenge your sister on her jilter.'

This time even the boy didn't answer. He just stared at the older man with such cold, controlled, mature malevolence that he — Charles — watched his uncle actually pause for a moment before turning back to the girl, speaking — his uncle — again in the gentle voice, though even then his uncle had to repeat the question before she answered:

'Is this true?'

'Not engaged,' she whispered.

‘But you love him?’

But the boy didn’t even give her time, didn’t give anybody time. ‘What does she know about love?’ he said. ‘Will you take the case, or do I report you to your superiors too?’

‘Can you risk being away from home that long?’ his uncle said in the mild voice which he — Charles — knew anyway and, if it had been addressed to him, would have leaped at once to hold his hat. But the boy didn’t even pause.

‘Say it in English if you can,’ he said.

‘I wont take your case,’ his uncle said.

For a moment still the boy stared at his uncle, holding the girl by the wrist. Then he — Charles — thought the boy was going to jerk, fling her bodily through the door ahead of him. But he even released her, himself (not the host, the owner of the door which he had already passed through once without even waiting for permission, let alone invitation) opening the door, then standing aside for the girl to precede him through it — a gesture, a pantomime of courtesy and deference even when automatic from habit and early training, as his was: automatic: and from long habit and the best of training under the best masters and tutors and preceptors in what the ladies of Yoknapatawpha County anyway would call the best of company.

But there was no difference in it now: only arrogance: swaggering, insulting not just to whom offered but to everyone watching it too, not even looking at the sister for whom he held the door but still staring at the man twice his age whose domicile he had now violated twice.

'All right,' the boy said. 'Don't say you were not warned.'

Then they were gone. His uncle closed the door. But for a second his uncle didn't move. It was a pause, a check, an almost infinitesimal instant of immobility so quick and infinitesimal that probably nobody but he, Charles, would have remarked it.

And he noticed it only because he had never before seen his uncle, that quick and nervous man garrulous in speech and movement both, falter or check in either once he had begun them.

Then his uncle turned and came back toward where he, Charles, still sat at his side of the chessboard, not even realising yet, so rapid and staccato the whole thing had been, that he not only hadn't risen himself, he would hardly have had time to even if he had thought about it.

And maybe his mouth was open a little too (he was not quite eighteen yet and even at eighteen there were still a few situations which even a man of his uncle's capacity for alarms would have to admit you might not be able to assimilate at the drop of a hat or the slam of a door, or at least hadn't needed to yet), sitting at his side of the half-played game watching his uncle come back to his chair and begin to sit back down and reach for the overturned cob pipe on the smoking stand all in the same motion.

'Warned?' he said.

'So he called it,' his uncle said, finishing the sitting down and approaching the bitt of the pipe to his mouth and already taking a

match from the box on the smoking stand, so that the actual relighting of the pipe would be merely a continuation of the coming back from the door: 'I'd call it a threat, myself.'

And he repeated that too, with his mouth still open probably.

'All right,' his uncle said. 'What would you call it then?' — striking the match and in the same sweep of the arm bringing the flame to the cold ash in the pipe, and still talking around the stem into the vain shape of the invisible puffing so that it would be a second or two yet before he would realise that all he had to smoke now was the match.

Then his uncle dropped the match into the ashtray and with the other hand made the move which without doubt he had already planned out long before the knock came on the door which he had been too late or at least too slow to answer or even say 'Come in.'

He made the move without even looking, moving the pawn which exposed his, Charles's, castle to the rook which his uncle had probably been convinced even longer back than the plan that he, Charles, had forgotten to watch, and then sat there with his thin quick face and his shock of premature white hair and his Phi Beta Kappa key and the dime corncob pipe and the suit which looked as if he had slept in it every night since the day he bought it, and said, 'Move.'

But he, Charles, wasn't that stupid even if his mouth was open a little. In fact, he wasn't really surprised, after the first shock of that entrance, that abrupt and that informal, at this hour, this late at night and this cold: the boy without doubt dragging the girl by the arm right on through the front door without bothering to ring or knock there at all,



on down the strange hall which, if he had never seen before, would have been seventeen or eighteen years ago as an infant at nurse, to a strange door and knocking this time true enough but not waiting for any response, and so into a room where for all he knew (or cared) his, Charles's, mother might have been undressing for bed.

What surprised him was his uncle: that glib and talkative man who talked so much and so glibly, particularly about things which had absolutely no concern with him, that his was indeed a split personality: the one, the lawyer, the county attorney who walked and breathed and displaced air; the other, the garrulous facile voice so garrulous and facile that it seemed to have no connection with reality at all and presently hearing it was like listening not even to fiction but to literature.

Yet two strangers had burst not only into his home but into his private sitting room, and delivered first a peremptory command and then a threat and then burst out again, and his uncle had sat calmly back to an interrupted chess game and an interrupted pipe and completed a planned move as though he had not only not noticed any interruption but hadn't actually been interrupted.

This, in the face of what should have supplied his uncle with food and scope for garrulity for the rest of the night, since of all possible things which might have entered this room from the whole county's remotest environs, this one concerned him least: the domestic entanglements or impasses or embroilments of a family a household six miles from town whose four members or at least inhabitants not a dozen people in the county knew more than merely to speak to on the street — the wealthy widow (millionairess, the county stipulated it), the softly fading still softly pretty woman in the late thirties, and the two spoiled children a year apart somewhere under twenty-one, and the Argentine army

captain house-guest, the four of them like the stock characters in the slick magazine serial, even to the foreign fortune-hunter.

For which reason (and maybe that was why, though it would take a good deal more than even his uncle's incredible taciturnity to convince him, Charles, of this) his uncle didn't really need to talk about it. Because for twenty years now, long before there were any children even, let alone anything to draw the foreign fortune-hunter, the county had been watching it unfold as the subscribers read and wait and watch for the serial's next installment.

Which — the twenty years — was before his, Charles's, time too. But it was his nevertheless; he had inherited it, heired it in his turn as he would heir in his turn from his mother and father who had heired them in their turn, the library shelf in the room just across the hall from this one where he and his uncle sat, containing not the books which his grandfather had chosen or heired in his turn from his father, but the ones which his grandmother had chosen and bought on the semi-yearly trips to Memphis — the sombre tomes before the day of gaudy dust-jackets, the fly leaves bearing his grandmother's name and address and even that of the store or shop where she purchased them and the date in the nineties and the early nineteen hundreds in her fading young women's seminary script, the volumes to be exchanged and lent and returned to be the subject of the leading papers at the next meeting of the literary clubs, the yellowed pages bearing even forty and fifty years later the imprint of pressed and vanished flowers and through which moved with the formal gestures of shades the men and women who were to christian-name a whole generation: the Clarissas and Judiths and Marguerites the St Elmos and Rolands and Lothairs: women who were always ladies and men who were always brave, moving in a sort of immortal moonlight without anguish and with no pain from birth without foulment to death without carrion, so that you too could weep

with them without having to suffer or grieve, exult with them without having to conquer or triumph.

So the legend was his too. He had even got some of it direct from his grandmother by means of childhood's simple inevitable listening, by-passing his own mother, who in a sense had had a part in it.

And until tonight it had even remained as harmless and unreal as the old yellowed volumes: the old plantation six miles from town which had been an old place even in his grandmother's time, not so big in acreage hut of good land properly cared for and worked, with the house on it which was not large either but was just a house, a domicile, more spartan even than comfortable, even in those days when people wanted needed comfort in their homes for the reason that they spent some of their time there; and the widower-owner who stayed at home and farmed his heritage and, with a constant tumbler of thin whiskey-and-water at his elbow and an aged setter bitch dozing at his feet, sat through the long summer afternoons in a home-made chair on the front gallery, reading in Latin the Roman poets; and the child, the daughter, the motherless girl who grew up in that almost conventual seclusion without companions or playmates with nobody in fact except a few Negro servants and the middle-aged father who paid (again by the town's and the county's postulation) little or no attention to her and who therefore, without ever once saying so to anyone of course, certainly not to the child, perhaps never even to himself, still charged against the life of the daughter, the death of the wife who apparently had been his own life's one monogamous love; and who (the child) at seventeen and without warning to anyone, not to the county anyway, married a man whom nobody in that part of Mississippi had ever heard of before.

And there was something else: an appendix or anyway appendage; a legend to or within or behind the actual or original or initial legend; apocryphal's apocrypha. He not only couldn't remember whether it was from his mother or his grandmother that he had heard it, he couldn't even remember whether his mother or grandmother had actually seen it, known it at first hand, or had themselves heard it from someone else.

It was something about a previous involvement, prior to the marriage: an engagement, a betrothal in form in fact, with (so the legend said) the father's formal consent, then broken, ruptured, voided — something — before the man she did marry ever appeared on the scene; — a betrothal in form according to the legend, yet so nebulous that even twenty years after, with twenty years of front gallery gossip for what his uncle called the Yoknapatawpha County spinster aunts of both sexes to have cast that romantic mantle over the shoulders of every male under sixty who had ever taken a drink or bought a bale of cotton from her father, the other party to it had not only no name but no face too — which at least the other man had, the stranger, for all that he appeared without warning out of nowhere and (as it were) married her all in one burst, one breath, without any space between for anything called by so leisurely a name as betrothal, let alone courtship.

So it — the first, the other one, the true betrothal, worthy of the word for the simple reason that nothing came of it but apocrypha's ephemeral footnote, already fading: a scent, a shadow, a whisper; a young girl's trembling Yes in an old garden at dusk, a flower exchanged or kept; and nothing remained unless perhaps the flower, the rose pressed between the pages of a book as the successors to his grandmother's generation occasionally did — was probably, without doubt, it had to be, the aftermath of some boy-and-girl business of her schooldays. But indubitably it was to someone in Jefferson or at least in

the county. Because until now she had never been anywhere else to have involved or pledged her inclinations and then lost them.

But the man (or the boy) had no face, no name. He had no substance at all, in fact. He had no past, no yesterday; protagonist of a young girl's ephemeris: a shade, a shadow; himself virgin as the untried passions of that cloistered and nunlike maiden. Not even the five or six girls (his, Charles's, mother was one of them) who had been the nearest thing she had to friends during the three or four years she attended the female half of the Academy, even knew for certain that an engagement really existed, let alone the mortal partner in it.

Because she never spoke of it herself, and even the rumor, legend's baseless legend, was born rather of a chance remark of her father's one day, and now its own part of the legend, to the effect that for a girl of sixteen to be partner in a betrothal was like a blind man being a partner in the ownership of an original Horatian manuscript.

But at least his uncle had a reason for not talking about this part of it because his uncle didn't even know about the first engagement except by second hand two or three years later. Because he — his uncle — was not there then; that was 1919 and once more Europe — Germany — was open to students and tourists too with student visas, and his uncle had already gone back to Heidelberg to finish his Ph.D., and when he returned five years later, she was already married to the other man, the one who did have a name and a face even if nobody in the town or the county had heard the one nor seen the other until they came up the church aisle almost, and had borne the two children and then herself departed with them for Europe and the old other thing which had never been more than a shadow anyway, had been forgotten even in Jefferson, unless maybe on fading occasions over cups of coffee or tea

or ladies' punch (and then more fading still over their own bassinets) by the six girls who had been her only friends.

So she married the stranger not only to Jefferson but to all north Mississippi and perhaps to all the rest of Mississippi too as far as anyone knew, about whom the town knew nothing except that he was not the materialisation at last of the nameless shadow of the other affair which had never emerged far enough into the light to have two actual people in it. Because there was no engagement prolonged or deferred here waiting for her to get another year older, his — Charles's mother said you had only to look at Harriss once to know that he would never abate one jot — or acquiesce one jot to the abatement — of anything he considered his.

He was more than twice her age, old enough himself to be her father — a big florid affable laughing man about whom you noticed at once that his eyes were not laughing too; noticed so quickly that his eyes were not laughing too that you realised only later that the laughter never had gone much further than his teeth; — a man who had what his uncle called the Midas touch, who as his uncle said, walked in an aura of pillaged widows and minors as some men walk in that of failure or death.

In fact, his uncle said that the whole pattern was upside down. He — his uncle — was home again now, for good this time, and his sister and mother, Charles's mother and grandmother (and all the other women he couldn't help but listen to probably) had told him about the marriage and about the other shadowy betrothal too. Which itself should have unbraked his uncle's tongue when the violation of his home didn't, for the very reason that it was not merely no concern of his but so little concerned with any reality at all that there would have been nothing in it anywhere to confound or restrict him.

And he, Charles, of course hadn't been in his grandmother's sitting room yet by about two years, but in his imagination he could see his uncle looking exactly as he always had since and before too and always would, sitting there beside his (Charles's) grandmother's footstool and rocker, with white folks' tobacco once again in the cob pipe and drinking the coffee (his grandmother wouldn't abide tea; she said it was for sick people) which his mother brewed for them, with his thin quick face and the wild shock of hair which had already begun to turn white when he got home in 1919 after three years as a stretcher-bearer in the French army, and spent that spring and summer doing nothing whatever that anyone knew of, before going back to Heidelberg to finish the Ph.D., and the voice which talked constantly not because its owner loved talking but because he knew that while it was talking, nobody else could tell what he was not saying.

The whole plot was hind-part-before, his uncle said; all the roles and parts mixed-up and confused: the child acting and reading what should have been the parent's lines and character — assuming of course that the father's cryptic remark about the Horatian manuscript meant anything at all; not the parent but the child putting aside the childhood sweetheart (no matter how thin and ephemeral had been that entanglement, his uncle said, asking, so his, Charles's, mother told, for the second time if anyone had ever learned the sweetheart's name or what had become of him) in order to lift the mortgage on the homestead; the child herself choosing the man twice her age but with the Midas touch whom it should have been the father's role to pick and, if necessary, even bring pressure to bear to the end that the old romance (and his mother told how his uncle said again, No matter how worthless and ephemeral) be voided and forgotten and the marriage done: and worse: even if it had been the father who chose the husband, the plot would still have been upside down because the money (and his mother told how his uncle asked this twice too: if the

man Harriss was already rich or if he just looked like, given enough time and enough people, he would be) was already the father's even if there wasn't much of it, because, as his uncle said, the man who read Latin for pleasure wouldn't have wanted any more than he already had.

But they were married. Then for the next five years what his uncle called that whole broad generation of spinster aunts who, still alive seventy-five years after the Civil War, are the backbone of the South's social and political and economic solidarity too, watched it as you watch the unfolding story in the magazine installments.

They went to New Orleans on the wedding journey, as everyone in that country at that time did who considered his marriage legal. Then they returned and for about two weeks were seen daily in town in an old battered victoria (her father had never owned an automobile and never would) drawn by a team of plow-horses and driven by a Negro plowhand in overalls and stained where chickens had roosted in it or over it and maybe owls too. Then it — the victoria — was seen occasionally in the Square for another month with just the bride in it before the town found out that the husband was gone, back to New Orleans, to his business: which was the first anybody knew that he had a business and where it was. But even then, and for the next five years too, they wouldn't know what it was.

So now there was only the bride for the town and the county to watch, alone in the old victoria, coming the six miles in to town, maybe to call on his, Charles's, mother or another of the six who had been her friends, or maybe just to drive through the town, the Square, and then back home. And then for another month it was just to drive through the Square, and that maybe once a week when it had used to be almost every day.



Then a month passed and not even the victoria was seen in town. It was as if she had realised at last, it had finally occurred to her, what for two months now the whole town and the county too had been believing and saying; — only eighteen then and his mother said how she didn't look even that — a slight, dark-haired, dark-eyed girl who didn't look much bigger than a child perched alone in the cave-like opening of the victoria's hooded back seat which would have held five or six of her, — who, his mother said, hadn't been any too bright even in school and had never tried to be anything else, and who, his uncle said, maybe didn't need to be bright, having been created for simple love and grief; that is it must have been for love and grief because it was certainly not for haughtiness and pride, since she had failed (if she had ever really tried even that) at assurance without even accomplishing bravado.

So there were more than just what his uncle called the spinster aunts who now believed they knew what sort of business Harriss's was, and that it had taken him long since a good deal further than New Orleans, — four or five hundred miles further probably, since although this was in the twenties when absconders still considered Mexico far and safe enough, this one could hardly have found enough money in that family and that plantation to have made Mexico a solvent necessity, let alone have got there — or in fact to have found flight at all a necessity, and that it was probably only his own fears which had sent him even the three hundred miles which New Orleans represented.

But they were wrong. He came back Christmas. And once he was actually back, where they could see him again, unchanged — the same man, a little ageless, affable, high-colored, bland, without grace and without imagination, it was all right again. In fact, it had never been wrong; even the very ones who had said soonest and most positively

that he had deserted her, were now the most convinced that they had never really believed it; when he left again after New Year's like any other husband unlucky enough to have his work, business, in one place and his family in another, nobody even marked the day.

They didn't even bother about his business anymore. They knew what it was now: bootlegging: and no petty furtive peddling of pint bottles in hotel barbershops either, because when she drove through the Square now alone in the victoria, it was in a fur coat: at which — the coat — as soon as they saw it, the man himself rose in the town's and the county's opinion and respect too. Because he was not only successful, but in the best tradition he spent it on his womenfolks.

And more than that: his was a still older and firmer American tradition; he was successful not even despite the Law but over the Law as though the Law itself and not failure were his vanquished adversary, moving among them on his returns home now, in an aura not merely of success, not solely of romance and bravado and the odor of spent cordite, but of delicacy too since he had had the taste to conduct his business in another state three hundred miles away.

And it was big business. He came back that summer in the biggest and shiniest car that had ever stayed overnight within the county's boundaries, with a strange Negro in a uniform who did nothing but drive and wash and polish it. And the first child came and then there was a nurse too: a light-colored Negress a good deal smarter, or at least snappier-looking than any other woman white or black either in Jefferson. Then Harriss was gone again, and now every day the four of them — the wife, the infant, the uniformed chauffeur and the nurse — would be seen in the big glittering car, in and out of the Square and the town two and three times a day and not even always stopping anywhere, until pretty soon the county and the town knew also that it

was the two Negroes who decided where and perhaps when too they would drive.

And Harriss came back that Christmas, and the next summer, and the second child came and then the first one was walking and now even the rest of the county besides his, Charles's, mother and the other five who had been the girlhood companions, knew at last whether it was a boy or not.

And then the grandfather was dead and that Christmas Harriss took command of the plantation, making in his wife's name — or rather in that of his own absentee-landlordship — an arrangement, trade, with the Negro tenants for the next year's farming of the land which everybody knew would not possibly work, which — so the county believed — Harriss himself didn't even bother to want not to work. Because he didn't care; he was making the money himself, and to have stopped merely to run a modest cotton-plantation even for one year would have been like the hot horse-player quitting the tracks in midseason to run a milk-route.

He was making the money and waiting, and so sure enough one day he didn't have to wait any longer. When he came home that summer, he stayed two months, and when he left there were electric lights and running water in the house, and the day-long night-long thump and hum of the pump and dynamo were the mechanical sounds where there used to be the creak of the hand-turned well-pulley and of the ice-cream freezer on Sunday mornings; and now there was nothing left of the old man who had sat on the front gallery with his weak toddy and Ovid and Horace and Catullus for almost fifty years, except his home-made hickory rocking chair and the finger-prints on the calf bindings of his books and the silver goblet he drank from, and the old setter bitch which had dozed at his feet.

His, Charles's, uncle said that the impact of the money had been stronger even than the ghost of the old stoic, the sedentary and provincial cosmopolite. Maybe his uncle thought it was even stronger than the daughter's capacity for grief. The rest of Jefferson did, anyway.

Because that year passed and Harriss came for Christmas and then for a month in the summer, and both children were walking now; that is, they must have been though nobody in Jefferson could vouch for it since nobody ever saw them except in the passing moving car, and the old setter was dead now and in that year Harriss rented all the farm-land in one lump to a man who didn't even live in the county, who drove seventy miles from Memphis each Sunday night during planting and harvest time, and camped in one of the abandoned Negro cabins until time to go back to Memphis the next Saturday noon.

And the next year came and that spring the renter brought his own Negro farm-hands, and so even the Negroes who had lived and dropped their sweat on the old place longer than she was old, were gone now and now there wasn't anything at all of the old owner left because his home-made chair and his silver goblet and the boxes containing the finger-worn calf-bound books were in his, Charles's, mother's attic, and the man who rented the farm-land was living in the house as the caretaker.

Because Mrs. Harriss was gone too. She didn't notify Jefferson in advance about that either. It was even a conspiracy, since his, Charles's, mother knew both that she was going, and where, and if his mother knew, then the other five did too.

One day she was there, in the house which Jefferson thought she would never have wanted to escape from, no matter what he did to it, no matter if the house where she had been born and lived all her life except for the two weeks' honeymoon in New Orleans, was now a kind of mausoleum of electric wires and water pipes and automatic cooking and washing machines and synthetic pictures and furniture.

Then the next day she was gone: herself, the two children, the two Negroes who even after four years in the country were still city Negroes, and even the long glittering hearselike car, — to Europe, for the childrens' health it was said, and nobody knew who said that either, because it was not his, Charles's, mother nor any of the other five who of all Jefferson and all the county had known she was going, and certainly it wasn't she who had said it. But she was gone, running from what, the town maybe thought it knew. But hunting for what or if hunting for anything, this time not even his uncle, who always had something to say (and something that quite often made sense) about anything which wasn't particularly his business, didn't know or at least didn't say.

And now not only Jefferson but the whole county watched it, not only what his uncle called the spinster aunts who watched by hearsay and supposition (and maybe hope) from their front galleries, but the men too, and not just men from the town who had only six miles to go, but farmers who had the whole county to cross.

They would come by whole families in battered dusty cars and wagons, or singly on horses and mules taken last night from the plow, to stop along the road and watch gangs of strange men with enough machinery to have built a highway or a reservoir, disc and terrace the old fields once dedicated to simple profit-producing com and cotton, and sow them to pasture grass costing more per pound than sugar.

They would ride past mile after mile of white-painted panel fence, to sit in the cars and wagons or on the horses and mules, and watch long rows of stables being built of better material than was in most of their houses, with electric lights and illuminated clocks and running water and screened windows such as most of their homes didn't have; they would come back on the mules, maybe without saddles even, with the plow-gear merely looped up over the hames to keep it from dragging, and watch van after van unload the fine pedigreed stallions and colts and mares whose ancestors for fifty generations (as his, Charles's, uncle might have said but didn't since this was the year during which his uncle seemed to have stopped talking very much about anything) would have blanched at a trace-gall like a housewife at a hair on the butter-dish.

He (Harriss) rebuilt the house. (He was making flying trips up every week now, in an aeroplane; they said it was the same aeroplane which ran the whiskey up from the Gulf to New Orleans.) That is, the new house was going to occupy the same ground the old one would have covered if there had been four of them just alike nailed together.

It had been just a house, of one storey, with the gallery across the front where the old master would sit in his home-made chair with his toddy and his Catullus; when Harriss got through with it, it looked like the Southern mansion in the moving picture, only about five times as big and ten times as Southern.

Then he began to bring friends up from New Orleans with him, for week-ends and longer, and not just at Christmas and in the summer now, but four and five times during the year, as though the money was coming in so fast and smooth now that he didn't even have to stay

there and watch it. Sometimes he wouldn't even come himself, but would just send them. He had a caretaker who lived in the house all the time: not the old one, the first renter, but a new one from New Orleans whom he called his butler: a fat Italian or Greek collarless in white silk shirt sleeves and a pistol loose in his hip pocket until the guests arrived.

Then he would shave and put on a four-in-hand tie of soft scarlet silk, and a coat too when it was very cold: who they said in Jefferson wore the pistol even when he was serving meals, though nobody from town or the county either had ever eaten there to see.

So sometimes Harriss would just send his friends up for the butler to take care of them: the men and the women with a hard, sleek, expensive unmarried air and look about them even when now and then some of them really were married to each other perhaps: the strange outlanders driving big shining sports cars fast through town and fast along the road which was still just a country road for a while a distance, no matter what he had built at one end of it, where chickens and dogs lay in the dust for coolness, and hogs and calves and mules strayed: a burst and whirl of feathers, a jolt or yelp or squeal (and if it were a horse or mule or cow or, deadliest of all, a hog, a bent bumper or fender too), the car not even slowing: until after a while the butler kept a mass of coins and banknotes and a few of Harriss's checks signed in blank, in a canvas sack hanging from the inside knob of the front door, the farmer or his wife or his child riding up to the front door and saying 'hog' or 'mule' or 'hen' and the butler would not even have to leave the door to reach down the sack and count out the money or fill in the check and pay them and they would go away: because that had become a secondary source of rural income for that whole six miles of road like the gathering and selling of blackberries or eggs.

There was a polo field too. It was beside the road, the highway; the men from town, the merchants and lawyers and deputy sheriffs, could drive out now and watch the riding without even getting out of their cars. And the men from the countryside too — the farmers, the landholders and the tenants and renters and croppers — who wore boots only when walking in mud was unavoidable, and who rode horses only to get from one place to another without having to walk, and that in the same clothes they had put on to eat breakfast in, would come too on horses and mules taken from the plow, to stand along the fence and look at the fine horses a little but mostly at the clothes — the women and the men too who couldn't ride a horse except in shiny boots and special pants, and the others in the pants and hoots and derby hats who didn't even ride horses.

And presently to watch something else. They had heard about polo and they even believed it before they ever saw it. But the other they still did not believe even while they were watching it and its preparation too: gangs of workmen cutting out whole panels of the costly plank-and-rail fences and the outermost and still costly wire fences too, then in the resulting gaps setting lower makeshift barriers of brush-tops and laths a little stouter than matchsticks, which wouldn't have stopped a serious dog, let alone a calf or a mule; and, at one place, a section of something molded and painted to resemble a stone wall (It was said to be paper, though naturally the county didn't believe this — not that they didn't believe that paper could be made to look like that, but simply because they did not believe any of it; they knew that the thing was not stone for the very reason that it looked like stone, and they were already prepared to be lied to about what it really was.)

which a man at each end could pick up and carry to one side like two housemaids moving a canvas cot; and at another place, in the middle of a forty-acre pasture as bare and empty as a baseball diamond, a section of hedgerow not even growing in the ground but in a wooden box like a



hog-trough, and behind it, an artificial pit filled with water pumped through a galvanised pipe from the house almost a mile away.

And after it had happened two or three times and the news had got around, half the men in the county would be there to watch it: the two Negro boys laying the trail of torn paper from one jump to the next, and then the men (one in a red coat, with a brass horn) and the women in the pants and boots on the thousand-dollar horses riding it.

And the next year there was an actual pack of hounds, fine ones, a little too fine to be simple dogs just as the horses were a little too fine to be simple horses, a little too clean, a little too (somehow) unaccustomed, living in weather-proof hutches with running water and special human beings to wait on them too like the horses did and had.

And now, instead of two Negroes with two long cotton-pickers' sacks of shredded paper, just one rode a mule, dragging along the ground at the end of a rope something tied up in a burlap sack, dragging it with tedious care up to each jump, then dismounting and tying the mule to something handy while he dragged the bag carefully up to the jump and across the middle of it and then mounted the mule again and dragged the bag on to the next one, and so completing the long looping circle back to the starting-place in the home pasture, the one nearest the highway and the fence where the tethered trace-galled mules and plow-horses stood and the motionless overalled men who had ridden them.

Whereupon the Negro would rein up the mule and sit on it, his eyes rolling a little white, while one of the watchers who had seen it before and followed by the six or ten or fifteen who had not, would climb the fence and, without even looking at the Negro, pass the mule and go

and pick the bag and hold it while one by one the six or twelve or fifteen bent down and sniffed it.

Then he would put the bag back down, and with still no word, no sound, they would go back and climb the fence and stand once more along it — men who would squat all night with a jug of com whiskey around a smoldering stump or log, and call correctly to one another the names of the running hounds by the tone and pitch of their voices a mile away, watching not only the horses which didn't need a quarry to run at, but the frantic clamor of dogs themselves pursuing not even a phantom but a chimaera, leaning their elbows on the white fence, immobile, sardonic and contained, chewing tobacco and spitting.

And each Christmas and New Year's, his, Charles's, mother and the other five who had been the girlhood friends, would receive the seasonal cards. They would be postmarked from Rome or London or Paris or Vienna or Cairo, but they hadn't been bought there. They hadn't been bought anywhere within the last five or ten years, because they had been chosen and purchased and saved from a quieter time than this one, when the houses that people were born in didn't always even know they lacked electric wiring and water pipes.

They even smelled like that. There were not only the fast ships, there was airmail crossing the ocean now, and he, Charles, would think of the pouches of letters from all the world's capitals, postmarked one day and delivered and read and forgotten almost the next, with among them the old-timey cards out of the old time, giving off the faint whisper of old sentiment and old thought impervious to the foreign names and languages, as if she had carried them across the ocean with her from a bureau drawer in the old house which these five and ten years had no longer existed.

And between the cards, on his mother's and the five other birthdays, the letters that even after ten years had not changed — letters constant in sentiment and expression and uncertain spelling, written in the hand of a girl of sixteen and still talking not only of the old homely things but in the old unchanged provincial terms, as if in ten years of the world's glitter she still hadn't seen anything she had not brought with her: talking not about names or places but about the children's health and schooling, not of the ambassadors and millionaires and exiled kings, but of the families of the porters and waiters who had been kind or at least gentle with her and the children, and of the postmen who delivered the mail from home; she didn't always remember to name, let alone underline, the fine fashionable schools the children attended, as if she didn't even know they were fine and fashionable.

So that the taciturnity was really not new; he would watch his uncle sitting even then, holding one of the letters his mother had received, incorrigible and bachelor, faced for the only time in his life with something on which he apparently had nothing to say, exactly as he sat here across the chessboard ten years later, still speechless, or certainly still taciturn.

But his uncle nor anybody else could have called Harriss's pattern upside down. And he, Harriss, followed it, and fast: marry a girl a child half your age and in ten years tentuple the dowry, then one morning your lawyer's secretary telephones your wife long distance in Europe and says you just died sitting at your desk.

Maybe he really did die at the desk; maybe it was even a desk in an office, as the message implied. Because you can be shot just as

discreetly across a desk in an office as anywhere else. And maybe he really did just die sitting at it, because prohibition was even legally dead by then and he was already rich when it ended, and the casket wasn't opened again after the lawyer and eight or ten of the butlers in their sharp clothes and arm-pitted pistols brought him home to lie in state for a day in his ten-year-old ancestral baron's hall, with a butler cum pistol in each downstairs room as far as the butlers went, so that now anybody in Jefferson that wanted could pass the casket with a neat white card engraved in script \$5500 propped among the flowers against it, and examine the inside of the house, before the lawyer and the butlers took him back to New Orleans or anyhow away and buried him.

That was in what was going to be the first year of the new war in Europe, or rather the second phase of that old one his uncle had gone to; the family would have had to come back home anyway in another three months.

They were back in less than two. So he saw them at last, for the first time, or the boy and girl, that is. He didn't see Mrs. Harriss then. But then he didn't need to see her; he had listened to his mother too long; he already knew how she would look; it was as if he had not only seen her before, but had known her as long as his mother had — the slight dark-haired woman still looking like a girl even at thirty-five, not looking very much older in fact than her own children, maybe because she had the power or capacity, whatever it was, or maybe the gift, the fortune, to have spent ten years among what his great-aunt would have called the crowned heads of Europe, without ever really knowing she had left Yoknapatawpha County; not so much looking older than her children but just softer, more constant, quieter; maybe just stiller.

He never saw any of them but just a few times — nor did anybody else that he knew of. The boy rode the horses, but only out there, in the

paddock or the polo field, and not for pleasure it appeared, but simply to pick out a few of the best ones to keep, because within a month they had held an auction sale in one of the smaller paddocks and sold off all but about a dozen. But he seemed to know horses, because the ones they kept were good ones.

And the people who saw him said that he could ride too, though in a curious, foreign, high-kneed fashion which was new to Mississippi or at least to Yoknapatawpha County, which — the county — presently heard that he was even better at something else still more foreign than he was at riding: that he had been the star pupil of some famous Italian fencing-master. And they would see the sister now and then in town in one of the cars, in and out of the stores as girls will, who can seem to find something they want or at least will buy in any store, no matter how small, no matter if they grew up in Paris and London and Vienna, or just Jefferson and Mottstown and Hollyknowe, Mississippi.

But he, Charles, never saw Mrs. Harriss that time. And so he would imagine her moving about that incredible house which she probably recognised only by its topographical location, not like a ghost, because — to him — there was nothing at all wraithlike about her. She was too — too — and then he found the word: tough.

Toughness: that constancy, that imperviousness, that soft still malleableness which had lived ten years in the glittering capitals of Europe without even having to be aware that she had completely resisted them; — merely soft, merely malleable: a breath say of an old sachet, as if one of the old bureau drawers or such from the old house had remained stubborn and constant against all change and alteration, not only impervious but not even aware that it had resisted change, inside the parvenues monstrous mushroom, and somebody passing had jarred open the drawer — and then suddenly and without warning he

saw the true juxtaposition, the true perspective: it was not she which was the ghost; the wraith was Harriss's monstrous house: one breath one faint waft of sachet from that disturbed drawer, and all the vast soar of walls, the loom and sweep of porticoes, became at once transparent and substanceless.

But he never saw her this time. Because two months later they were gone again, to South America this time, since Europe was interdict. So for another year the cards and the letters came back to his mother and the other five, telling no more still of foreign lands than if they had been written from the next county, talking not only about the children now but about home: not the monstrosity Harriss had changed it into, but as it had been before, as if, seeing again its site in space, she remembered its shape in time; and, absent from it, it existed intact again as though it had merely bided and waited for that; it was still as though, even approaching forty, she had less than ever any capacity for novelty, for experiencing any new thing or scene.

Then they were back. There were four of them now: the Argentine cavalry captain too, pursuing or following or anyway drawn by not the daughter apparently but the mother, and so that pattern was upside down too since Captain Gualdres was no more senior to the girl than her father had been to his bride; and so at least the pattern was consistent.

So one morning he and his uncle were crossing the Square, thinking (he anyway) of anything but that, when he looked up and saw her. And he was right. She looked exactly as he had known she would, and then and even before they stopped, he could smell it too: the scent of old sachet, lavender and thyme and such, which, you would have thought, the first touch of the world's glitter would have obliterated, until in the next second you realised that it — the scent, the odor, the breath, the

whisper — was the strong and the enduring, and it was the inconstant changing glitter which flashed and passed.

‘This is Charles,’ his uncle said. ‘Maggie’s boy. I hope you’ll be happy.’

‘I beg your pardon?’ she said.

His uncle said it again: ‘I hope you’ll be very happy.’ And already he, Charles, knew something was wrong with it, even before she said:

‘Happy?’

‘Yes,’ his uncle said. ‘Didn’t I see it in your face? or shouldn’t I?’

And then he knew what was wrong. It was his uncle; it was as though that year ten years ago when his uncle had stopped talking, had already been too long. Because probably talking was like golf or wing-shooting: you couldn’t afford to miss a day; and if you ever missed a whole year, you never got your game or your eye back.

And he stood there too, watching her while she stood looking at his uncle. Then she blushed. He watched it start and move up and cover her face as the moving shadow of a cloud crosses a patch of light. Then it even crossed her eyes too, as when once the cloud-shadow reaches the water, you can not only see the shadow, you can even see the actual cloud too, while she still looked at his uncle. Then she sort of ducked her head, his uncle stepping aside to let her pass. Then his uncle turned too and bumped into him and then they went on and even after he and his uncle had gone a hundred feet or more, it seemed to him that he could still smell it.

‘Sir?’ he said.

'Sir what?' his uncle said.

'You said something.'

'Did I?' his uncle said.

'You said "less oft is peace".'

'Let's hope not,' his uncle said. 'I don't mean the peace, but the quotation. But then, suppose I did say it. What's the good of Heidelberg or Cambridge or Jefferson High or Yoknapatawpha Consolidated, except to furnish a man a certain happy glibness with which to be used by his myriad tongues.'

So maybe he had been wrong. Perhaps his uncle had not lost that year after all, like the old golfer or wing-shot who, a little slack and off and even consistently missing shot after casual shot, can still bear down at last not even when the: pressure comes but merely when he wants to. Because almost before he had even had time to think that, his uncle said, striding on, glib, familiar, quick, incorrigibly garrulous, incorrigibly discursive, who had always something curiously truthful yet always a little bizarre to say about almost anything that didn't really concern him:

'No, we'll let it stand. The least we can wish Captain Gualdres, the stranger in our midst, is that peace be not less oft or indeed not oft at all.'

Because by that time the whole county knew Captain Gualdres, by hearsay, and most of them even by sight. Then one day he, Charles, saw him too. Captain Gualdres was crossing the Square on one of the Harriss horses, and his, Charles's, uncle said what it was. Not who the man was nor even what, but what they were, the man and the horse



together: not a centaur, but a unicorn. He looked hard, not that flabby hardness of too much living which Harriss's butlers had had, but the hardness of metal, of fine steel or bronze, desiccated, almost epicene.

And as soon as his uncle had said it, he, Charles, could see it too: the horse-creature out of the old poetry, with its single horn not of bone but of some metal so curious and durable and strange that even the wise men could not name it; some metal forged out of the very beginning of man's dreams and desires and his fears too, and the formula lost or perhaps even deliberately destroyed by the Smith himself; something far older than steel or bronze and stronger than all the power for suffering and terror and death in mere gold or silver.

That was how, his uncle said, the man seemed a part of the horse he rode; that was the quality of the man who was a living part of the living horse: the composite creature might die, and would, and must, but only the horse would leave bones; in time the bones would crumble to dust and vanish into the earth, but the man would remain intact and impervious where they had lain.

But the man himself was all right. He spoke a hard, rigid sort of English that was not always clear in context, but he spoke it to everybody, anybody; soon he was not only known, but well known, not only in town but through the county too. Within a month or two he seemed to have been everywhere in the county that a horse could go; he must have known back roads and lanes and paths which even his, Charles's, uncle, politicking the county yearly to hold his constituency together, probably had never seen.

He not only knew the county, he had made friends in it. Soon all sorts of people were going out there to see, not the Harrisses but the

stranger; as guests not of the woman who owned the place and whose family name they had known all her life and her father's and grandfather's too, but of the stranger, the foreigner who six months ago they had never heard of and even a year later they would not be able to understand all he said; — out-of-doors men, usually bachelors: farmers, mechanics, a locomotive fireman, a civil engineer, two young men on the highway maintenance crew, a professional horse-and-mule trader — going out there on his invitation to ride the horses belonging to the woman who was his hostess known and whose lover (the whole county was convinced before they ever saw him that his interest, or at least intentions, was in the older woman, the mother, who already controlled the money, because he could have married the girl, the daughter, at any time, long before they left South America) he already probably was and whose husband he could be at any time he wished: — which would be when he finally had to, since, being not only a foreigner but a Latin too, he would have sprung from a long line of bachelor Don Juans and would be adulterous not even through preference but simply in the same way that a leopard is spotted.

In fact, it was presently said of him that if Mrs. Harriss had been a horse instead of a human, he would have married her at once long ago. Because it was soon realised that horses were his heart's love just as drink or dope or gambling are other men's.

The county heard how he would go to the stables alone at night, moon or dark, and saddle a half-dozen of them and ride them in relays into dawn and sunup; and that summer he built a steeplechase course in comparison to which that one Harriss had built was an obstacle race for crawling infants: sections of rail or wall not set into the fences but higher than the fences by a foot or two feet, not matchwood this time but solid beams capable of supporting roofs, not papier-mâché this time but the actual living rock freighted all the way from eastern Tennessee and Virginia.

And now many people from town too would go out there, because that was something to see: the man and the horse fusing, joining, becoming one beast, then passing on beyond even that point, that juncture: not daring, but testing, almost physically palpating at that point where even at mutually-compounding ultimate, concorded at absolute's uttermost, they must become violently two again, like the rocket pilot at his mach 1 then 2 then 3 and toward (himself and the machine) their own finitive apex where the iron craft explodes and vanishes, leaving his tender and naked flesh still hurtling forward on the other side of sound.

Though in this case (the man and the horse) the thing was in obverse. It was as if the man knew that he himself was invulnerable and unbreakable, and of their two, only the horse could fail, and that the man had laid out the course and built the jumps just to see where the horse must ultimately falter.

Which, by all the tenets of that agrarian and equestrian land, was exactly right; that was exactly the way to ride a horse; Rafe McCallum, one of his constant watchers, who had bred and raised and trained and sold horses all his life and who knew more about horses probably than any man in the country, said so: that when it was in the stall, treat it like it cost a thousand dollars; but when you were using it for something you had, or you and it both liked, to do, treat it like you could have bought ten like it for that many cents.

And one thing more happened or at least began about three months ago now, which the whole county had had to know about, or at least form an opinion about, for the very reason that this was the only phase or side of Captain Gualdres' Mississippi life which he ever tried to keep, if not secret, at least private.

It had a horse in it of course because it had Captain Gualdres in it too. In fact, the county even knew specifically what horse. It was the one animal — or creature, including Captain Gualdres — in all those broad paneled manicured acres which didn't belong even titularly to the Harrisses.

Because this one belonged to Captain Gualdres himself. He had bought it on his own selection and with his own money — or what he used for his own money: and the fact that he bought a horse with what the county believed was his mistress's money was one of the best, perhaps the best North American stroke Captain Gualdres ever made or could have made. If he had used Mrs. Harriss's money to buy himself a girl, which, being younger than Mrs. Harriss, they had expected all the time that sooner or later he would, the county's contempt and disgust for him would have been exceeded only by their contempt and shame for Mrs. Harriss.

While, having decently spent her money for a horse, the county absolved him in advance by accepting the prima facie; he had gained a kind of male respectability by honorableness in adultery, fidelity and continence in pimphood; continuing (Captain Gualdres) to enjoy it for almost six weeks in fact, going himself all the way to St Louis and buying the horse and coming back in the truck with it.

It was a mare, a filly, sired by a famous imported steeplechaser and going blind from trauma, purchased of course, the county believed, to be a brood mare (which was proof to them that Captain Gualdres anyway considered his tenure on North Mississippi worth a year's purchase at least) since there was obviously nothing else that anyone

could do with a mare, no matter what the breeding, which in another year would be totally blind.

Which the county continued to believe for the next six weeks, even after they discovered that he was doing something with the mare besides simply waiting on nature, discovering this — not what he was doing with the mare, but that he was doing something with it — for that same reason that this was the first one of his horse activities which he ever tried to keep private.

Because there were no watchers, spectators this time, not only because whatever it was Captain Gualdres was doing with the mare took place at night and usually late, but because Captain Gualdres himself asked them not to come out and watch, asking them with that Latin passion for decorum and courtesy become instinctive from dealing with its own hair-triggered race, which shone even through the linguistic paucity:

‘You will not come out to see because, my honor, there is nothing now to see.’

So they didn’t. They deferred, not to his Latin honor perhaps, but they deferred. Perhaps there really was nothing to see, since there couldn’t have been very much out there at that hour worth going that distance to see; only occasionally someone, a neighbor on his way home, passing the place in the late silence, would hear hooves in one of the paddocks beyond the stables at some distance from the road — a single horse, at trot then canter then for a few beats at dead run, the sound stopping short off into complete silence while the listener could have counted two or perhaps three, then beginning once more in the middle of the dead run, already slowing back to canter and trot as if Captain Gualdres had snatched, jerked, wrenched the animal from full speed into immobility in one stride and held it so for the two or three beats,

then flung it bodily into full run again, — teaching it what, nobody knew, unless as a barber-shop wit said, since it was going to be blind, how to dodge traffic on the way to town to collect its pension.

‘Maybe he’s learning it to jump,’ the barber said — a neat dapper man with a weary satiated face and skin the color of a mushroom’s belly, on whom the sun shone at least once every day because at noon he would have to cross the open street to get from the barber-shop to the All Nite Inn and eat his dinner, who if he had ever been on a horse, it was in his defenseless childhood before he could protect himself.

‘At night?’ the client said. ‘In the dark?’

‘If the horse is going blind, how does it know it’s night?’ the barber said.

‘But why jump a horse at night?’ the client said.

‘Why jump a horse?’ the barber said, slapping the brush around the foaming mug. ‘Why a horse?’

But that was all. It didn’t make sense. And if, in the county’s opinion, Captain Gaudres was anything, he was sensible. Which — the sensibleness or at least practicalness — even proved itself by the very action which smirched his image in another phase of the county’s respect. Because they knew the answer now, to the mare, the blind mare and the night. He, the matchless horseman, was using a horse not as a horse but as a disguise; he, the amoral preyer on aging widows, was betraying the integrity of his amorality.

Not his morals: his morality. They had never had any illusions about his — a foreigner and a Latin — morals, so they had accepted his lack of them already in advance before he could have demanded, requested it

even. But they themselves had foisted on, invested him with a morality, a code which he had proved now was not his either, and they would never forgive him.

It was a woman, another woman; they were forced at last to the acceptance of that which, they realised now, they had always expected of a foreigner and a Latin, knowing now at last why the horse, that horse, a horse going blind, the sound and reason for the sound of whose feet late at night nobody would understand probably, but at least nobody would bother enough about to investigate.

It was a Trojan horse; the foreigner who as yet barely spoke English, had gone all the way to St. Louis to find and buy with his own money, one meeting the requirements: blindness to establish an acceptable reason for the night absences, a horse already trained or that he himself could train to make on signal — perhaps an electrical sound every ten or fifteen minutes operated from a clock (by this time the county's imagination had soared to heights which even horse-traders didn't reach, let alone mere horse-trainers) — those spurts of galloping around an empty paddock, until he got back from the assignation and threw a switch and put the horse up and rewarded it with sugar or oats.

It would be a younger woman of course, perhaps even a young girl; probably was a young girl, since there was a hard ruthless unimaginative maleness to him which wore and even became the Latin formality like a young man's white tie and tails became him and stood him in good stead, with no real effort on his part at all. But this didn't matter. In fact, only the concupiscent wondered who the partner might be.

To the others, the rest, the most of them, the new victim was no more important than Mrs. Harriss. They turned the stem face of repudiation not on a seducer, but simply on another buck of the woods running the land, as though the native domestic supply were not enough. When they remembered Mrs. Harriss, it was as the peers and even superiors of her million dollars. They thought, not 'Poor woman' but 'Poor fool.'

And for a while, during the first months of that first year after they all came home from South America, the boy would ride with Captain Gualdres. And he, Charles, had already known that the boy could ride, and the boy did ride; it was when you watched him trying to follow Captain Gualdres over the steeplechase course that you actually realised what riding was. And he, Charles, thought that, with a Spanish-blooded guest in the house, maybe the boy would have someone to fence with.

But whether they did or not, nobody ever knew, and after a while the boy even stopped riding with his mother's guest or lover or his own prospective stepfather or whatever, and when the town saw the boy at all, it would be passing through the Square in the supercharged sports car with the top back and the rumble full of luggage, either going somewhere or just coming back. And after the six months, when he did see the boy close enough to look at his eyes, he would think: EVEN IF THERE WERE JUST TWO HORSES IN THE WORLD AND HE OWNED BOTH OF THEM, I WOULD HAVE TO WANT TO RIDE ONE MIGHTY HAD BEFORE I WOULD RIDE WITH HIM, EVEN IF MY NAME WAS CAPTAIN GUALDRES, II.

Yet these were the people — the puppets, the paper dolls; the situation, impasse, morality play, medicine show, whichever you liked best — dropped out of a clear sky into his uncle's lap at ten o'clock on a cold night four weeks before Christmas, and all his uncle saw fit or felt



inclined or even needful to do, was to come back to the board and move the pawn and say 'Move' as though it had never happened, never been; not only dismissed but repudiated, refused.

But he didn't move yet. And this time he repeated himself, stubbornly: 'It's the money.'

And this time his uncle repeated himself too, still abrupt, short, even harsh: 'Money? What does that boy care about money? He probably hates it, is put into a rage each time he has to carry a wad of it around with him simply because he wants to buy something or go somewhere. If it was just the money, I'd never have heard about it. He wouldn't have had to come here bursting in on me at ten o'clock at night, first with a royal ukase then with a lie then with a threat, just to keep his mother from marrying a man who has no money. Not even if the man had no money at all, which in Captain Gualdres' case may not even be the fact.'

'All right,' he said, quite stubbornly. 'He doesn't want his mother or sister either to marry that foreigner. Just not liking Captain Gualdres is plenty enough for that.'

Now his uncle really had finished talking, sitting opposite him across the chessboard, waiting. Then he discovered that his uncle was looking at him, steady and speculative and quite hard.

'Well well,' his uncle said. 'Well well well:' — looking at him while he found out that he hadn't forgot how to blush either. But he should have been used to that by now — or at least to the fact that his uncle would still remember it, whether it had slipped his mind or not. But at least he

stuck to his guns, holding his head up, hot suffusion and all, staring as steadily back as his uncle stared, answering that too:

‘Not to mention dragging his sister along to make her tell the lie.’

His uncle was looking at him, not quizzical now, not even staring: just looking.

‘Why is it,’ his uncle said, ‘that people of seventeen—’

‘Eighteen,’ he said. Or almost.’

‘All right,’ his uncle said. ‘Eighteen or almost — are so convinced that octogenarians like me are incapable of accepting or respecting or even remembering what the young ones consider passion and love?’

‘Maybe it’s because the old ones can no longer tell the difference between that and simple decency, like not dragging your sister six miles at ten o'clock on a cold December night to make her tell a lie.’

‘All right,’ his uncle said. ‘TOUCHE then. Will that do? Because I know one octogenarian of fifty who will put nothing past seventeen and eighteen and nineteen — and for that matter, sixteen too — , least of all, passion and love or decency or dragging your sister six or twenty-six miles at night to make her tell a lie or break a safe or commit a murder either — if he had to drag her. She didn’t have to come; at least, I saw no shackles.’

‘But she came,’ he said. ‘And she told the lie. She denied she and Captain Gualdres were ever engaged. But when you asked her right out if she loved him, she said Yes.’

‘And got dismissed from the room for saying it,’ his uncle said. That was when she told the truth — which incidentally I don’t put past seventeen and eighteen and nineteen either when there is a practical reason for it. She came in here, the two of them did, with the lie all rehearsed to tell me. But she lost her nerve. So they were each trying to use the other to accomplish a purpose. Only it’s not the same purpose.’

‘But at least they both quit when they saw it had failed. He quit pretty quick. He quit almost as hard as he started. I thought for a minute he was going to throw her out into the hall like she might have been a rag doll.’

‘Yes,’ his uncle said. Too quick. He quit that plan to try something else as soon as he found out he couldn’t depend on her. And she had already quit before then. She quit as soon as she began to believe, either that he was getting out of hand, or that I was not going to swallow it and so maybe I would get out of hand too. So they have both already decided to try something else, and I don’t like it. Because they are dangerous. Dangerous not because they are stupid; stupidity (your pardon, sir) is to be expected at that age. But because they have never had anybody to tell them they are young and stupid whom they had enough respect for or fear of to believe. — Move.’

And that seemed to be all of it as far as his uncle was concerned; at least on this subject he was going to get no more change from him apparently.

It seemed to be all of it indeed. He moved. He had planned it a long time back too, a longer time back than his uncle, counting as airmen do by contiguous and not elapsed time, because he had not had to make a landing long enough to repel an invading force and then get airborne

again, as his uncle had. He checked his uncle's queen and her castle both with the horse. Then his uncle fed him the pawn which only he, Charles, seemed to have believed that nobody had forgotten about, and he moved and then his uncle moved and then as usual it was all over.

'Maybe I should have taken the queen twenty minutes ago when I could, and let the castle go,' he said.

'Always,' his uncle said, starting to separate the white and the black pieces as he, Charles, reached for the box on the lower shelf of the smoking stand. 'You couldn't have taken them both without two moves. And a knight can move two squares at once and even in two directions at once. But he cant move twice' — shoving the black pieces across the board toward him. 'I'll take the white this time and you can try it.'

'It's after ten,' he said. 'It's almost ten thirty.'

'So it is,' his uncle said, setting up the black pieces. 'It often is.'

'I thought maybe I ought to be going to bed,' he said.

'Maybe you ought,' his uncle said, still absolutely immediate and absolutely bland. 'You don't mind if I stay up, do you?'

'Maybe you would have a better game then,' he said. 'Playing against yourself, at least you'd have the novelty of being surprised at your opponent's blunders.'

'All right, all right,' his uncle said. 'Didn't I say TOUCHE?'

At least put the pieces back on the board whether you use them or not.'

That was all he knew then. He didn't even suspect any more. But he learned fast — or caught on fast. This time they heard the feet first — the light sharp brittle staccato clapping that girls make, coming up the hall. He had already learned, from the time he had spent in his uncle's quarters, that you really never actually hear the sound of feet in any house or building containing at least two more or less separate establishments.

So he realised in the same moment (which was before she even knocked, even before his uncle said, 'Now it's your time to be too late to open it') that not only had his uncle known all the time that she would come back, but that he must have known it too. Only he thought at first that the boy had sent her back; it wasn't until afterward that he thought to wonder how she had managed to get away from him that quick.

She looked as if she had been running ever since, anyway, standing in the door for a moment after he opened it, holding the fur coat together at her throat with one hand and the long white dress flowing away from beneath it. And maybe the terror was still in her face, but there wasn't anything dazed about her eyes. And she even looked at him this time, good, when on the other one, as near as he could tell, she never had seen that he was in the room.

Then she quit looking at him. She came in and crossed the room fast to where his uncle (this time) stood beside the chessboard.

'I must see you alone,' she said.

'You are,' his uncle said. 'This is Charles Mallison, my nephew.' His uncle turned one of the chairs away from the chessboard. 'Sit down.'

But she didn't move.

'No,' she said. 'Alone.'

'If you cant tell me the truth with three here, you probably wont with just two,' his uncle said. 'Sit down.'

Still she didn't move for a space. He, Charles, couldn't see her face because her back was toward him. But her voice had changed completely.

'Yes,' she said. She turned toward the chair. Then she stopped again, already bending to sit down, half-turned and looking at the door as if she not only expected to hear the brother's feet coming up the hall, but as if she were on the point of running back to the front door to look up and down the street for him.

But it was hardly a pause, because she sat down, collapsing on down into the chair in that rapid swirling of skirts and legs both, as girls do, as if their very joints were hinged differently and at different places from men's.

'Can I smoke?' she said.

But before his uncle could reach for the box of cigarettes which his uncle himself didn't smoke, she had produced one from somewhere — no platinum-and-jewel case as you expected, but a single cigarette bent and crumpled and already shedding tobacco as if it had lain loose in her pocket for days, holding her wrist in the other hand as though to steady

it while she leaned the cigarette to the match his uncle struck. Then she expelled that one puff and laid the cigarette in the ashtray and put her hands in her lap, not clenched, just lying tight and small and still against the dark fur.

‘He’s in danger,’ she said. ‘I’m afraid.’

‘Ah,’ his uncle said. ‘Your brother is in danger.’

‘No no,’ she said, almost pettishly. ‘Not Max: Sehas — Captain Gualdres.’

‘I see,’ his uncle said. ‘Captain Gualdres is in danger. I’ve heard he rides hard, though I’ve never seen him on a horse myself.’

She took up the cigarette and drew on it twice rapidly and mashed it into the tray and put her hand back into her lap and looked at his uncle again.

‘All right,’ she said. ‘I love him. I told you that. But it’s all right. It’s just one of those things. That you can’t help. Mother saw him first, or he saw her first. Anyway, they belong to the same generation. Which I don’t, since S — Captain Gualdres is a good eight or ten years older than I am, maybe more. But no matter. Because that’s not it. He’s in danger. And even if he did give me the run-around for Mother, I still don’t want to see him hurt. At least I don’t want my brother locked up in jail for doing it.’

‘Especially as locking him up wouldn’t undo the deed,’ his uncle said. ‘I agree with you: much better to lock him up before.’

She looked at his uncle. ‘Before?’ she said. ‘Before what?’

‘Before he does what he might be locked up for having done,’ his uncle said in that bland immediate quick fantastic voice which lent not only a perspicacity but a sort of solid reasonableness to the most fantastic inconsequence.

‘Oh,’ she said. She looked at his uncle. ‘Lock him up how?’ she said. ‘I know that much about law, myself: that you can’t keep anybody locked up just because of what they are planning to do. Besides, he’d just give some Memphis lawyer two or three hundred dollars and be out again the next day. Isn’t that true?’

‘Isn’t it?’ his uncle said. ‘Remarkable how hard a lawyer will work for three hundred dollars.’

‘So that wouldn’t do any good at all, would it?’ she said. ‘Deport him.’

‘Deport your brother?’ his uncle said. ‘Where? What for?’

‘Stop it,’ she said. ‘Stop it. Don’t you know that if I had anyone else to go to, I wouldn’t be here? Deport Seb — Captain Gualdres.’

‘Ah,’ his uncle said. ‘Captain Gualdres. I’m afraid immigration authorities lack not only the will-to-succeed but the scope of movement too, of Memphis or three-hundred-dollar lawyers. It would take weeks, maybe months, to deport him, when if there is food for your fears, two days would be too much. Because what would your brother be doing all that time?’

‘Do you mean that you, a lawyer, couldn’t keep him locked up somewhere until Sebastian is out of the country?’

‘Keep who?’ his uncle said. ‘Locked up where?’



She stopped looking at his uncle, though she hadn't moved. 'Can I have a cigarette?' she said.

His uncle gave her one from the box on the table and held the match and she sat back again, puffing rapidly at it and talking through the puffs, still not looking at his uncle.

'All right,' she said. When things finally got so bad between Max and him, when I finally realised that Max hated him so much that something bad was going to happen, I persuaded Max to agree to—'

'— to save your mother's fiancé,' his uncle said. 'Your prospective new father.'

'All right,' she said through the rapid smoke, holding the cigarette between two fingers with pointed painted nails. 'Because there was nothing really settled between him and Mother — if there ever had been anything to settle. And so at least it wasn't Mother who wanted anything settled about it because... And he would have had the horses or at least the money to buy new ones, no matter which one of us.. She puffed rapidly at the cigarette, not looking at his uncle nor at anything. 'So when I found out that sooner or later Max was going to kill him if something wasn't done about it, I made a trade with Max that if he would wait twenty-four hours, I would come with him to you and persuade you to have him deported, back to the Argentine—'

'— where he wouldn't have anything but his captain's pay,' his uncle said. 'And then you would follow him.'

'All right,' she said. 'Yes. So we came to you, and then I saw that you didn't believe us and were not going to do anything about it and so the only thing I could think to do was to let Max see with you watching that

I loved him too, so that Max would do something to make you believe that at least Max meant what he was saying. And he did it and he does mean it and he's dangerous and you've got to help me. You've got to.'

'And you've got to do something too,' his uncle said. 'You've got to start telling the truth.'

'I have. I am.'

'But not all of it. What's wrong between your brother and Captain Gualdres. Not — as they say — chewing gum this time.' She watched his uncle for just a second through the rapid smoke. The cigarette was almost gone now, right down to the painted finger-tips.

'You're right,' she said. 'It's not the money. He doesn't care anything about money. There's plenty of that for Se — all of us. It wasn't even because of Mother. It was because Sebastian always beat him. At everything. Sebastian came without even a horse of his own, and Max rides well too but Sebastian beat him, beat him on Max's own horses, the very horses that Max knew Sebastian was going to be the owner of as soon as Mother came to town and said Yes. And Max had been the best pupil Paoli had had in years and one day Sebastian took a hearth-broom and parried through two ripostes until Max jerked the button off and went at him with the bare point and Sebastian used the hearth-broom like a sabre and beat down the lunge until somebody grabbed Max—'

She was breathing, not hard so much as fast, rapid, panting almost, still trying to draw on the cigarette which would have been too short to smoke even if her hand had been steady enough to hold it steady, sitting huddled in the chair in a kind of cloud of white tulle and satin and the rich dark heavy sheen of little slain animals, looking not wan so

much as delicate and fragile and not even fragile so much as cold, evanescent, like one of the stalked white early spring flowers bloomed ahead of its time into the snow and the ice and doomed before your eyes without even knowing that it was dying, feeling not even any pain.

‘That was afterward,’ his uncle said.

‘What? After what?’

‘That happened,’ his uncle said. ‘But it was afterward. You don’t want a man dead just because he beat you, on a horse or with a rapier either. At least, you don’t take actual steps to make the wish a fact’

‘Yes,’ she said.

‘No,’ his uncle said.

‘Yes.’

‘No.’

She leaned and put the cigarette stub into the ashtray as carefully as if it was an egg or maybe a capsule of nitroglycerin, and sat again, her hands not even shut now but lying open on her lap.

‘All right,’ she said. ‘I was afraid of this. I told — knew you wouldn’t be satisfied. It’s a woman.’

‘Ah,’ his uncle said.

‘I thought you would,’ she said, and now her voice had changed again, for the third time since she entered the room not ten minutes ago yet. Out there, about two miles from our back door. A farmer’s daughter. — Oh yes,’ she said, ‘I know that one too: Scott or Hardy or somebody else

three hundred years ago: the young lord of the manor and the villeins: DROIT DU SEIGNEUR and all the rest of it. Only this time it wasn't. Because Max gave her a ring.' Now her hands were lying on the chair arms, clenched again, and she wasn't looking at his uncle now either. 'A good deal different this time. Better than Hardy or Shakespeare either thought of.

Because there were two city lads this time: not only just the rich young earl but the young earl's foreign friend or anyway house-guest: the dark romantic foreign knight that heat the young earl riding the young earl's own horses and then took the young earl's sword away from him with a hearth-broom. Until at last all he had to do was ride at night up to the young earl's girl friend's window, and whistle — . Wait,' she said.

She got up. She was already walking before she got onto her feet. She crossed the room and jerked the door open before he could even move, her heels clapping hard and fast in the hall. Then the front door banged. And still his uncle just stood there looking at the open door.

'What?' he said. What?'

But his uncle didn't answer; his uncle was still watching the door and then almost before his uncle could have answered, they heard the front door again and then the hard brittle girl-heels in the hall, two pairs of them now, and the Harriss girl came in fast and crossed the room and flipped one hand backward behind her and said, There she is,' and went on and swirled down into the chair again while he and his uncle looked at the other girl — a country girl, because he had seen her face before in town on Saturday, but that was the only way you could tell them now because their mouths and faces were painted too and sometimes their fingernails and the Sears, Roebuck clothes didn't look like Sears,

Roebuck now and sometimes they were not even Sears, Roebuck even if they were not trimmed off in thousand-dollar mink; — a girl about the same age as the Harriss girl but not quite as tall, slender yet solid too, as country-bred girls can look, with dark hair and black eyes, looking at him for a second and then at his uncle.

‘Come in,’ his uncle said. ‘I’m Mr. Stevens. Your name is Mossop.’

‘I know it,’ the girl said. ‘No, sir. My mother was a Mossop. My father is Hence Cayley.’

‘She’s got the ring too,’ the Harriss girl said. ‘I asked her to bring it because I knew you wouldn’t believe it any more than I did when I heard it. I don’t blame her for not wearing it. I wouldn’t wear anybody’s ring either that said to me what Max said to her.’

The Cayley girl looked at the Harriss girl — a look level and black and unwinking and quite calm — for about a minute while the Harriss girl took another cigarette from the box, though this time nobody went to strike the match for her.

Then the Cayley girl looked at his uncle again. Her eyes were all right so far. They were just watchful.

‘I never did wear it,’ she said. ‘On account of my father. He don’t think Max is any good. And I’m not going to even keep it, as soon as I can find him to give it back. Because I don’t think so too now—’

The Harriss girl made a sound. It didn’t sound to him like anything she would have learned in a Swiss convent either. The Cayley girl gave her another of the hard black contemplative looks. But her eyes were still all right. Then she looked at his uncle again.

'I didn't mind what he said to me. I didn't like the way he said it. Maybe that was the only way he could think of to say it at the time. But he ought to have been able to think of a different way. But I wasn't mad because he felt he had to say it.'

'I see,' his uncle said.

'I wouldn't have minded his having to say it, anyway,' she said.

'I see,' his uncle said.

'But he was wrong. He was wrong from the beginning. He was the one that said first that maybe I better not wear the ring out where folks could see it for a while yet. I never even had time to tell him I already knew better than to let Papa find out I even had it—'

The Harriss girl made the sound again. This time the Cayley girl stopped and turned her head quite slowly and looked at the Harriss girl for five or six seconds while the Harriss girl sat with the unlighted cigarette between her fingers. Then the Cayley girl looked at his uncle again.

'So he was the one that said we better not be engaged except in private. So since I wasn't to be engaged except in private, I didn't see any reason why Captain Goldez—'

'Gualdres,' the Harriss girl said.

'Goldez,' the Cayley girl said. '— or anybody else couldn't ride up and sit on our gallery and talk to us. And I liked to ride horses that didn't have trace-galls for a change too, so when he would bring one along for me—'

‘How could you tell whether it had a trace-gall or not, in the dark?’ the Harriss girl said.

Now the Cayley girl, and still without haste, turned her whole body and looked at the Harriss girl.

‘What?’ she said. ‘What did you say?’

‘Here,’ his uncle said. ‘Stup it.’

‘You old fool,’ the Harriss girl said. She wasn’t even looking at his uncle. ‘Do you think that any man except one like you with one foot already in the grave, would spend half the night every night riding a horse up and down an empty polo field by himself?’

Then the Cayley girl moved. She went fast, stooping and hiking up the hem of her skirt and taking something from the top of her stocking as she went, and stopped in front of the chair and if it had been a knife, he and his uncle would still have been too late.

‘Stand up,’ she said.

Now the Harriss girl said ‘What?’ looking up, the hand still holding the unlighted cigarette in front of her mouth. The Cayley girl didn’t speak again. She just rocked back onto her heels, slender and solid too, and swung her arm back and his uncle was moving now, hollering ‘Stop it! Stop it!’ hut the Cayley girl had already swung, slapping the Harriss girl’s face and the cigarette and the hand that held it, all together, and the Harriss girl jerked in the chair and then sat with the broken cigarette dangling between her fingers and a long thin scratch down her cheek; and then the ring itself, a big diamond, tumbled winking down the front of her coat and onto the floor.

The Harriss girl looked at the cigarette a moment. Then she looked at his uncle. 'She slapped me!' she said.

'I saw her,' his uncle said. 'I was just about to, myself — and then jumped too; he had to: the Harriss girl coming fast out of the chair and the Cayley girl already rocked back onto her heels again. But his uncle got there first, between them this time, flinging the Harriss girl back with one arm and the Cayley girl with the other, until in another second they both stood there crying, bawling, exactly like two three-year-olds who have been fighting, while his uncle watched them for a moment and then stooped and picked up the ring.

'That'll do now,' his uncle said. 'Stop it. Both of you. Go to the bathroom and wash your faces. Through that door yonder' — saying quickly 'Not together' as they both moved. 'One at a time. You first,' to the Harriss girl. 'There's styptic in the cabinet if you want it, fear hydrophobia rather than merely believe in it. Show her the way, Chick.'

But she had already gone on into the bedroom. The Cayley girl stood wiping her nose on the back of her hand until his uncle handed her his handkerchief.

'I'm sorry,' she said, sniffing, snuffling, that is. 'But she ought not to have made me do it.'

'She ought not to have been able to,' his uncle said. 'I suppose she had you waiting out there in the car all the time. Drove out to your house and got you.'

The Cayley girl blew her nose into the handkerchief. 'Yes sir,' she said.



'Then you'll have to drive her home,' his uncle said to him, not looking back. 'They both cant—'

But the Cayley girl was all right now. She gave her nose a good hard wipe right and then left and started to hand the handkerchief back to his uncle and then stopped, letting the hand drop at her side.

'I'll go back with her,' she said. 'I'm not afraid of her. It wont be but two miles home even if she wont take me any further than her gate.'

'All right,' his uncle said. 'Here': holding out the ring. It was a big diamond; it was all right too. The Cayley girl didn't hardly look at it.

'I don't want it,' she said.

'I wouldn't either,' his uncle said. 'But you owe yourself the decency of letting your own hand be the returner.'

So she took the ring and then the Harriss girl returned and the Cayley girl went to bathe her face, still carrying the handkerchief. The Harriss girl looked all right again, with a glazed swipe of styptic on the scratch; and she had the platinum-and-jewel box now, but it was powder and such. She didn't look at either of them. She looked into the mirror in the box's lid, finishing her face.

'I should apologise, I suppose,' she said. 'But I imagine lawyers see all sorts of things in their trade.'

'We try to avoid bloodshed,' his uncle said.

'Bloodshed,' she said. She forgot her face then and the platinum-and-jewel box too and the flipness and the hardness both went and when she looked at his uncle, the terror and dread were in her eyes again;

and he knew that, whatever he and his uncle might think about what her brother could or would or might do, at least she didn't have any doubts. 'You've got to do something,' she said. 'You've got to. If I had known anybody else to go to, I wouldn't have bothered you. But I'

'You told me he made a pact with you to do nothing for twenty-four hours,' his uncle said. 'Do you think he will hold himself still bound to it, or will he do what you did — make an effort of his own behind your back too?'

'I don't know,' she said. 'If you could just lock him up until I'

'Which I can't do, any more than I can have the other one deported before breakfast. Why don't you deport him yourself? You said that you—'

Now there was terror and despair both in her face.

'I can't. I tried. Maybe Mother is a better man than I am, after all. I even tried to tell him. But he's like you: he doesn't believe either that Max is dangerous. He says it would be running from a child.'

'That's just exactly what it would be,' his uncle said. 'That's just exactly why.'

'Exactly why what?'

'Nothing,' his uncle said. Then his uncle was not looking at her, not looking at any of them, not at anything as far as he could tell, just standing there rubbing the ball of his thumb against the bowl of the cob pipe. Then she said, 'Can I have another cigarette?'

Why not?' his uncle said. She took the cigarette from the box and this time he lit it for her, passing his uncle to the smoking stand, stepping carefully among the scattered chessmen to strike the match as the Cayley girl came in, not looking at anybody either, saying to his uncle:

'It's on the mirror.'

'What?' his uncle said.

'Your handkerchief,' the Cayley girl said. 'I washed it.'

'Oh,' his uncle said, and the Harriss girl said, 'Just talking to him wont do any good either. You tried that once, you know.'

'I don't remember,' his uncle said. 'I don't recall hearing anything but him. But you are right about the talking. I have an idea this whole business started because somebody has already talked too much.'

But she wasn't even listening. 'And we'll never get him in here again either. So you'll have to come out there—'

'Good night,' his uncle said.

She was not listening at all. ' — in the morning before he can get out of bed and go somewhere. I'll telephone you in the morning when will be the best time—'

'Good night,' his uncle said again.

Then they were gone: through the sittingroom door, leaving it open of course; that is, the Harriss girl did, though when he went to close it the Cayley girl had turned back to do it until she saw he was already there.

But when he started to shut it, his uncle said, 'Wait' so he stood holding it and they heard the hard brittle girlheels in the hall and then, sure enough, the front door too.

'That's what we thought the other time,' his uncle said. 'Go and make sure.'

But they were gone. Standing in the open front door in the vivid chill windless December dark, he heard the overrevved engine and watched the big supercharged roadster lurch almost into full speed with a whine a squeal of tires on pavement, then around the next corner, the tail-lights sucking from view too fast there too, so that long after it must have crossed the Square, it seemed to him that he could still smell the outraged rubber.

Then he went back to the sittingroom where his uncle now sat among the scattered chessmen, filling the pipe. He went on without stopping and picked up the chessboard and set it back on the table. Luckily all the fighting had taken place in the other direction, so none of the pieces had been stepped on. He gathered them up from around his uncle's feet and set them back in place on the board again, even advancing the white queen's pawn in the orthodox opening which his uncle insisted on. His uncle was still filling the pipe.

'So they were right about Captain Gualdres after all,' he said. 'It was a girl.'

'What girl?' his uncle said. 'Didn't one of them drive six miles twice tonight just to make sure we understood that she wanted her name coupled with Captain Gualdres', no matter what the conditions; and the

other one not only resorted to fisticuffs to refute the aspersion, she cant even spell his name?’

‘Oh,’ he said. Then he didn’t say it. He drew his chair up and sat down again. His uncle watched him.

‘You had a nice sleep?’ his uncle said.

He was a little slow on that one too. But all he had to do was to wait, because the only time when his uncle absolutely refused to diagram his wit was when it was really witty, really brilliant: never when it merely had an edge.

‘Thirty minutes ago you were on your way to be. I couldn’t even stop you.’

‘And I almost missed something,’ he said. ‘I don’t intend to this time.’  
There will be no more to miss tonight.’

‘I thought that too,’ he said. ‘That Cayley girl—’

‘— is safe at home,’ his uncle said. ‘Where, I hope and trust, she will stay. And the other one too. Move then.’

‘I already have,’ he said.

‘Then move again,’ his uncle said, matching the white pawn. ‘And watch what you are doing this time.’

He thought he did, was, had, always had every time. But all watching what he was doing seemed to accomplish was to show him a little sooner than ordinary that this one too was going to end just like the other did: until suddenly his uncle swept the board clean and set up a single problem with the horses and rooks and two pawns.

'It stops being a game then,' he said.

'Nothing by which all human passion and hope and folly can be mirrored and then proved, ever was just a game,' his uncle said.

'Move.'

And this time it was the telephone, and this time he knew it was going to be the telephone and he even knew what the telephone was going to say, not even really having to listen to the one audible side of it: nor did that take his uncle long:

'Yes? Speaking... When?... I see. When you got home they just told you he had packed his bag and taken his car and said he was going to Memphis.... No no, never prescribe for a physician nor invite a postman to a walk': and put the receiver back into the cradle and sat there with his hand still on it, not moving, not even breathing apparently, not even rubbing the thumb against the bowl of the pipe; sitting there so long that he was getting ready to speak, when his uncle raised the receiver and asked for the number, nor did this take long either: to Mr. Robert Markey in Memphis, a lawyer and in city politics too, who had been at Heidelberg with his uncle:

'No no, not the police; they couldn't hold him. I don't want him held anyway; I just want him watched, so he can't leave Memphis without me knowing it. A good private man, just to keep an eye on him without him knowing it — unless he tries to leave Memphis.... What? I never really authorise actual bloodshed, at least not with witnesses.... Yes, until I come up and put my own hand on him, tomorrow or next day... At the hotel... There's only one: the Greenbury.

Did you ever hear of a Mississippian who has learned yet there is another one? (Which was true enough; there was a saying in North Mississippi that the state began in the lobby of the Greenbury hotel)... Assumed name? Him? The last thing he is running from is notoriety.

He will probably call all the newspapers to be sure they have his name and location right, and that they record it.... No no, just wire me in the morning that you have him safely under surveillance and keep him so until you hear from me again': and put the telephone down and got up, but not to return to the chessboard hut instead went to the door and opened it and stood holding the knob, until finally he did catch up. He got up and picked up the book he had started upstairs with three hours ago. But this time he spoke, and this time his uncle answered him:

'But what do you want with him?'

'I don't,' his uncle said. 'I just want to know he's in Memphis, and that he stays there. Which he will do; he will want me and the rest of the world too to be convinced he is safely and harmlessly in Memphis, or anywhere else except Jefferson, Mississippi, ten times more than I want to know it.'

But he was slow on that too; he had to ask that too.

'His alibi,' his uncle said.

And that too.

'For whatever he is planning to do — whatever trick he has invented to frighten his mother's fiancé into leaving the country.'

'Trick?' he said. What trick?'

‘How do I know?’ his uncle said. ‘Ask yourself; you’re eighteen, or so near it doesn’t matter; you know what a child of nineteen will do: a Black Hand letter maybe, or even a reasonably careful shot fired through the bedroom window at him. I’m fifty; all I know is that people nineteen years old will do anything, and that the only thing which makes the adult world at all safe from them is the fact that they are so preconvinced of success that the simple desire and will are the finished accomplishment, that they pay no attention to mere dull mechanical details.’

‘Then if the trick’s not going to work, you don’t need to worry,’ he said.

‘I’m not worrying,’ his uncle said. ‘I’m being worried. Worse; annoyed. I just want to keep my — or Mr. Markey’s — finger on him until I can telephone his sister tomorrow and she — or their mother, or anyone else in the family who have or hope to have any control over him or either or both of them — can go up there and get him and do whatever they want to with him; I would suggest that they tie him up in one of the stalls and let his prospective father (this might even be enough reason to Captain Gualdres for him to give over his maiden hesitancy and consent to an immediate marriage) work on him with his riding-crop.’

‘Oh,’ he said. ‘Anyway, there’s nothing wrong with that Cayley girl. Maybe if he’d just been here tonight and seen her when his sister—’

‘Nobody ever believed there was, except his sister,’ his uncle said. ‘She was the one who ever convinced him in the first place that there was, started this whole thing. To get her own man. Maybe she thought that,



as soon as her brother reached for that foil again, Gualdres would leave the country.

Or maybe she hoped that simple discretion and good sense would be enough to move him; in either case, all she would have to do would be to follow him, to some or any other place in the United States or even back to the Argentine (where of course there are no other women) and, by surprise envelopment or perhaps simple compromise, gain the victory, render him at least monogamous. But she underestimated him; she aspersed his character with the crime of maturity too.'

His uncle held the door open, looking at him.

'There's nothing actually wrong with any of them except youth. Only — as I believe I mentioned a moment ago — the possession of youth is a good deal like, the possession of smallpox or bubonic plague.'

'Oh,' he said again. 'Maybe that's what's the matter with Captain Gualdres too. We were wrong about him. I thought he was about forty. But she said he's not hut eight or ten years older than she is.'

Which means she believes he is about fifteen years older,' his uncle said. Which means he is probably about twenty-five older.'

Twenty-five?' he said. 'That would put him right back where he used to be.'

'Had he ever left it?' his uncle said. His uncle held the door open. Well? What are you waiting for?'

'Nothing,' he said.

'Then good night too,' his uncle said. 'You go home too. This kindergarten is closed for the day.'

III.

So that was that. He went upstairs to his room. He went to bed too, taking off the uniform, 'shedding the brown' as the Corps called it. Because this was Thursday, and the battalion always drilled on Thursday. And he was not only cadet lieutenant colonel this year, but nobody ever missed drill because, although the Academy was only a prep school, it had one of the highest R.O.T.C. ratings in the country; at the last review, the inspector-general himself told them that when war came, every one of them who could prove he was eighteen years old would be almost automatically eligible for officer-candidate school.

Which included him too, since he was already so near eighteen that you could put the difference in your eye. Except that it wouldn't matter now whether he was eighteen or eight or eighty; he would be too late even if he were going to wake up eighteen tomorrow morning. It would be over and people would already have begun to be able to start forgetting about it before he could even reach officers' school, let alone finish the course.

It was already over even now as far as the United States was concerned: the British, the handful of boys, some no older than he and some probably not even as old, who flew the Royal Air Force's fighter command, had stopped them on the west and so now there was nothing left for that whole irresistible tide of victory and destruction to do but vanish away into the plumbless depths of Russia like the mop-thrust push of dirty water across a kitchen floor: so that each time during the fifteen months since that fall of 1940 that he took the

uniform down or hung it back up in the closet — the khaki serge true enough such as real officers wore but without even the honest stripes of N.C.O.'s but instead, the light-blue tabs and facings of R.O.T.C. like the lapel badges of fraternity pledges, and the innocent pastless metal lozenges such as you might see on the shoulders of a swank hotel doorman or the leader of a circus band, to divorce it still further from the realm of valor and risk, the heart's thirst for glory and renown; — each time he looked at it, in the eyes of that heart's thirst (if that's what it was), certainly in the irremediable regret which had been his these last months after he realised that it was too late, that he had procrastinated, deferred too long, lacking not only the courage but even the will and the desire and the thirst, the khaki altered transmogrified dissolved like the moving-picture shot, to the blue of Britain and the hooked wings of a diving falcon and the modest braid of rank: but above all the blue, the color the shade which the handful of Anglo Saxon young men had established and decreed as such visual synonym of glory that only last spring an association of American haberdashers or gents' outfitters had adopted it as a trade slogan, so that every lucky male resident of the United States who had the price could walk into church that Easter morning in the authentic aura of valor yet at the same time safe from the badges of responsibility and the candy-stripes of risk.

Yet he had made a little something resembling an attempt (and he thought a little better of it for the very fact that remembering he had done so gave him no comfort). There was Captain Warren, a farmer a few miles from town, who had been a flight commander in the old Royal Flying Corps before it became the RAF; he had gone to see him that day going on two years ago now when he was only just past sixteen.

'If I could get to England some way, they would take me, wouldn't they?' he said.

'Sixteen's a little young. And getting to England's a little hard to do too now.'

'But they would take me if I could get there, wouldn't they?' he said.

'Yes.' Captain Warren said. Then Captain Warren said, 'Look. There's plenty of time. There'll be plenty and more for all of us before it's over. Why not wait?'

So he did. He waited too long. He could tell himself that he had done that at the advice of a hero, which at least did this much for the heart's thirst: having accepted and followed it from a hero would forever prevent his forgetting that, no matter how deficient he might be in courage, at least he wasn't in shame.

Because it was too late now. In fact, as far as the United States was concerned, it had never begun at all and so all it would cost the United States was just money: which, his uncle said, was the cheapest thing you could spend or lose: which was why civilization invented it: to be the one substance man could shop with and have a bargain in whatever he bought.

So apparently the whole purpose of the draft had been merely to establish a means for his uncle to identify Max Harriss, and since the identification of Max Harriss had accomplished no more than the interruption of a chess-game and a sixty-cent telephone toll to Memphis, even that was not worth its cost.

So he went to bed and to sleep; tomorrow was Friday so he would not have to put on the pseudo khaki in order to shed the brown and, for another week, the heart's thirst, if that's what it was. And he ate breakfast; his uncle had already eaten and gone, and he stopped at his

uncle's office on the way to school to pick up the notebook he had left yesterday, and Max Harriss wasn't in Memphis; the wire came from Mr. Markey while he was still in the office:

Missing prince missing here too now what and he was still there while his uncle told the boy to wait and wrote the answer:

No what just thanks and so that was that too; he thought that was all; when he came back at noon to where his uncle waited on the corner to walk home to dinner, he didn't even think to ask; it was his uncle who voluntarily told him how Mr. Markey had even telephoned and said how Harriss seemed to be well known not only to all the clerks and telephone girls and the Negro doormen and bellboys and waiters in the Greenbury, but to all the liquor stores and taxi-drivers in that part of town too, and that he, Mr. Markey, had even tried the other hotels just on the impossible supposition that there was one Mississippian who had heard there were others in Memphis.

So he said, like Mr. Markey: 'Now what?'

'I don't know,' his uncle said. 'I would like to believe that he had dusted the whole lot of them from his feet and was a good five hundred miles away by now, and still travelling, except that I wouldn't asperse him either behind his back with an accusation of judgment.'

'Maybe he has,' he said.

His uncle stopped walking.

'What?' his uncle said.

'You just said last night that people nineteen years old are capable of anything.'

'Oh,' his uncle said. 'Yes,' his uncle said. 'Of course,' his uncle said, walking on again. 'Maybe he has.'

And that was all: eating his dinner: walking back with his uncle as far as the office corner: in school that afternoon, through the history class which Miss Melissa Hogganbeck now called World Affairs with capitals on both, which, coming twice a week, should have been worse for the heart's thirst than the inevitable next Thursdays when he would have to tote the brown again — the sabre and the pastless shoulder-pips — and posture through the spurious the straightfaced the make-believe of command, but which was not at all: the tireless cultured educated 'lady's' voice talking with a kind of frantic fanaticism of peace and security: of how we were safe because the old worn-out nations of Europe had learned their lesson too well in 1918; they not only did not dare outrage us, they couldn't even afford to, until the world's whole staggering and savage mass was reduced to that weightless interminable murmuring not even echoed within the isolate insulate dusty walls of a prep-school classroom and having a hundred times less connection with any reality than even the sword and the pips.

Because at least the sabre and pips were a make-believe of what they parodied, while to Miss Hogganbeck the whole establishment of national R.O. T.C. was an inescapable inexplicable phenomenon of the edifice of education, like the necessity for having children in the junior courses.

And it was still all even when he had seen the horse. It was in a muddy horse-van standing in an alley behind the square when he passed after school, with a half dozen men standing around looking at the van from

a definitely respectful distance, and only afterward did he actually see the horse shackled into the van not with ropes but with steel chains as if it were a lion or an elephant. Because he hadn't really looked at the van yet.

In fact, he hadn't even got as far as affirming, accepting that there was a horse in it, because at that moment he saw Mr. Rafe McCallum himself coming up the alley and he crossed the street to speak to him because he and his uncle would go out to the McCallum farm fifteen miles from town to shoot quail in season, and, until they enlisted last summer, he used to go out there by himself to spend the night in the woods or the creek bottom running fox or coon with the twin McCallum nephews.

So he recognized the horse, not by seeing it, because he had never seen it, but by seeing Mr. McCallum. Because everybody in the county knew -the horse or knew about it — a stallion of first blood and pedigree hut absolutely worthless; they — the county — said that this was the only time in his life that Mr. McCallum had ever been beaten in a horse-trade, even if had bought this one with tobacco-or soap-coupons.

It had been ruined either as a colt or a young horse, probably by some owner who had tried to break its spirit by fear or violence. Only its spirit had refused to break, so that all it had got from whatever the experience had been, was a hatred for anything walking upright on two legs, something like that abhorrence and rage and desire to destroy it which some humans feel for even harmless snakes.

It was unrideable and unmanageable even for breeding. It was said to have killed two men who just happened to get on the same side of a fence with it. Though this was not very probable, or the horse would

have been destroyed. But Mr. McCallum was supposed to have bought it because its owner wanted to destroy it. Or maybe he believed he could tame it. Anyway, he always denied that it had ever killed anyone, so at least he must have thought he could sell it, since no horse was ever quite as bad as the man who bought it claimed, or as good as the man who sold it contended.

But Mr. McCallum knew that it could kill a man, and the county believed that he thought it would. For although he would go into the lot where it was (though never into a stall or pen where it would be cornered), he would never let anyone else do it; and it was said that once a man had offered to buy it from him, but he had refused. Which had an apocryphal sound too, since Mr. McCallum said himself that he would sell anything which couldn't stand up on its hind legs and call his name, because that was his business.

So here was the horse roped and chained and blanketed into a horse-box fifteen miles from its home paddock, and so he said to Mr. McCallum:

'You finally sold it.'

'I hope so,' Mr. McCallum said. 'A horse aint ever sold until the new stall door is shut behind it though. Sometimes not even then.'

'But at least it's on the way,' he said.

'At least it's on the way,' Mr. McCallum said.

Which didn't mean much, didn't mean anything in fact except that Mr. McCallum would have to hurry like billy-O just to prove he hadn't even sold it. Which would be in the dark and a good while into it: four oclock



now, and anyone who had engaged to buy that horse would have to have lived a long way off not to have heard about it.

Then he thought how anybody who bought that horse would live too far away to be reached in just one daylight even if it were the twenty-second of June, let alone the fifth of December, so maybe it didn't matter what time Mr. McCallum started, and so he went on to his uncle's office and that was all except the postscript and even that was not too long away; his uncle had the practice brief all laid out for him on the desk and the list of references beside it and he got to work and it seemed almost at once when the light began to fail and he switched on the desk lamp and then the telephone rang.

The girl's voice was already talking when he lifted the receiver and it never did stop, so that it was a second or two before he could recognize it:

'Hello! Hello! Mr. Stevens! He was here! Nobody even knew it!

He just left! They called me from the garage and I ran down and he was already in the car with the engine running and he said if you want to see him, to be on your corner in five minutes; he said he wouldn't be able to come up to your office, for you to be on the corner in five minutes if you want to see him, otherwise you can call and maybe get an appointment with him at the Greenbury hotel tomorrow—' and still talking when his uncle came in and took the receiver and listened for a moment, and probably still talking even after his uncle put the receiver back up.

'Five minutes?' his uncle said. 'Six miles?'

'You never saw him drive,' he said. 'He's probably already crossing the Square.'

But that would be a little too fast even for that one. He and his uncle went down to the street and stood on the corner in the cold dusk for what seemed like ten minutes to him, until at last he began to believe that here was some more of the same hurrah and hokum and uproar they had been in the middle of or at least on the edge of, since last night, in which the last thing they would expect would be not only what they might have expected, but what they had been warned to look for.

But they did see him. They heard the car, the horn: the heel of the Harriss boy's palm on the button or maybe he had simply reached inside the dash or the hood and jerked the ground connection loose, and probably if the boy was thinking about anything at all then, he was being sorry he didn't have an old-time muffler cutout.

And he, Charles, thought of Hampton Killegrew, the night marshal, running out of the pool room or the Allnite Inn or wherever he would be at this time and already too late too, the car howling and wailing up the street toward the Square with all the lights burning, parking driving and fog, then blatting and crashing between the brick walls and the street narrowed into the Square; and afterward he remembered a cat leaping in silhouette across the rushing lights, looking ten feet long one second then the next one high and narrow as a fleeing fence post.

But luckily there wasn't anybody else but him and his uncle at the crossing and the boy saw them then, the lights swinging down at them as if he was going to drive right up onto the curb. Then they swung away at the last second and he could have touched the boy — the face, the teeth glinting in it — as the car shot past into the Square and

crossed it and slewed skidding, the tires squealing against the pavement, into the Memphis highway, the horn and the tires and the engine growing fainter and fainter, until at last he and his uncle could even hear Hampton Killegrew running toward the corner cursing and yelling.

‘Did you pull the door to?’ his uncle said.

‘Yes sir,’ he said.

‘Then let’s go home to supper,’ his uncle said. ‘You can stop at the telegraph office on the way.’

So he stopped in the telegraph office and sent the wire to Mr. Markey exactly as his uncle had worded it:

He is now Greenbury tonight use police per request Jefferson chief if necessary

and came out and overtook his uncle at the next corner.

‘Why the police now?’ he said. ‘I thought you said—’

‘To escort him on through Memphis toward wherever he is going,’ his uncle said. ‘In any direction except back here.’

‘But why is he going anywhere?’ he said. ‘You said last night that the last place he will want to be is out of sight; the last place he will want to be is where nobody can see him, until after his joke—’

‘Then I was wrong,’ his uncle said. ‘I maligned him too. Apparently I attributed to nineteen not only more ingenuity than it is capable of, but

even malice too. Come along. You're late. You've not only got to eat supper, you've got to get back to town.'

'To the office?' he said. 'The telephone? Can't they call you at home? Besides, if he's not even going to stop in Memphis, what will they have to telephone you about—'

'No,' his uncle said. 'To the picture show. And before you can ask that, the reason is, that's the one place where nobody nineteen or twenty-one named Harriss nor going on eighteen named Mallison either, can talk to me. I'm going to work. I shall spend the evening in the company of scoundrels and felons who have not only the courage of their evil, but the competence for it too.'

He knew what that meant: the Translation. So he didn't even go to his uncle's sittingroom. And his uncle left the supper table first, so he didn't see him again.

And if he, Charles, hadn't gone to the picture show, he wouldn't have seen his uncle at all that evening: eating his supper without haste since there was plenty of time despite his uncle and only his uncle seemed to want to avoid the human race: walking still without haste, since there was still plenty of time, through the cold vivid dark toward the Square and the picture show, not knowing what he was going to see and not even caring; it might be another war picture he was walking toward and it didn't even matter, thinking remembering how once a war picture should, ought, to have been the worst thing of all for the heart's thirst to have to endure, except that it was not, since there lay between the war movie and Miss Hogganbeck's world events a thousand times even the insuperable distance which lay between Miss Hogganbeck's world events and the R.O.T.C. pips and the sword: thinking how if the human race could just pass all its time watching moving pictures, there would

be no more wars nor any other man-made anguishes, except for the fact that man couldn't spend that much time watching moving pictures since boredom was the one human passion that movies couldn't cope with and man would have to spend at least eight hours a day watching them since he would have to sleep for another eight and his uncle said the only other thing man could stand for eight continuous hours was work.

So he went to the show. And if he hadn't gone to the show, he wouldn't have been passing the Allnite Inn where he could see, recognise the empty horse-van at the curb before it with the empty chains and shackles looped through the side-planks, and, turning his head toward the window, Mr. McCallum himself at the counter, eating, the heavy white-oak cudgel he always carried around strange horses and mules, leaning against the counter beside him. And if he hadn't had fourteen minutes yet before the week-night hour (except Saturday or unless there was a party) when he was supposed to be back home and indoors, he wouldn't have entered the Inn and asked Mr. McCallum who had bought the horse.

The moon was up now. Once the lighted Square was behind him, he could watch the chopping shadows of his legs chopping off the shadows of the leafless branches and then finally of the fence pickets too, though not for long because he climbed the fence at the corner of the yard and so saved the distance between there and the gate.

And now he could see the shaded down-glow of the desk lamp beyond the sitting-room window and, himself not walking hurrying but rather being swept along on the still-pristine cresting of the astonishment and puzzlement and (most of all, though he didn't know why) haste, his instinct was to stop, avoid evade — anything rather than violate that interdiction, that hour, that ritual of the Translation which the whole

family referred to with a capital T — the rendering of the Old Testament back into the classic Greek into which it had been translated from its lost Hebrew infancy — which his uncle had been engaged on for twenty years now, a few days over two years longer than he, Charles, had lived, retiring to the sittingroom once a week always (and sometimes two and three times provided that many things happened to displease or affront him), shutting the door behind him: nor man woman nor child, client well-wisher or friend, to touch even the knob until his uncle turned it from inside.

And he, Charles, thought how if he had been eight instead of almost eighteen, he wouldn't have paid any attention even to that student lamp and that shut door; or how if he had been twenty-four instead of eighteen, he wouldn't have been here at all just because another boy nineteen years old bought a horse. Then he thought how maybe that was backward; that he would have been hurrying faster than ever at twenty-four and at eight he wouldn't have come at all since at eighteen all he knew to do was just the hurrying, the haste, the astonishment, since, his uncle to the contrary or not, his was one eighteen anyway which couldn't begin to anticipate how Max Harriss's nineteen hoped to circumvent or retaliate on anybody with even that horse.

But then he didn't need to; his uncle would attend to that. All required of him was the hurry, the speed. And he had supplied that, holding the steady half-walk half-trot from that first step through the Inn door where he could turn the corner, to the yard and across it and up the steps into the hall and down the hall to the closed door, not pausing at all, his hand already reaching for the knob, then into the sitting-room where his uncle sat in shirtsleeves and an eyeshade at the desk beneath the lamp, not even looking up, the Bible propped open in front of him and the Greek dictionary and the cob pipe at his elbow and the better part of a ream of yellow copy paper strewn about the floor at his feet.

‘He bought the horse,’ he said. ‘What can he do with the horse?’

Nor did his uncle look up yet nor even move. ‘Ride it, I hope,’ his uncle said. Then his uncle looked up, reaching for the pipe. ‘I thought it was understood—’

His uncle stopped, the pipe too, the stem already turned to approach his uncle’s mouth, the hand holding it just clear of the desk, motionless. And he had seen this before and it seemed for a moment that he was watching it now: the instant during which his uncle’s eyes no longer saw him, while behind them shaped the flick and click of the terse glib succinct sentence sometimes less than two words long, which would blast him back out of the room.

‘All right,’ his uncle said. ‘What horse?’

He answered, succinct too. ‘McCallum’s. That stallion.’

‘All right,’ his uncle said again.

And this time he was not slow; he didn’t need the diagram. ‘I just left him at the Inn, eating supper. He took it out there this afternoon. I saw the truck in the alley on the way from school this afternoon, but I didn’t—’

His uncle was not seeing him at all; the eyes were as empty as the Harriss girl’s had been when she came through the door the first time last night. Then his uncle said something. It was in Greek, the old Greek, as his uncle was back there in the old time when the Old Testament had first been translated or even written.

Sometimes his uncle would do that: say something for him in English that neither of them would have intended for his, Charles's, mother to hear, then again in the old Greek, and even to him who couldn't understand the Greek, it sounded a lot stronger, a lot more like whoever was saying it meant exactly that, even to the ones who couldn't understand it or at least hadn't understood it until now.

And this was one of them and neither did this sound like anything that anybody had got out of the Bible, at least since the Anglo-Saxon puritans had got hold of it. His uncle was up now too, snatching off the eyeshade and flinging it away, and kicked the chair backward and snatched his coat and vest from the other chair.

'My overcoat and hat,' his uncle said. 'On the bed. Jump.'

And he jumped. They went out of the room exactly like an automobile with a scrap of paper being sucked along behind it, up the hall with his uncle in front in the flapping coat and vest now and still holding his arms extended back for the overcoat, and he, Charles, still trying to gain enough to shove the overcoat sleeves over his uncle's hands.

Then across the moonlit yard to the car, he still carrying the hat, and into the car; and without warming the engine at all, his uncle rushed it backward on the choke at about thirty miles an hour, out of the drive into the street and dragged the tires and whirled it around and went up the street still on the choke and took the corner on the wrong side, crossing the Square almost as fast as Max Harriss had done, and slammed in beside Mr. McCallum's truck in front of the Inn and jumped out.



'You wait,' his uncle said, running on across the pavement into the Inn, where through the window he watched Mr. McCallum still sitting at the counter drinking coffee with the stick still leaning beside him until his uncle ran up and snatched it up and turned without even stopping, sucking Mr. McCallum along behind and out of there just as he had sucked him, Charles, out of the sitting room two minutes ago, back to the car where his uncle jerked the door open and told him, Charles, to move over and drive and flung the stick in and shoved Mr. McCallum in and got in himself and slammed the door.

Which was all right with him, because his uncle was worse even than Max Harriss, even when he wasn't in a hurry or going anywhere. That is, the speedometer only showed about half as much, but Max Harriss had an idea he was driving fast, while his uncle knew he wasn't.

'Step on it,' his uncle said. 'It's ten minutes to ten. But the rich eat late so maybe we'll still be in time.'

So he did. Soon they were out of town and he could let the car out some even though the road was just gravel; building himself a concrete driveway six miles in to town was the only thing Baron Harriss had forgot to do or anyway died too quick to do. But they went pretty fast, his uncle perched forward on the edge of the seat and watching the speedometer needle as if the first time it flickered he intended to jump out and run ahead.

'Howdy Gavin, hell,' his uncle said to Mr. McCallum. Wait and howdy me after I indict you as an accessory.'

'He knew the horse,' Mr. McCallum said. 'He came all the way out home and insisted he wanted to buy it. He was there at sunup, asleep in the car at the front gate, with four or five hundred dollars loose in his

overcoat pocket like a handful of leaves. Why? Does he claim to be a minor?’

‘He don’t claim either,’ his uncle said. ‘He seems to hold the entire subject of his age interdict from anybody’s meddling — even his uncle in Washington. But never mind that. What did you do with the horse?’

‘I put him in the stable, the stall,’ Mr. McCallum said. ‘But it was all right. It was the little stable, with just one stall in it, with nothing else in it. He told me I wouldn’t need to worry, because there wouldn’t be anything else in it. He had it already picked out and ready when I got there. But I looked, myself, at the doors and fences both. The stable was all right. If it hadn’t been, I wouldn’t have left the horse, no matter how much he paid me for it.’

‘I know that,’ his uncle said. What little stable?’

‘The one that’s off to itself, that he built last summer, behind some trees, away from the other stables and the paddocks too. With a paddock of its own, and nothing else in the stable but the one big stall and a tack room and I looked in the tack room too: just a saddle and bridle and blankets and a curry-comb and brush and some feed.

And he said that anybody that touched that saddle and bridle or the feed either, was going to already know about the horse and I told them they had certainly better, because if anybody walked into that lot and opened that stall door expecting to find just an ordinary horse behind it, it would not only be a considerable worry to the one that did the walking and the opening, but to the one that owned the horse too. And he said that at least that let me out, because I was just the one that

sold it. But the stable was all right. There was even an outside window where a man could climb into the loft and throw down feed until the horse got used to him.'

'And when would that be?' his uncle said.

'I learned how to do it,' Mr. McCallum said.

'Then maybe in a minute now we can watch you,' his uncle said.

Because they were almost there. They hadn't gone out as quick as Max Harriss had come in, but already they were running between the white fences which, in the moonlight, didn't look any more substantial than cake-icing, with the broad moon-filled pastures beyond them where his uncle could probably remember cotton growing — or at least his uncle would probably claim he did — while the old owner sat in his home-made chair on the gallery, to look out over them for a while, then turn back to his book and his toddy again.

Then they turned through the gates with his uncle and Mr. McCallum both sitting on the edge of the seat now, and ran fast up the drive between the combed and curried lawns, the bushes and shrubs and trees as neat as laid-by cotton, until they could see what had been the old owner's house too: the tremendous sprawl of columns and wings and balconies that must have covered half an acre.

And they were in time. Captain Gualdres must have come out the side door just in time to see their lights in the drive. Anyway, he was already standing there in the moonlight when they saw him and he was still standing there when the three of them got out of the car and approached, bareheaded, in a short leather jacket and boots and a light crop dangling from his wrist.

It began in Spanish. Three years ago he had reached optional Spanish in high school and he didn't remember now, in fact he never had really understood, how or why he started taking it; just exactly what his uncle had done, as a result of which he, Charles, found himself committed to taking the Spanish which he had never really intended to commit himself to.

It wasn't persuasion and it wasn't a bribe, because his uncle said you didn't need to be bribed to do something you wanted to do, needed to do, whether you knew at the time you needed it, would ever need it, or not. Perhaps his mistake was in dealing with a lawyer. Anyway, he was still taking Spanish and he had read Don Quixote and he could keep up with most Mexican and South American newspapers and he had started the Cid only that was last year and last year was 1940 and his uncle said, 'But why?

It should be easier than Quixote because the Cid is about heroes.' But he couldn't have explained, to anyone, least of all a man fifty years old, even his uncle, how to assuage the heart's thirst with the dusty chronicle of the past when not fifteen hundred miles away in England men not much older than he was were daily writing with their lives his own time's deathless footnote.

So most of the time he could understand them; only a little of the Spanish went too fast for him. But then, some of the English was too fast for Captain Gualdres too, and at one time he was even about to believe there were two of them who were not keeping up with his uncle's Spanish too.

'You go to ride,' his uncle said. 'In the moonlight.'

‘But certainly,’ Captain Gualdres said, still courteous, still only a little startled, his black eyebrows up only a little — so courteous that the voice never showed the surprise at all and not even the tone of it was actually saying, in whatever way a Spaniard would say it, So what?

‘I’m Stevens,’ his uncle said, in that same rapid voice — which to Captain Gualdres, he realised, was much worse than just rapid since to a Spaniard the rapidity and abruptness would be the worst crime of all; which (the Spanish), realised also, was the trouble: there had not been time; his uncle had not had time to do anything but just talk in it. ‘This is Mr. McCallum. And this is my sister’s son, Charles Mallison.’

‘Mr. McCallum I know well,’ Captain Gualdres said in English, turning; they could see his teeth for a second too. ‘He has one much horse too. A pity.’ He shook hands with Mr. McCallum, sudden and brief and hard.

But even doing that he still looked like bronze, for all his soft worn moon-gleamed leather and brilliantined hair, as if he had been cast from metal, hair boots jacket and all, in one jointless piece. ‘The young gentleman, not so well.’ He shook hands with him, Charles, quick and brief and hard too. Then he stepped back. And this time he didn’t shake hands. ‘And Mr. Stevens, not so well. A pity too, perhaps.’

And still even the tone of the voice didn’t say, You may now present the apologies for consideration. It didn’t even say, yes, gentlemen? Only the voice itself said, perfectly courteous, perfectly heatless, with no inflection whatever:

‘You come out for ride? Is no horse up for now, but plenty on the little campo. We go to catch.’

Wait,’ his uncle said in Spanish. ‘Mr. McCallum has had to look at the ends of too many horses every day to need to ride one tonight, and my sister’s son and I do not have to look at enough of them to want to. We have come to do you a favor.’

‘Ah.’ Captain Gualdres said, in Spanish too. ‘And that favor?’

‘All right,’ his uncle said, still in the rapid voice, in that quick splatter of Captain Gualdres’ native tongue resonant, not quite musical, like partly detempered metal: There was a great haste. Perhaps I came so fast that my manners could not keep up.’

‘That politeness which a man can outride.’ Captain Gualdres said, ‘was it ever his to begin with.’ With deference: ‘what favor?’

And he, Charles, thought too: WHAT FAVOR? Captain Gualdres hadn’t moved. There had never been doubt, disbelief in his voice; now there wasn’t even astonishment, surprise in it. And he, Charles, was ready to agree with him: that there could be anything anything could do to him that his uncle or anybody else would need to warn him against or save him from: thinking (Charles) of not only Mr. McCallum’s horse but a whole drove like it cracking their cannons and crowns on him, maybe rolling him in the dust and getting him dirty even and maybe even chipping his edges or possibly even denting him a little, but that was all.

‘A wager then,’ his uncle said.

Captain Gualdres didn’t move.

'A request then,' his uncle said.

Captain Gualdres didn't move.

'A favor to me then,' his uncle said.

'Ah,' Captain Gualdres said. Nor did he move even then: only the one word not even Spanish nor even English either because it was the same in all the tongues that he, Charles, had ever heard of.

'You ride tonight,' his uncle said.

'Truth,' Captain Gualdres said.

'Let us go with you to the stable where you keep your night riding-horse,' his uncle said.

Again Captain Gualdres moved, even though it was only the eyes, he — Charles — and Mr. McCallum watching the gleam of the whites as Captain Gualdres looked at him then at Mr. McCallum then back to his uncle and then no more, no more at all, apparently not even that of breathing, while he, Charles, could have counted sixty almost. Then Captain Gualdres did move, already turning.

'Truth,' he said, and went on, the three of them following, around the house that was too big, across the lawn where the bushes and shrubs were too many, past the garages that would have held more cars than just four people could ever have used and the conservatories and hothouses of too many flowers and grapes for just four people ever to have eaten or smelled, crossing that moon-still moon-blached moon-silent barony with Captain Gualdres leading the way on the hard bowed pistons of boot-gleamed and glinted legs, then his uncle then himself then Mr. McCallum carrying the white-oak cudgel, the three of them in single file behind Captain Gualdres like three of his family GAUCHOS if

Captain Gualdres had a family and they were not GAUCHOS instead or maybe even something else altogether ending in ONES.

But not toward the big stables with the electric clocks and lights and gold-plated drinking fountains and mangers, nor even toward the lane which led to them. Instead, they crossed the lane, climbing the white fence and crossing the moonlit pasture, on to and around and then beyond a small patch of woods and there it was and he could even still hear Mr. McCallum talking almost: the small paddock inside its own white fence, and a single stable about the size of a two-car garage, all new since last September without doubt and neat and fresh with paint and the upper half of the single stall door open; a black square in the dazzling white; and suddenly behind him Mr. McCallum made a kind of sound.

And this was where it began to go too fast for him. Even Captain Gualdres went Spanish now, turning, his back to the fence, compact, durable, even somehow managing to look taller, saying to his uncle what until now even the tone of the voice had not said, the two of them facing one another in the rapid splatter of Captain Gualdres' native language so that they sounded like two carpenters spitting tacks at each other's handsaw. Though his uncle began in English and at first Captain Gualdres followed, as if his uncle anyway felt that Mr. McCallum was at least entitled to this much:

'Now, Mr. Stevens. You explain?'

'With permission?' his uncle said.

'Truth,' Captain Gualdres said.

'This is where you keep your night horse, the blind one.'



‘Yes.’ Captain Gualdres said. ‘No horse here but the little mare. For night. Is left in the stable by the negrito each afternoon.’

‘And after supper — dinner — midnight, whenever it’s dark enough, you come out here and go into that paddock and walk across to that door and open it, in the dark, like now.’ And at first he had thought how there were too many people here, one too many, anyway. Now he realised that they were short one: the barber: because Captain Gualdres said, ‘I set first up the jumps.’

‘The jumps?’ his uncle said.

‘The little mare does not see. Soon she will not see forever. But she can still jump, not by seeing but by the touch, the voice. I teach her the — bow you say it? — faith.’

‘I think the word you want is invulnerability,’ his uncle said. Then it went into Spanish, fast, the two of them, except for the rigidity, like boxers. And he might have kept up with Cervantes just writing it, but having the Batchelor Sampson and the chief of the Yanguesians trading a horse right before his face, was too much for him until his uncle explained it afterward when (or so he thought) it was finally all over — or came as near to explaining it as he, Charles, ever really expected.

‘Then what?’ he said. ‘What did you say then?’

‘Not much,’ his uncle said. ‘I just said, ‘That favor.” And Gualdres said, “For which, naturally, I thank you beforehand.” And I said, ‘But which, naturally, you do not believe. But of which, naturally, you wish to know the price.” And we agreed on the price, and I performed the favor, and that was all.’

'But what price?' he said.

'It was a bet,' his uncle said. 'A wager.'

'A wager on what?' he said.

'On his fate,' his uncle said. 'He called it. Because the only thing a man like that believes in is his destiny. He doesn't believe in a fate. He doesn't even accept one.'

'All right,' he said. 'The bet. Bet him what?'

But his uncle didn't even answer that, just looking at him, sardonic, whimsical, fantastical and familiar still, even though he, Charles, had just discovered that he didn't know his uncle at all. Then his uncle said:

'A knight comes suddenly out of nowhere — out of the west, if you like — and checks the queen and the castle all in that same one move. What do you do?'

At least he knew the answer to that by now. 'You save the queen and let the castle go.' And he answered the other one too: 'Out of western Argentina.' He said: 'It was that girl. The Harriss girl. You bet him the girl. That he didn't want to cross that lot and open that stable door. And he lost.'

'Lost?' his uncle said. 'A princess and half a castle, against some of his bones and maybe his brains too? Lost?'

'He lost the queen,' he said.

'The queen?' his uncle said. What queen? Oh, you mean Mrs. Harriss. Maybe he realised that queen had been moved the same instant he

realised he would have to call the bet. Maybe he realised that queen and the castle both had been gone ever since the moment he disarmed the prince with that hearth-broom. If he ever wanted her.'

'Then what was he doing here?' he said.

'Why was he waiting?' his uncle said.

'Maybe it was a pleasant square,' he said. 'For the pleasure of being able to move not only two squares at once but in two directions at once.'

'Or indecision, since he can,' his uncle said. 'And almost fatal for this one, because he must. At least, he'd certainly better. His threat and his charm are in his capacity for movement. This time, he forgot that his safety lay in it too.' But that was tomorrow. Right now he couldn't even keep up with what he was watching. He and Mr. McCallum just stood there looking and hearing while his uncle and Captain Gualdres stood facing each other, rapping out the brittle splattering syllables, until at last Captain Gualdres made a motion, not quite a shrug and not quite a salute, and his uncle turned to Mr. McCallum.

'What about it, Rafe?' his uncle said. Will you walk over there and open that door?'

'I reckon so,' Mr. McCallum said. 'But I don't see—'

'I've made a bet with Captain Gualdres,' his uncle said. 'If you wont do it, I'll have to.'

Wait,' Captain Gualdres said. 'I think it is for me to—'

'You wait yourself, Mister Captain,' Mr. McCallum said. He shifted the heavy stick to the other hand and stood looking across the white fence

into the empty moon-filled lot, at the silent white wall of the stable with its single black square of half-door, for almost a half minute. Then he shifted the cudgel back to the other hand and climbed up onto the fence and put one leg over it and turned his head and looked back down at Captain Gualdres. 'I just found out what all this is about,' he said. 'And so will you in a minute.'

Then they watched him climb, still without haste, down into the paddock: a compact light-poised deliberate man with about him something of the same aura, sense of horses which Captain Gualdres had, walking steadily on in the moonlight, toward the blank white stable and the single black square of emptiness, of utter of absolute silence, in the center of it, reaching the stable at last and lifting the heavy wrought-iron latch and opening the closed lower half of the door; only then moving with unbelievable speed, jerking the half-door quickly back and out on its hinges and already moving with it, swinging it all the way back to the wall until he stood slightly behind it, between it and the wall, the heavy cudgel clutched in his other hand; swinging the door back barely an instant before the stallion, itself the same color as the inky blackness of the inside, exploded out into the moonlight as if it had been tied to the door itself with a rope no longer than a watch-chain.

It came out screaming. It looked tremendous, airborne even: a furious mass the color of doom or midnight in a moonward swirling of mane and tail like black flames, looking not merely like death because death is stasis, but demoniac: the lost brute forever unregenerate, bursting out into the moonlight, screaming, galloping in a short rushing circle while it flung its head this way and that, searching for the man until it saw Mr. McCallum at last and quit screaming and rushed toward him, not recognising him until he stepped out from the wall and shouted at it.

Then it stopped, its fore feet bunched and planted, its body bunching against them, until Mr. McCallum, again with that unbelievable quickness, walked to it and swung the cudgel with all his strength across its face, and it screamed again and whirled, spun, already galloping, and Mr. McCallum turned and walked toward the fence. He didn't run: he walked, and although the horse galloped two complete circles around him before he reached the fence and climbed it, it never quite threatened him again.

And during another time Captain Gualdres didn't move, metal-hard, inviolable, not even pale. Then Captain Gualdres turned to his uncle; it was in Spanish still, but now he could follow it.

'I have lost,' Captain Gualdres said.

'Not lost,' his uncle said.

'Truth,' Captain Gualdres said. 'Not lost.' Then Captain Gualdres said, 'Thanks.'

IV.

Then Saturday, no school: the whole unchallengeable day in which to have sat around the office and attended the little rest of it, the cleaning up; the what little rest of it remained, or so he thought, who even at that late hour of December afternoon had not yet known his own capacity to be astonished and amazed.

He hadn't even really believed that Max Harriss would come back from Memphis. Mr. Markey, in Memphis, hadn't believed it either apparently.

'Memphis city police cant transport a prisoner back to Mississippi,' Mr. Markey said. 'You know that. Your sheriff will have to send someone—'

'He's not a prisoner,' his uncle said. 'Tell him that. Tell him I just want him to come back here and talk to me.'

Then for almost half a minute there was nothing on the telephone at all except the faint hum of the distant power which kept the line alive, which was costing somebody money whether voices went over it or not. Then Mr. Markey said:

'If I gave him that message and told him he could go, would you really expect to see him again?'

'Give him the message,' his uncle said. 'Tell him I want him to come back here and talk to me.'

And Max Harriss came back. He arrived just ahead of the others, just far enough ahead of them to have got through the anteroom and into the office while the other two were still mounting the stairs; and he, Charles, shut the anteroom door and Max stood in front of it, watching his uncle, delicate and young and expensive-looking still and a little tired and strained-looking too as if he hadn't slept much last night, except for his eyes.

They didn't look young or tired either, watching his uncle exactly as they had looked at him night before last; looking anything but all right by a good long shot. But at least there wasn't anything cringing in them, whatever else there might be.

'Sit down,' his uncle said.

'Thanks,' Max said, immediate and harsh, not contemptuous: just final, immediate, negative. But he moved in the next second. He approached the desk and began to peer this way and that about the office in burlesque exaggeration. 'I'm looking for Hamp Killegrew,' he said. 'Or maybe it's even the sheriff himself. Where've you got him hidden? in the water-cooler? If that's where you put either one of them, they are dead of shock by now.'

But still his uncle didn't answer, until he, Charles, looked at his uncle too. His uncle wasn't even looking at Max. He had even turned the swivel chair sideways and was looking out the window, motionless except for the almost infinitesimal stroking of the thumb of the hand which held it, on the bowl of the cold cob pipe.

Then Max stopped that too and stood looking down at his uncle's profile with the hard flat eyes in which there was little of youth or peace or anything else that should have been in them.

'All right,' Max said. 'You couldn't prove an intention, design. All that you can prove, you wont even have to.'

I already admit it. I affirm it. I bought a horse and turned it into a private stable on my mother's property. I know a little law too, you see. I probably know just exactly the minor and incorrect amount of it to make a first-class small-town Mississippi lawyer. Maybe even a state legislator, though probably a little too much ever to be elected governor.'

Still his uncle didn't move, except for the thumb. 'I'd sit down, if I were you,' he said.

'You'd do more than that right now if you were me,' Max said. 'Well?'

Now his uncle moved. He swung the chair around with the pressure of his knee against the desk, until he faced Max.

'I don't need to prove it,' his uncle said. 'Because you are not going to deny it.'

'No,' Max said. He said it immediately, contemptuously. It wasn't even violent. 'I don't deny it. So what? Where's your sheriff?'

His uncle watched Max. Then he put the stem of the cold pipe into his mouth and drew at it as if it had fire and tobacco in it; he spoke in a voice mild and even almost inconsequential:

'I suppose that when Mr. McCallum brought the horse out and you had him put it into Captain Gualdres' private stable, you told the grooms and the other Negroes that Captain Gualdres had bought it himself and wanted it let alone. Which wasn't hard for them to believe, since Captain Gualdres had already bought one horse which he wouldn't let anyone else touch.'

But Max no more answered that than he had answered the other night when his uncle asked him about not being registered for draft. There was not even contempt in his face while he waited for his uncle to go on.

'All right,' his uncle said. 'When are Captain Gualdres and your sister to be married?'



And that was when he, Charles, found out what else it was in the flat hard eyes. It was despair and grief. Because he watched the rage blaze up and burn, scour, sear them out until there was nothing left in them but the rage and the hatred, and he thought how maybe his uncle was right and there are more ignoble things than hatred and how if you do hate anyone, it must surely be the man you have failed to kill even if he doesn't know it.

'I've been doing some trading lately,' his uncle said. 'I'll know soon whether I did so bad at it or not. I'm going to make another trade with you. You are not nineteen years old, you are twenty-one, but you haven't even registered yet. Enlist.'

'Enlist?' Harriss said.

'Enlist,' his uncle said.

'I see,' Harriss said. 'Enlist, or else.'

Then Harriss began to laugh. He stood there in front of the desk, looking down at his uncle and laughing. But it never had touched his eyes in the first place, so it didn't need to leave them: it was just his face which the laughter left, laughing itself gradually away from his eyes even if it hadn't ever been there, until at last they looked like his sister's had two nights ago: the grief and the despair, but without the tenor and fear, while his uncle's cheeks went through the motion of drawing at the cold pipe as though there were smoke in it.

'No,' his uncle said. 'No "else." Just enlist. Look.

You are playing poker (I assume you know poker, or at least — like a lot of people — anyway play it). You draw cards. When you do that, you

affirm two things: either that you have something to draw to, or you are willing to support to your last cent the fact that you have not.

You don't draw and then throw the cards in because they are not what you wanted, expected, hoped for; not just for the sake of your own soul and pocket-book, but for the sake of the others in the game, who have likewise assumed that unspoken obligation.'

Then they were both motionless, even the void similitude of his uncle's smoking. Then Harriss drew a long breath. You could hear it: the inhale and the suspiration.

'Now?' he said.

'Yes,' his uncle said. 'Now. Go back to Memphis now and enlist.'

'I...' Harriss said. There are things—'

'I know,' his uncle said. 'But I wouldn't go out there now. They will allow you a few days after you are enlisted to come back home and say — put your affairs in order. Go back now. Your car is downstairs, isn't it? Go back to Memphis now and enlist.'

'Yes,' Harriss said. He drew another of the long breaths and let it go. 'Go down those steps and get in the car by myself, and leave. What makes you think you or the army or anybody else will ever catch me again?'

'I hadn't thought about it at all,' his uncle said. 'Would it make you feel better to give me your word?'

And that was all. Harriss stood there for another moment by the desk, then he went back to the door and stood there, his head bent a little. Then he raised his head and he, Charles, thought that he would have done that too: gone back through the anteroom where the others were. But his uncle spoke in time.

'The window,' his uncle said, and got up himself from the swivel chair and went and opened it, onto the outside gallery from which the stairs descended to the street, and Max stepped through it and his uncle closed the window and that was all: the feet on the stairs for a moment, but no shriek of tires now nor fading wail of the horn either this time, and if Hampton Killegrew or anybody else ran after him yelling this time, he and his uncle never heard that either. Then he went to the anteroom door and opened it and asked Captain Gualdres and the sister to come in.

Captain Gualdres still looked like bronze or metal of some sort even in the double-breasted dark suit any man might have worn and most men owned. He even still looked like horses too. Then he, Charles, realized that this was because the horse was missing: and that was when he first noticed that Captain Gualdres' wife was a little taller than Captain Gualdres. It was as if, without the horse, Captain Gualdres was not only incomplete as regarded mobility, but in height too, as if his legs had not been intended for him to be seen and compared with others while standing on them.

She was in a dark dress too, the dark blue in which brides 'go away,' travel, with the fine rich fur coat with a corsage (Orchids, of course. He had heard of orchids all his life, so he realised that he had never seen them before. But he knew them at once; on that coat and that bride

they could be nothing else.) pinned to the collar and the thin thread from the Cayley girl's fingernail still showing on her cheek.

Captain Gualdres wouldn't sit down, so he and his uncle stood too.

'I come to say good-bye,' Captain Gualdres said in English. 'And to receive your — how you say—'

'Felicitations,' his uncle said. 'And to you, congratulations. You have them a thousand times. May I ask since when?'

'Since—' Captain Gualdres looked quickly at his wrist ' — one hour. We just leave the padre. Our mama has just return home. We decide not to wait. So we come to say goodbye. I say it.'

'Not good-bye,' his uncle said.

'Yes. Now. By one—' again Captain Gualdres looked at his wrist ' — five minutes we are no more for here.' (Because, as his uncle had said, there was one thing about Captain Gualdres: he not only knew exactly what he thought he was going to do, he quite often did it.) 'Back to my country. The CAMPO. Maybe I do not ought to have left him to begin. This country. Is magnificent, but too strong for simple GAUCHO, PAYSANO. But for now, no matter. For now, is done.

So I come to say one more good-bye and one hundred more GRACIAS.' Then it was Spanish again. But he kept up: 'You have Spanish. My wife, having been educated only in the best of European convents for rich young American ladies, has no language at all. In my country, the campo, there is a saying: Married; dead.

But there is another saying: To learn where the rider will sleep tonight, ask the horse. So no matter about that either, that's all finished too. So I have come to say goodbye, and thanks, and to congratulate myself that you had no stepchildren also to be placed for life. But I really have no confidence even in that condition because nothing is beyond a man of your capacity and attainments, not to mention imagination. So we return to my — our — country in time, where you are not. Because I think you are a very dangerous man and I do not like you. And so, with God.'

'With God,' his uncle said in Spanish too. 'I wouldn't hurry you.'

'You can't,' Captain Gualdres said. 'You don't even need to. You don't even need to wish you could.'

Then they were gone too: back through the anteroom; he and his uncle heard the outer door, then watched them pass across the gallery window, toward the stairs, and his uncle took from his vest the heavy watch with its loop of chain and the dangling golden key and laid it face-up on the desk.

'Five minutes,' his uncle said. Which was time enough, moment enough for him, Charles, to have asked exactly what was the other side of that bet his uncle had made last night with Captain Gualdres, except that he knew now he didn't need to ask; in fact, he realised now he had begun not to need to ask that at that instant Thursday night when he shut the front door after Max Harriss and his sister and came back to the sittingroom and found that his uncle had no intention of going to bed.

So he said nothing, merely watching his uncle lay the watch on the desk, then stand over it, his arms spread a little and braced on either side of the watch, not even sitting down.

'For decency.

For moderation,' his uncle said, then, already moving and even in the same breath, his uncle said, 'Or maybe I've already had too much of both,' taking up the watch and putting it back into his vest, then through the anteroom, taking up the hat and overcoat, and through the outer door, not even saying backward over his shoulder: 'Lock it,' then down the stairs and already standing beside the car, holding the door open, when he, Charles, reached it.

'Get in and drive,' his uncle said. 'And remember this is not last night.'

So he took the wheel and drove on through across the crowded Saturday Square, still having to dodge among the homeward-bound cars and trucks and wagons even after they were clear of downtown. But the road itself was still open for a little speed — a lot of it if he had been Max Harriss going home instead of just Charles Mallison driving his uncle backward.

'Now what?' his uncle said. 'What's wrong with it? Or has your foot gone to sleep?'

'You just said it's not last night,' he said.

'Of course it's not,' his uncle said. 'There's no horse waiting to run over Captain Gualdres now, even if the horse was necessary. He's got something this time a good deal more efficient and fatal than just an insane horse.'

'What's that?' he said.

'A dove,' his uncle said. 'So what are you poking along for? Are you afraid of motion?'

So they went then, almost half as fast as Max Harriss, over the road which the baron hadn't had time to concrete but which he probably would have dropped other things to do if he had just been warned in time, not for his own comfort because he didn't travel it; he went and came from New Orleans in his own airplane so that when Jefferson saw him it went out there to do it; but for the uniqueness of spending that much money on something not only not his hut which all who knew him would not even expect him to use, just as Huey Long in Louisiana had made himself founder owner and supporter of what his uncle said was one of the best literary magazines anywhere, without ever once looking inside it probably nor even caring what the people who wrote and edited it thought of him any more than the baron did what the farmers thought of him whose straying livestock leaped and shrieked and died under the speeding wheels of his guests; they were going fast now through the early December afternoon — the winter afternoon, the sixth day of winter the old folks called it, who counted from the first of December.

And it (the road) was older than gravel too, running back into the old time of simple dirt red and curving among the hills, then straight and black where the rich land flattened, alluvial and fertile; niggard in width since the land was too rich, too fecund in com and cotton, to allow room for men to pass one another almost, marked only by the thin iron of carriage-and wagon-rims and the open O's of horses and mules when the old owner, the baron's father-in-law, would leave the Horace and the weak toddy long enough to come in to town the two or three or four times a year, to vote or sell the cotton or pay the taxes or attend a funeral or a wedding, and then be driven back to the toddy and the Latin pages again, along the simple dirt in which even hooves, unless running, made no noise, let alone the wheels or anything other

than the creak of harness; back to the acres which were hardly bounded then except in his own recollection and holding and belief and that of his neighbors, not even fenced always, let alone in carefully panelled and railed oak and hickory designed in Virginia and Long Island and handicrafted in Grand Rapids factories, the lawn which was a yard of shabby oaks then, innocent of shears and pruners and clippers and borderers in a light mist of gasoline fumes, to the house which was just a house to back a front gallery for him to sit on with the silver cup and the worn calf; a garden which was just a garden, overgrown, shabby too, of old permanent perennial things: nameless roses and lilac bushes and daisies and phlox and the hard durable dusty bloom of fall, itself in the tradition of the diluted whiskey and the Horatian odes: unassertive, enduring.

It was the quiet, his uncle said. This, the first time, the only time his uncle actually said it, was twelve years ago when he, Charles, was not even quite six yet, just old enough to listen: which in fact his uncle even mentioned: 'Not that you are old enough to hear it, but that I'm still young enough to say it.

Ten years from now, I won't be.' And he said, 'You mean ten years from now it won't be true?' And his uncle said, 'I mean that ten years from now I won't say it because ten years from now I will be ten years older and the one thing age teaches you is not fear and least of all more of truth, but only shame. — That spring of 1919 like a garden at the end of a four-year tunnel of blood and excrement and fear in which that whole generation of the world's young men lived like frantic ants, each one alone against the instant when he too must enter the faceless anonymity behind the blood and the filth, each one alone' (which at least proved one of his uncle's points, the one about truth anyway) 'with his constant speculation whether his fear was as plain to others as to himself.



Because the groundling during his crawling minutes and the airman during his condensed seconds have no friends or comrades any more than the hog at the trough or the wolf in the pack has. And when the corridor ends at last and they come out of it — if they do — they still have none.

Because' (but at least he, Charles, hoped his uncle was right about the shame) 'they have lost something, something of themselves dear and irreplaceable, scattered now and diffused and become communal among all the other faces and bodies which also survived: I am no more just John Doe of Jefferson, Mississippi; I am also Joe Ginotta of East Orange, New Jersey, and Charley Longfeather of Shoshone, Idaho, and Harry Wong of San Francisco; and Harry and Charley and Joe are all John Doe of Jefferson, Mississippi too.

But that composite is each still us, so we cant repudiate it. And that's why American Legions. And though we may have been able to face and lie down what we had seen Harry and Joe and Charley do in the person of John Doe of Jefferson, we cant face down and lie away what we saw John Doe do as Charley or Harry or Joe. And that's why, while they were still young and had faith in breath, American Legions got mass-drunk.'

Because only the point about the shame was right, since his uncle only said that twelve years ago and never again since. Because the rest of it was wrong, since even twelve years ago, when his uncle was only in the late thirties, he had already lost touch with what was the real truth: that you went to war, and young men would always go, for glory because there was no other way so glorious to earn it, and the risk and fear of death was not only the only price worth buying what you

bought, but the cheapest you could be asked, and the tragedy was, not that you died but that you were no longer there to see the glory; you didn't want to obliterate the thirsting heart: you wanted to slake it.

But that was twelve years ago; now his uncle only said, first: 'Stop. I'll drive.'

'No you won't,' he said. "This is fast enough.' Within a mile now they would begin to pass the white fence; in two they would reach the gate and even see the house.

'It was the quiet,' his uncle said. 'At first I couldn't even sleep at night for it. But that was all right, because I didn't want to sleep; I didn't want to miss that much of silence: just to lie in bed in the dark and remember tomorrow and tomorrow and all the colored spring, April and May and June, morning noon and evening, empty, then dark again and silence to lie in because I didn't need to sleep. Then I saw her.

She was in the old stained victoria with the two mismatched plow-horses drawing it and the plow-hand on the box who didn't even have on shoes. And your mother was wrong. She didn't look like a parading doll at all.

She looked like a little girl playing grown-up in the carriage-house, but playing it in deadly seriousness; like a child of twelve say, orphaned by sudden catastrophe, upon whom has devolved the care of a whole litter of younger brothers and sisters and perhaps even an aged grandparent, supervising the diet and changing and washing out the garments of infants; too young to have a vicarious interest in, let alone the conception of and kinship with the passion and mystery which created them alive into the world, which alone could have made the drudgery of feeding them bearable or even explicable.

‘Of course it wasn’t that. There was only her father, and if anything, the situation was reversed: the father who not only farmed the land and supervised the household, but did it in such a way that a plow-team and its driver from the field could be spared always to draw those six miles back and forth to town, the old carriage against the tremendous expanse of whose cushions she could resemble an archaic miniature, sober and sedate and demure ten years beyond her age and fifty years beyond her time.

But that was the impression I got: a child playing house in that windless and timeless garden at the red and stinking corridor’s end: and so one day I knew suddenly and irrevocably that just silence was not peace.

It was after I saw her the third or the tenth or the thirtieth time, I don’t remember which, but one morning I stood beside the halted carriage with the barefoot nigger on the box and she like something preserved from an old valentine or a 1904 candy-box against that faded soiled expanse of back seat (when the carriage passed, all you saw was just her head, and from behind you couldn’t even see that though obviously the hand and the team wouldn’t have been taken from the plow just to give the plowman a ride to town and back); — one morning I stood beside the halted carriage while on all sides rushed and squawked the bright loud glittering new automobiles because the war was won and every man would be rich and at peace forever.

“‘I’m Gavin Stevens,” I said. “And I’m going on thirty years old.”

“‘I know it,” she said. But I felt thirty, even if I wasn’t quite. She was sixteen. And how could you say to a child (as we said then): “Give me a date?” And what would you (at thirty) do with it? And you don’t just

simply invite the child: you ask the child's parents if it can come. So it was just dusk when I stopped your grandmother's car at the gate and got out. There was a garden then, not a florist's landscaping dream. It was a good deal bigger than even five or six rugs spread side by side, with old bushes of roses and callicanthus and paintless collapsing arbors and trellises and beds of perennials re-seeding themselves without outside meddling help or let, and she standing in the middle of it watching me as I entered the gate and went up the walk until she couldn't see me any more.

And I knew she would not have moved from where she stood, and I mounted the steps to where the old gentleman sat in his hickory chair with the setter pup at his feet and the silver cup and the marked book at his elbow, and I said, "Let me be betrothed to her" (mark how I put it: me to her). "I know," I said. "I know: not now. Not now. Just let us be betrothed, and we wont even have to think about it again."

'And she hadn't moved from where she stood, not even for listening. Because it was too far for listening, and besides she didn't need to: just standing there in the dusk the twilight, not moving: not shrinking, just not anything at all; it was even I who tilted up her face though it took no more strength than to raise a strand of honeysuckle. It was like tasting sherbet.

"I don't know how," she said. 'You'll have to teach me.'

"Don't learn then," I said. "It's all right. It doesn't even matter. You don't have to learn." It was like sherbet: the rest of spring, and summer and the long rest of summer: the darks and silence to be in, remembering sherbet: not retasting it because you don't need to retaste sherbet; it doesn't take much sherbet because you don't forget

it. Then it was time for me to go back to Germany and I took the ring out to her. I had already looped it onto the ribbon myself.

“You don’t want me to wear it yet?” she said.

“Yes,” I said. “No,” I said. “All right. Loop it over the bush here if you want to. It’s just a little piece of glass and colored iron; it probably won’t even last a thousand years.” And I went back to Heidelberg and every month the letters would come, talking about nothing. Because how could they? She was just sixteen; what can have happened to just sixteen to write about, even talk about? And each month I answered, talking about nothing too, because how could just sixteen have translated it if I had, translated it to? And that’s what I never did understand, never did find out,’ his uncle said.

Now they were almost there; he was already slowing the car to enter the gate.

‘Not how she got the German translated,’ his uncle said. ‘But how whoever translated the German for her, translated the English too.’

‘German?’ he said. ‘You wrote her in German?’

‘There were two letters,’ his uncle said. ‘I wrote them at the same time. I sealed and mailed them in the wrong envelopes. Then his uncle cried, ‘Look out!’ and even reached for the wheel. But he caught the car in time.

‘The other one was a woman too,’ he said. ‘Yes. So that—’

'She was a Russian,' his uncle said. 'She had escaped from Moscow. For a price, paid by installments, over a long time, to different collectors. She was through a war too, O my Philistine. I knew her in Paris in 1918.

When I left America in the fall of '19 to go back to Heidelberg, I thought, believed I had forgotten her. That is, one day in mid-ocean I discovered that I hadn't thought about her since spring. And so I knew I hadn't forgot. I changed my hooking and went to Paris first; she was to follow me to Heidelberg as soon as someone would visé what papers she had. I would write to her each month too while we waited. Maybe while I waited. You must hear in mind my age. I was a European then.

I was in that menopause of every sensitive American when he believes that what (if any) future Americans' claim not even to human spirit but to simple civilization has, lies in Europe. Or maybe that was wrong.

Maybe it was simply, sherbet, and I was not even allergic to sherbet nor even impervious to it but simply incapable of sherbet; writing the two letters at the same time because it didn't even demand any cerebral process to compose one of them, that one flowing from somewhere around, amid the intestines, out to the fingertips, the pen-point, the ink without detour via the brain: as a result of which I was never even able to recall what could have been in the one which went where I had not written it to go, though there couldn't have been much doubt; never occurred to me to remember to be careful with them because they did not exist in the same world although the same hand wrote them at the same desk upon successive sheets of paper with the same one unbroken pen-stroke beneath the same two pfennigs' worth of electricity while the same space on the clock's dial crept beneath the moving hand.'

Then they were there. His uncle didn't have to say stop; he had already parked the car in the empty drive too wide too suave and too neatly raked and graveled for even a station wagon and a convertible or two and a limousine and something for the servants, his uncle not even waiting for that but already out of the car and walking toward the house while he, Charles, was still saying, 'I don't have to come in too, do I?'

'Haven't you come a little far to quit now?' his uncle said. So he got out too and followed, up the flagged walk too wide and with too many flagstones in it, toward the side portico which, merely a side one, would have held a president and cabinet or a supreme court all right though a little cozy for Congress, and the house itself like something between a gargantuan bride's cake and a freshly whitewashed circus tent, his uncle still going fast and still talking:

'We are strangely apathetic toward some very sound foreign customs. Think what a blaze it would have made, with his coffin on stacked gasoline-soaked cross-ties high in the middle of it: its (the house's) amortization one with its creator's suttee.'

Then inside; the Negro butler opened the door and immediately vanished and he and his uncle stood in the room in which Captain Gualdres (assuming he was or had been cavalry) could have paraded his troop, horses too, though he noticed little else because it was the orchid again: recognised at once, immediately, without surprise not even attention.

Then he even forgot the pleasant savor, titillation of simple tremendousness, because she came in: her feet in the hall and then into the room, though he had already smelled it, as if somebody had

opened an old drawer by gaucherie, clumsiness, mistake and forty servants in rubber soles jumping frantically through the long corridors and rooms of glash and glitter to hurry it shut again; coming into the room and stopping and beginning to put her hands up palm-out in front of her without even having time to look at him since his uncle, who had never really stopped at all, was already walking toward her.

‘I’m Gavin Stevens and now I’m almost fifty,’ his uncle said, walking on toward her even after she began to retreat, fall back, bringing the hands higher and still palm-out toward his uncle, his uncle walking right on into the hands too and still walking right on while she was still trying to hold him away long enough to at least give herself time to change her mind about wanting to turn and run: too late now, assuming that was what she wanted or anyway thought she ought to do: but too late now, so that his uncle could stop too, looking back at him.

‘Now what?’ his uncle said. ‘You can say something, cant you? Even good afternoon Mrs. Harriss will do.’

He started to say ‘Excuse me.’ But already he had thought of something better than that.

‘Bless you, my children,’ he said.

V.

That was Saturday. The next day was December seventh. But even before he left, the store windows were already bright with toys and tinsel and artificial snow like any other December in any other year, the air bright and merry with the taste and smell of Christmas even with gunfire in it, the gunfire and the whine of bullets and the sound they



made on flesh getting ready to echo right here in Jefferson before many more weeks or months.

But when he saw Jefferson next, it was spring. The wagons and pick-ups of the hill farmers and the five-and ten-ton trucks of the bottomland planters and operators had already backed up to the loading platforms of the seed stores and the fertilizer warehouses, and tractors and spanned and tripled mules would be moving across the dark shearing of the land's winter sleep: plow and middlehuster, harrow and drag and disc; dogwood would bloom soon and soon the whippoorwills, but this was only 1942 and there would be a little time yet before the party-line telephones would begin to carry the War and Navy Department telegrams, and on Thursday mornings the RFD carrier would leave in the lonely post-perched boxes the weekly YOKNAPATAWPHA CLARION bearing the reproduced photograph and the brief obit already too familiar yet still cryptic as Sanscrit or Chinese — the country-boy face not really old enough yet to be a man's photograph, the uniform still showing the creases of the quartermaster shelves, the place-names which those who had created that face and flesh apparently in order that it might die in agony there, had never even heard of before, let alone pronounce.

Because the inspector-general had been right. In fact, Benbow Sartoris, who had been only nineteenth in the class, had his commission and was already in England on something hush hush. Which, first and cadet colonel on the battalion list, he might have been doing too before it was too late, except that as usual he had exchanged the devil for the witch: not even the Sam Browne and the sabre and the trick insigne now, but only the blue hat-band and, even though being a cadet colonel or maybe that particular cadet colonel had shortened preflight some, probably a year yet before the winged badge on the cap would move down to just above the left pocket (with the shield of a pilot in

the middle he hoped or at least a navigator's globe or anyway a bomb dropper's bomb).

And not even coming home really but just passing it on the way from preflight to basic, airplanes at last, only stopping in the station long enough for his mother to get on the train and ride with him down to the mainline junction where he would get a train for Texas and she would come back on the next local; approaching, passing, beginning to pass the familiar land: the road crossings he knew, the fields and woods where he had hiked as a cub then a scout and, old enough at last for a gun, hunted rabbits first and then quail on the wing.

Then the shabby purlieus themselves timeless and durable, familiar as his own voracious omnivorous insatiable heart or his body and limbs or the growth of his hair and fingernails: the first Negro cabins weathered and paintless until you realised it was more than just that and that they were a little, just a little awry: not out of plumb so much as beyond plumb: as though created for, seen in or by a different perspective, by a different architect, for a different purpose or anyway with a different past: survived or even impervious to, unaware of, harder air or weather, whatever it was, each in its fierce yet orderly miniature jungle of vegetable patch, each with a shoat hog in a pen too small for any hog to thrive in yet this one did and would, and usually a tethered cow and a few chickens, the whole thing — cabin outhouse washpot shed and well — having a quality flimsy and make-shift, alien yet inviolably durable like Crusoe's cave; then the houses of white people, no larger than the Negro ones but never cabins, not to their faces anyway or you'd probably have a fight on your hands, painted or at least once-painted, the main difference being that they wouldn't be quite so clean inside.

Then he was home: a paved street-crossing not very far from the house he had been born in, and now he could see above the trees the water tank and the gold cross on the spire of the Episcopal church and then no more: his face pressed to the grimy glass as if he were eight years old, the train slowing over a clash and clatter of switch-points among the box-and cattle-cars and the gondolas and the tanks, and there they were, seen as the child of eight sees them: with something of shock, set puny yet amazingly durable against the perspective of the vast encompassable earth: his mother: his uncle: his new aunt: and his mother had been married to one man for twenty years and had raised another one, and his new aunt had been married to two in about that same time and had watched two more in her own house fighting each other with hearth-brooms and horses, so he was not surprised nor did he even really know how it happened: his mother already in the train and his new aunt already gone back to the waiting car while he and his uncle had the one last word together:

‘Well, Squire,’ he said. ‘You not only went once too many to the well, you threw the pitcher in and then jumped in after it. I’ve got a message from your son.’

‘My who?’ his uncle said.

‘All right,’ he said. ‘Your son-in-law. Your daughter’s husband. The one that don’t like you. He came out to camp to see me. He’s a cavalryman now. I mean a soldier, an American’ — tediously, himself récapitulant: ‘You understand? One night an American acquaintance tried to kill him with a horse. The next day he married the American’s sister. The day after that a Jap dropped a bomb on another American on a little island two thousand miles away.’

So on the third day he enlisted, not into his own army in which he already held a reserve commission, but into the foreign one, renouncing not only his commission to do so but his citizenship too, using an interpreter without doubt to explain both to his bride and to his adopted government what he was trying to do' — remembering, still récapitulant, not amazed or if amazed, the tireless timeless amazement of the child watching tireless and timeless the repetitive Punch and Judy booth: that afternoon and no warning whatever until the summons to the orderly room, and there Captain Gualdres was ' — in a private's uniform, looking more like a horse than ever, maybe because of the fact that he had got himself into the one situation or condition above earth — a 1942 United States Army cavalry regiment — where as long as the war lasted he would have no contact whatever with horses—' himself (Charles) repetitive too: 'He didn't look brave, he just looked indomitable, not offering a life or a limb to anyone, any government in gratitude for or protest against any thing, as if in this final and serious moment neither would he assume any sentimental pretence regarding the vain and idle pattering of bullets against him any more than he had used to about the vain and fragile hooves of horses; not hating Germans or Japs or even Harrisses, going to war against Germans not because they had ruined a continent and were rendering a whole race into fertilizer and lubricating oil, but because they had abolished horses from civilised cavalry, getting up from the chair when I came in and saying, "I come here so you can see me. Now you have seen me. Now you will return to your uncle and say to him, Perhaps you are satisfied now."'

'What?' his uncle said.

'I don't know either,' he said. That's what he said: that he had come all the way there from Kansas so I could see him in that brown suit and then come back to you and say, "Now maybe you're satisfied."'

And now it was time to go; they had already pulled the express hand-truck away from the baggage car door, and the express clerk was even leaning out the door looking back, and Mr. McWilliams, the conductor, was standing at the vestibule steps with his watch in his hand, but at least he was not hollering at him, Charles, yet, because he, Charles, wore a uniform and this was still early in 1942 and civilians hadn't got used to war yet. So he said, 'And one more thing. Those letters. Two letters. Two wrong envelopes.'

His uncle looked at him. 'You don't like coincidence?'

'I love it,' he said. 'It's one of the most important things in life. Like maidenhead. Only, like maidenhead, you only use it once. I'm going to save mine a while yet.'

His uncle looked at him, quizzical, fantastical, grave. 'All right,' his uncle said. 'Try this. A street. In Paris. Within, as we Yoknapatawphians say, a medium spit of the Bois de Boulogne, so recent in nomenclature that its name is no older than the last battles of 1918 and the Versailles peace table — less than five years then; so select and so discreet that its location was known only to garbage collectors and employment bureaus for upper servants and the under secretaries of embassys. But no matter; it doesn't exist any more now, and besides, you'd never get there to see it if it did.'

'Maybe I will,' he said. 'Maybe I'll look at where it used to be.'

'You can do that here,' his uncle said. 'In the library. Simply by opening the right page in Conrad: the same waxed red-and-black tiled floor, the ormolu, the faience, the buhl; even to the long mirror which seemed to hold as in a silver dish the whole condensation of light, of afternoon, in whose depths seemed to float, like the lily upon its own concordant

repetition, that forehead innocent and smooth of thought, ravaged only by grief and fidelity—'

'How did you know she was there?' he said.

'I seen it in the paper,' his uncle said. 'The Paris HERALD. The United States government (given a little time) did very well in keeping up with its own first American Expeditionary Force in France. But theirs was nothing to how the Paris HERALD kept cases on the second one which began to land in Europe in 1919. — But this one was not ravaged at all by anything: just sitting there looking still exactly like a little girl whom all the world was helping now in the make-believe that she was a queen; and no caller this time come to do justice to a dead man because the man, creature, whose message this caller bore was anything but dead; he had sent his envoy all that distance from Heidelberg not to deliver a message but a demand: he wanted to know. So I asked it.

““But why didn't you wait for me?” I said. “Why didn't you cable?””

'Did she answer it?' he said.

'Didn't I say that brow was unravaged, even by indecision?' his uncle said. 'She answered it. “You didn't want me,” she said. “I wasn't smart enough for you.”’

'And what did you say?'

'I answered correctly too,' his uncle said. 'I said, “Good afternoon, Mrs. Harriss.” Will that one do?'

'Yes,' he said. And now it was time. The engineer even blew the whistle at him. Mr. McWilliams had never once shouted, 'Come on here, boy, if you're going with us' as he would have five years ago (or for that matter, five months ago): only the two short deep impatient blasts of steam; simply because of the yet untried uniform he wore, a creature whose constant waking habit was talk, who would not even have missed or been aware of the breath passing over his vocal cords necessary to holler at him, had made no sound; instead, simply because he wore the uniform, a trained expert in a hundred-ton machine costing a hundred thousand dollars had expended three or four dollars' worth of coal and pounds of hard-earned steam to tell an eighteen-year-old boy that he had spent enough time gossiping with his uncle: and he thought how perhaps that country, that nation, that way of living really was invincible which could not only accept war but even assimilate it in stride by compromising with it; with the left hand so to speak, without really impeding or even deflecting, aberrating, even compelling the attention of the right hand still engaged in the way's old prime durable business.

'Yes,' he said. 'That's better. I might even buy that one. And that was twenty years ago. And it was true then or at least enough then or at least enough for you then. And now it's twenty years later and it's not true now or at least not enough now or at least not enough for you now. How did just years do all that?'

'They made me older,' his uncle said. 'I have improved.'

The end